The Slippery Bluff as a Barrier or a Summit of Possibility: Decolonizing Wild Pedagogies in Alaska Native Children's Experiences on the Land

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Abstract

The research presented in this article contributes to our understanding of wild pedagogies, put into practice through the exploration of a space where culture/Nature binaries are blurred and contrasted. The observations and findings challenge the way we "see," come to know, and position ourselves as part of or separate from the natural world. This qualitative study provides the insight of 14 children from an Alaska Native village, primarily of mixed Iñupiaq and Yup'ik heritage, into their lived, storied entanglements with the Land in order to explore Western and Indigenous ways of relating to the Land. It provides narratives of ways in which the children's emotional and behavioural interactions shape how they know and come to understand their place. This article also offers a decolonizing approach to rewilding environmental education by naming and questioning the colonial forces that inexplicitly teach our children to separate themselves from their place.

Résumé

La présente recherche enrichit notre compréhension des pédagogies de la nature, mises en pratique à travers l'exploration d'un espace où la dualité nature/culture s'estompe et exprime ses contrastes à la fois. Les observations et les résultats mettent en doute notre manière de « voir », d'acquérir des connaissances et de nous croire séparés du monde naturel ou intégré à celui-ci. La présente étude qualitative expose les liens riches et concrets avec le territoire qu'entretiennent 14 enfants d'un village autochtone d'Alaska, principalement d'appartenance mixte iñupiaq et yup'ik; et on étudie ensuite la manière dont Occidentaux et Autochtones entrent en relation avec la Nature. Ces récits montrent comment les interactions des enfants avec l'environnement et les émotions qui en découlent modèlent leur compréhension de la place qu'ils occupent dans la nature. L'article présente également une approche de décolonisation permettant de ramener l'éducation à l'environnement aux sources de la nature en nommant explicitement et en remettant en question les forces coloniales qui enseignent implicitement à nos enfants à se séparer de leur milieu.

Keywords: early childhood environmental education, wild pedagogies, decolonization, Alaska Native, children's agency

Mots-clés : éducation à l'environnement de la petite enfance, pédagogies de la nature, décolonisation, Autochtones d'Alaska, capacité d'agir des enfants

"I see a moose," 4-year-old Chloe shouted, pointing to a grassy ridgeline several kilometres away.
"You see a moose? Where do you see a moose?" the researcher asked.
"Uh huh," Chloe said, *"Titto! Titto!"*
Lucas stood near to Chloe. *"I see the moose,"* he said.
"Show me," the researcher said.
"Titto!" Chloe called, excitedly, *"I see it walking.*
"Oh there is a moose. Right there—straight up that hill," Ms. Lizzie confirmed.
"See!" Chloe yelled, *"Titto!"*
Chloe intently watched the ridgeline. Her classmates, teachers, and the researcher gathered over driftwood on the rocky beach, looking out across the tundra towards the hill to see if they could spot it. After several seconds, Chloe looked away.
"I see a moose nowhere," she said.
"Who ha!" her friends called for the moose.
"I see nowhere," Chloe repeated.
A teacher asked her if she wanted her school lunch: a peanut butter sandwich, a packaged granola bar, an apple and a glass of milk. Chloe joined her friends on a log to eat.
A few minutes went by, and Chloe muttered to herself, "There's a moose."
Ms. Lizzie asked her if the moose had antlers. Chloe said no.
"Nope, it was a mama one?" Ms. Lizzie confirmed.
"Yeah," Chloe said.

At four years old, Chloe is tuned into the Land[1] and the beings with whom she shares it. Her spotting of the moose happened just seconds after the researcher had placed a wearable camera on her forehead. Chloe looked up and saw movement, noting the moose poised on the hillside several kilometres in the distance. Parent volunteer, Ms. Lizzie, confirmed the sighting. Lucas also noted the animal in the clearing. The young children, unprompted, let out moose calls. Chloe shouted *"Titto,"* repeatedly. Although the word does not appear as such in the Iñupiaq dictionary (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 2020), it may be a regional derivative of the Iñupiaq word *tuttuvak* or *tiniika* (moose). *Tuttu*, a similar word, refers to caribou. While the moose was easily spotted on a plateau in the distance by Chloe and Ms. Lizzie, the other adults (including myself) who had accompanied the children to Pebble Creek that day to go fishing were not able to see it. The adults on this outing, with the exception of Ms. Lizzie, were not from the Land in which Chloe belonged. "Seeing," as evident in this interaction, required a deep discernment and familiarity with the Land.

The opening interaction reveals Chloe's living relations with the Land and with other living beings in her place. Minutes after the spotting, Ms. Lizzie texted Chloe's mom and her husband to notify them that a moose had been spotted. It was moose season for the people from this northwestern Alaska Native village along the Bering Sea, and Chloe's spotting could catalyze the families' act of packing away food for the winter. In this way, Chloe was exercising the Iñupiaq value of *Iñuuniaqatiunik Ikayuutiłiq*—Responsibility to the Tribe. Chloe's attunement to the Land is a necessary skill that has enabled her people to survive winter after winter in the harsh Arctic climate.

While Chloe's example reveals a deep intimacy with the Land in which she lives, such relations are rarely emphasized in historical and contemporary colonial educational approaches (Battiste, 2013). As Battiste (2013) noted, "Colonialism is a theory of relationships embedded in power, voice, and legitimacy. … It has racialized Aboriginal people's identity, marginalized and de-legitimated their knowledge and languages, and exploited their powerlessness in taking their lands" (p. 106). Education has been, and continues to be, used as a primary vehicle for colonization; it removes and separates Indigenous children from their language, ways of knowing, and ways of being on the Land (Battiste, 2013; Berry, 1999; Skerrett & Richie, 2020). The research presented in this article aims to legitimize Indigenous children's perspectives and interactions with the Land as significant and important to their identity formation. As a decolonizing approach, this study calls into question subtle forms of colonizing approaches to education, namely, educational discourses that intend to tame and control children's ways of knowing and interacting with their environment. In this way, the study strives to rewild environmental education by challenging human-centric notions of agency and recognizing inter-relational agency between children and Nature as co-teacher.

Wild Pedagogies

Wild pedagogies aim to de-centre "dominant versions of education" (Jickling et al., 2018a, p. 1) by placing human and more-than-human relationships with landscapes/Nature/wilderness settings at the forefront of pedagogy. Jickling et al. (2018a) wrote that wilderness "refers to self-willed land" (p. 26), to a place where all beings can dwell on their own terms. By acknowledging the agency of all living beings and the agency of the Land (Plumwood, 2006), wild pedagogies offer an alternative framework for de-centring anthropocentric epistemologies, which prioritize human dominion over the Land. As Jickling et al. (2018a) noted, "Each species has its own locus of meaning" (p. 37), and by tuning in and listening to the more-than-human world around us, we begin to see outside ourselves as part of an interconnected system. It is the diversity of humans and every living being within a biocultural system that forms the basis of a sustainable livelihood (Skerrett & Ritchie, 2020).

Wild pedagogies aim to challenge the status quo of educational approaches by promoting educational approaches that position Nature as co-teacher (Blenkinsop & Ford, 2018). In such an approach, the human teacher is no longer "the sole arbiter of the truth. Meaning will become more fluid as it is seen as a shared endeavor" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 164). "Wildness" entails spontaneity, fluidity, and flow. Such a form of education will require that educators and researchers take a step back in order to allow processes of being in the wild to unfold authentically. Recognizing children's agency in the process is essential as more often than not children act and respond to the world in very distinct

ways from adults (Green, 2013, 2018a). Needless to say, wild pedagogies are not intended to be a free-for-all; instead, implications of human actions and interactions must be considered for the good of all beings (Blenkinsop & Ford, 2018). Thus, teachers must grapple with tensions between free will and guidance, between allowing for unruliness and gently correcting and redirecting behaviours that might result in the disruption of ecological systems. The process of making room for wild pedagogies to emerge requires fluidity, an openness to a shift in thinking, and a re-examination of our own ingrained practices and colonizing approaches to education (Blenkinsop & Ford, 2018; Jickling et al., 2018b).

Spatial Autonomy

This paper tunes into Alaska Native children's agency—that is, their spatial autonomy on the Land—to interrogate possibilities for wild pedagogies. Coinciding with the notion of freedom on the Land, spatial autonomy plays an important role in children's environmental identity formation, in which children explore and develop their own sense of place in all the settings to which they are exposed (Green, 2018a, 2018b). While autonomy has been criticized as an individualistic concept (Rasmussen, 2009), it has also been proposed that autonomy and self-competency are universal human psychological needs—although the way in which they are enacted and expressed varies among different cultures (Matsumoto & Juang, 2012). Spatial autonomy, as applied in the context of this research, is inclusive of both the collective and individual relations that a child forms with their place, beginning at a very young age. Gaining a sense of spatial autonomy has been shown to boost children's self-confidence, skills in navigation, creativity and innovation, and ecological understandings of their place (Green, 2018a). Children's spatial autonomy is also enacted and influenced by the geographical, cultural, familial, and educational contexts to which a child is exposed (Punch, 2002; Green, 2018a). Thus, spatial autonomy for a child growing up in a rainforest will manifest itself differently than it does for a child growing up on the open spaces of the Arctic tundra. Similarly, spatial autonomy enacted by a child raised within Indigenous subsistence culture will likely be distinct from that of a child growing up a cosmopolitan city. The research presented in this paper draws on an understanding that children's spatial autonomy as it relates to the Land is a significant part of wild pedagogies.

The children's spatial autonomy on and with the Land in the present study was interpreted through their cultural lens of *Iñupiat Ilitqusiat* (Iñupiaq Values) (Northwest Alaska Elders, 1989; Topkok & Green, 2016). Iñupiaq well-being is related to a holistic internalization of *Iñupiat Ilitqusiat*, demonstrated and enacted through a healthy and happy state of mind, body, spirit, and the environment. Through such a lens, Nature and culture are not in a binary relationship; instead, they complement each other in their connection with the diverse living world (Skerrett & Ritchie, 2020).

Nature as Colonized

Wild pedagogies take on a critical approach by identifying Nature as an entity that has been colonized (Blenkinsop & Ford, 2018). Wilderness is "a place where people and other living beings are able to interact equitably, where all have the opportunity to flourish and express themselves in their own unique ways" (Jickling et al., 2018b, p. 161). Colonization presents an opposing force to such an environment in so far as it strives to subdue, tame, and control the "wild"; the result of such process is that the mind and the Land become "monocultures" (Skerrett & Ritchie, 2020, p. 2). This colonizing process has had devastating results on the Alaskan children's relationship with the Land. Historically, Indigenous children in Alaska were forced to adhere to Western standards of education and ways of relating with the natural world. Alaska Native children were sent to boarding schools, away from their families, which resulted in the loss of their language and their cultural practices, in their ways of living and being on the Land and sea (Berry, 1999; Lunda, 2018; Rivkin et al., 2017). As Skerrett and Ritchie (2020) observed, "when the relationships are disrupted, so too is the delicate network between people and the environment and their ability to read one another" (p. 10).

Contemporary forms of settler-colonialism continue to have implications on the health and well-being of Alaska Native communities (Rivkin et al., 2017). Broadly speaking, consumer-driven lifestyles, wastefulness, and pollution impact every living being on earth, regardless of their proximity to consumerism. What is more, human-induced climate change is having an unprecedented impact on coastal Alaska Native communities, whose residents depend on the Land and sea and for survival (Cold, 2018). Additionally, educational structures still, in many ways, perpetuate colonial models of control and disconnection from place and the environment (Jickling et al., 2018b). Within these structures, "children are told what to do, where to go, and even what to think" (Jickling et al., 2018b, p. 163).

This study aims to disrupt colonial forms of education that overshadow Indigenous children's ways of being and ways of knowing the Land. Through the use of participatory methods, the research is guided by the question: How do Alaska Native children experience spatial autonomy on the Land? The research presented in this paper also aims to trouble the tensions between these children's ways of relating and a teacher's orientation towards control (Jickling et al., 2018b). What happens when children's ways of knowing are misunderstood, when their cultural identities seem to clash with Western orientations of dominion over the natural world? In short, the purpose of this paper is to critically integrate the "wild pedagogies" that naturally emerge among these children through peer-to-peer and child–Nature interactions. It strives to intervene in the tensions that have arisen between boundary-challenging children and adults who wish to tame them, between the sensible and unruly, between tuning in or tuning out, and between making space or disturbing place and ways of being in the wild.

Naming My Own Tension

Before going further, it is important to identify my own tension in presenting this argument as a White, non-Indigenous researcher/educator, an outsider to the culture, and a visitor to the Land which the children in these stories inhabit. With this positionality in mind, I nevertheless choose, with all good intentions, to boldly take this step forward because I believe that it is crucial to name and address the colonized forces that are continuously in action as we—settler educators/researchers on the Land who work with Indigenous peoples—confront our historical baggage. How do we rewild the spaces which my White settler ancestors stole? How do we honour the voices of those who have been historically oppressed? I do not know the answers to these life-wrenching questions, but I do know that these children continue to teach me what it means to live on the Land. Thus, I share their interactions as a means to walk with them and provoke deeper reflections on how we can support *all* children as they tune into their place.

Methods

In this paper, I provide vivid examples of wild pedagogies in action that organically emerged from young children (4–5 years old) from an Alaska Native village who were interacting with their wilderness settings. I provide examples of children reading the landscape, testing the boundaries, and learning to discern limits. I also interrogate the roles of the non-Indigenous educators (Ms. Arnold and Ms. Davis, who had recently moved to the village) and a local Alaska Native parent volunteer (Ms. Lizzie) with respect to nurturing or restricting the children's spatial autonomy. The wild pedagogies invoked in this project stem from the second year of a five-year research study focusing on young children's environmental identity development in rural and non-rural Alaskan settings. Alaska, a place of "pristine" wilderness (Brown, 2002, p. 15), paints the backdrop of children's natural world encounters; yet, our study is beginning to show how exposure and experiences in wilderness setting differ vastly among Alaskan children. In other words, when it comes to children's environmental identity development, no two paths are alike.

The approach taken in this research was largely qualitative and observational, focusing on the emotional and behavioural attributes of children's lived Nature experiences. We equipped children with small wearable cameras and invited them to partake in "sensory tours"—to help us see the world through the eyes of a child (Green, 2016). Our pedagogical approach involved taking children out onto the Land and inviting them to play, explore, and subsist in their surrounding wilderness settings. This rather human-centred method nevertheless permitted me to switch traditional research perspectives and learn from the viewpoint of the experiences of a child. Such a method also aimed to be decolonizing in that

it attempted to trouble those historical and contemporary colonial approaches in education that try to control how children should be in Nature. Children have a unique affinity with Nature, which is to some degree untainted and unpolluted by adult worries and learned human–Nature binaries (Taylor, 2017). That said, children's lived experiences in their environments are always influenced by cultural and societal values, as well as by historical and contemporary forms of colonization. Furthermore, their experiences are largely influenced by the adults who accompany them in the wilderness. Therefore, seeing the world through the lens of a child strengthens our understanding of the formative early childhood experiences and enduring colonizing forces that shape how children's experiences with wilderness settings are informed.

Videos captured by wearable cameras were transcribed into text and analyzed holistically. Micro-interactions formed the unit of analysis for this research. Micro-interactions recognize children's agency to engage with their environment- shaped by emotions, propelling behaviour, and ultimately informing how children come to relate with and see themselves as part of their environment. Children's micro-interactions were timestamped, and the researchers notated who was involved, children's emotional and behavioural responses, adult influences, and verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. For the purposes of this paper, particular micro-interactions were selected to provide insight into Alaska Native children's spatial autonomy and the tensions between the children's way of relating to the Land and the teachers' need for control. These are presented as descriptive vignettes and labelled by the viewpoint of who was wearing the camera. Direct quotes from children and adults are italicized to highlight their views and perspectives.

Research Context

Fifteen 4–5-year-old children participated in the project, which took place in a rural Alaska Native village of approximately 700 inhabitants on the shores of the Bering Sea. All but two children were identified by their families as Alaska Native, primarily of Iñupiat descent. During the researchers' week-long visit in autumn of 2019, the children, along with their teachers, parent volunteers, and the researchers, engaged in activities at three different wilderness settings: play on a beach adjacent to their school; berry picking on open tundra near the village; and fishing at Pebble Creek, approximately 25 kilometres north of the village up the Bering Sea coastline.

Much of the adventure in Pebble Creek, the focus of this paper, was spontaneous and unexpected. I sat beside Ms. Lizzie, a parent volunteer, in a white Ford F150 truck with five children in the back singing *"Oh Susanna"*—a song from my own settler-colonial childhood, which I had inadvertently shared with them. We drove down dirt roads into the country. Ms. Lizzie exclaimed, *"Hold on kids"* and *"Whoa!"* The truck took a nose dive over the edge of the dirt

road, navigating its way through the tundra before ending up on the rocky beach along the ocean coast. The children shrieked and giggled as we drove just three or four metres away from the crashing waves.

I was told that Pebble Creek is a popular fishing spot for locals and that families venture to the spot during the summer and autumn months. On warm and sunny days children, swim in water with cousins and aunties, siblings and friends. *"So this is where Pebble Creek is located?"* I wondered to myself. I had pictured something greener and lusher: tall trees, tire swings, and picnics… Perhaps, once again, I was drawing on my own colonized version of what a creek "should be" when I imagined this landscape. I had previously heard about Pebble Creek from local children who had participated in another research project with me a few years ago. Those children had drawn pictures and described a swimming hole with green grass on the side and a few trees. Indeed, there was a lush green tundra with autumn colours on the edge of the coastal margin and a few spotted taller trees in the distance—the considerable distance—on a small hill several kilometres away. It was this distant vista that the children had described, but it was at a different scale than I had imagined.

After we had arrived at the spot where the creek meets the coast, Ms. Lizzie motioned for the drivers to turn their vehicles around on the narrow beach, and they began the process of backing, turning, pulling forward, and turning again. The three "official" off-road school vehicles came to a full stop only a few metres away from the waves of the Bering Sea, forming a single-file line facing back toward the way we had just come. *"Will our cars be safe here?"* I asked, a bit worried. "*Sure,"* Ms. Lizzie said, *"We will keep an eye on them."*

The children eagerly jumped out of the vehicles and onto the rocky beach, running along the grey rocks that met the grey waves of the ocean, underneath the grey sky. A path of brown driftwood crisscrossed the pebbles. For some children, Pebble Creek was familiar; for instance, Steven shared that he had been to the creek for fishing. It was a first visit for other children, and also for myself, my research assistant, two adult volunteers, and the children's teacher, Ms. Arnold. Only Ms. Lizzie, the parent volunteer, had been there before.

"Holy cow! It has really changed," Ms. Lizzie said, surprised, referring to the creek that had naturally woven its way into the soft sand and rocks, forming a dark grey mound, which I will refer to as "the bluff." The bluff formed a wall-like barrier of grey sludge and rocks that dropped down, forming a mini-coastline along the edge of the creek.

"Wait! Stand back!"—Owen's Point of View

Owen and his friends spread out across the sand and rocks near the coastline, leading towards the confluence of the creek.
Owen watched as Ms. Arnold walked quickly to keep ahead of the children.
"Come here, come here, come here…" Ms. Arnold said, waving the children close.

"Hey, this is a fast little creek. It goes out to the ocean—you know that, right? Also, this edge right by the side of it is very loose. So if you get close to that creek… Do you know what sand does when you step on it? It falls down. Don't go close to the edge or else you might fall down."

Owen and the other children stopped and listened, following Ms. Arnold over some driftwood.

"*I found a cool seashell,"* Erin showed Emma.

"Don't let them get too close to the edge of the river," Ms. Lizzie said.

"That is what I was just telling them," Ms. Arnold added.

"I don't want you to fall in the water, guys. You should stay over here," Erin said, worried for her friends.

"*Don't go too close to the edge. You can walk up that way,"* Ms. Arnold said as she pointed the children away from the edge of the creek.

"Don't stand beside it or you will fall in," Ms. Arnold said again.

"Go swimming?" Chloe asked.

"No," Samuel answered and Ms. Arnold echoed.

"No swimming," Chloe repeated.

Samuel picked up a long stick and swung it into the water.

"*You guys can play up there too—look,"* Ms. Arnold said as she pointed to the rocks, away from the water.

Anne picked up two rocks and Grace began to dig in the sand.

Samuel moved closer to the edge and picked up a rock to throw it into the water.

"*Wait, wait, wait! Hold on! If you want to go right there … and throw something…"* Ms. Arnold tried again to redirect the children away from the water.

"*I guess if they want … they can stand on the rocks, and slide down right here,"* Ms. Arnold contended, realizing that the children's interaction with the creek was inevitable. After all, the children were there to go fishing.

During this exchange, Owen's wearable camera showed how he paid close attention to Ms. Arnold's direction, quietly watching and listening to what his teacher was directly (and indirectly) teaching about how to interact with the environment. Ms. Arnold was greatly concerned about the potential danger of the creek, and rightly so. The current was fast, and standing too close to the edge could be dangerous. *"Wait! Stop! Do not get too close."*

Likewise, Owen carefully observed each of his peers' interactions with the Land. Erin found a seashell. Almost instinctually, Anne and Grace picked up rocks to throw in the water. Similarly, Samuel reached for a stick and threw it towards the water, just as he had done a few days before on the beach near his school. Ms. Arnold responded with anxiety about the children's playful interactions with the Land. Her worried reaction influenced Erin, who also expressed concern for her friends about their potential to fall in the water. This over-worry might cause children to question if it is OK to touch, experiment with, and interact with their place—all important aspects in developing spatial autonomy (Green, 2018a).

While it is important to instill in the children a healthy understanding of the potential dangers of wild waters, it is also important to balance such concerns against the benefits of being near this kind of open water and to contextualize one's anxiety for the learners. Ms. Arnold emphasized fear and separation

in teaching the children about the potential danger, in this way perpetuating colonizing discourses (Jickling et al., 2018a). Instead of only directing the children away from the water, she might have modelled how the children could navigate the shoreline safely.

Down the Big Slope—Patrick's Point of View

Patrick approached the edge of the big slope.
"Wait, I don't want you guys running and falling into the water," Ms. Arnold called.
Ms. Arnold reached out to help the children, one at a time, down the steep bluff and onto the rocky landing.
"I don't want you falling in the water," Ms. Arnold repeated.
Ms. Arnold helped Grace slide slowly down the bluff. Next, she reached out to Samuel, but Samuel jumped down on his own.
"Do not go in the water!" Ms. Arnold repeated.
"Come here," Ms. Arnold said to the children. She helped Anne, and then Sean, down.
Lucas stood next to Patrick.
"Let me try," Lucas said, sliding down on his own.
"Patrick," Ms. Davis called, reaching out to help him.
"Woo-hoo!" Patrick exclaimed, sliding down the hill independently.
Patrick started to reach for a rock.
"Hold on, don't grab a rock yet," Ms. Arnold said.
"Huh," Patrick responded.

The bluff's slippery slope posed a challenge which had to be faced in order for the children to get near the creek to fish. Instead of providing space for children to exercise their agency in navigating the slope, the teacher, anxious about the potential danger, sought to assist the children down one by one. She repeatedly warned them, *"Do not go in the water."* Despite this, many of the children exercised their spatial autonomy by sliding and jumping down the steep bluff on their own. Although their teacher was nervous for them, some children appeared confident in their abilities. This example suggests how colonizing tendencies of control might inform the way we support children in their experiences on the Land (Jickling et al., 2018a). This interaction also reveals, to some extent, a misunderstanding of the competency that many of these children had in navigating the Land on their own. Instead of hovering over the children, assisting them one by one, a teacher might stand back and allow children the opportunity to exercise their skills on their own, while still being available to support those who struggle.

Fun on the Slippery Slope—Oliver's Point of View

Oliver watched as Jackson, next to the edge of the bluff, attempted to go down.
"Don't go off that way!" Ms. Arnold yelled from behind.
Jackson, arms out to the side, bent his knees, preparing to slide.

"Jackson!" Ms. Arnold repeated.
"Don't be doing that—you are going to fall," Ms. Arnold said as she reached towards Jackson.
"But then how can I get down there?" Jackson asked.
"You can go around this way. Over here," Ms. Arnold said.
Oliver watched as Ms. Arnold led Jackson to another part of the bank that was less steep.

Left alone on the edge and testing the boundaries, Oliver prepared to slide down. Spreading his arms out, he slid down the bluff *with* the rock.
Oliver dug his feet into the sand, sloping back up the embankment.
At the top, Oliver met Philip, laughing. The two boys started to scuffle. Philip shoved Oliver over the edge.
"Fun, fun!" Oliver plowed his fingers into the sand, skidding down a second time.
"Do you need help?" Ms. Davis nearby asked.
"Fun!" Oliver exclaimed, climbing back up.
Back up the bluff a third time, Oliver found a new spot to slide, a little steeper than the first. The two boys wrestled. This time Oliver won, and Philip let out a cry before falling down.
"Hey, Philip and Oliver—don't do that, OK? You are going to get hurt," Ms. Lizzie said.
Oliver emptied his boot before preparing his feet to coast back down.
"Ah!" Oliver screamed, running the rest of the way down and right into the creek. He walked in deeper, looking into the water. After a few seconds, he turned around and scrambled back up the bluff again!

This interaction showed Oliver and Philip testing the adults' boundaries on the bluff. Once again, there was a tension between the children's exertion of their own agency and what the adults deemed as safe. But where should such boundaries lie? Ms. Arnold redirected Jackson away from the slope and towards a less steep part of the bank. Oliver took advantage of Ms. Arnold's attention diverted elsewhere, demonstrating his dexterity by surfing down the slope multiple times. Through this act, Oliver may have been acknowledging the agency of the bluff itself as malleable and everchanging. Additionally, learning how to navigate a slippery slope might also contribute to Oliver's spatial autonomy, refining his capacity to live on the Land.

Wild pedagogies should make room for the spontaneous and unexpected, allowing fluidity and flow (Jickling et al., 2018b). But when is wild too wild? And how and when should adults intervene or control a situation? The game became more intense, with Oliver and Philip pushing each other over the edge. This captured Ms. Lizzie's attention, who prompted the boys to stop because they "*are going to get hurt*." Ms. Lizzie's intervention was directed towards teaching the children the *Iñupiaq* value, *Kamakkutiłiq*—Respect for Others. While each being should be allowed to freely express themselves on the Land in their own unique ways, an intervention is deemed necessary when one's agency might intentionally harm another.

A Helping Hand—Researcher's Point of View

(This interaction was recorded on the researcher's iPad.)

> Grace was following Erin and Philip up the slippery slope. Grace stopped at the bottom.
> *"Can you help me?"* Grace asked. *"I need help getting up."*
> Philip, directly in front of her, extended his hand to help; however, Grace refused to take it. He wiped his hands together, cleaning off the dirt and reached towards Grace again. Grace took a step back, and walked away.

This short interaction offers a different perspective of Philip's agency on the bluff. Instead of playing rough, Philip noticed his peer's request for help and reached out to offer his assistance. When Grace did not respond, Philip cleaned his hand and offered it a second time. Philip's small gestures revealed the Iñupiat value, *Savaqatigiiyuɬiq*—Cooperation—in helping one another on the Land. This value, enacted in subtle ways, should be nurtured and supported so that children can learn to work with one another and other living beings in their shared environment.

Hey, hey, no!—Samuel's Point of View

> Samuel walked over to the side of the bluff and picked up the biggest rock he could find. He threw it into the creek. He found another and threw it even further into the water. He reached for yet another and threw it, and then another, and another. … He turned towards the bluff again and noticed Philip, inching over the side.
> *"Hey, hey, no!"* Samuel said, pointing at Philip.
> *"No, NO! You'll fall!"* Samuel said.
> Philip slipped over the side, triggering a small rock slide. He scurried quickly back up.
> *"Whoa! Hey, what's happening here?"* a teacher said from behind.
> Samuel attempted to kick the rocks back into the place where they had fallen.
> *"We got to get up out of here at some point,"* Ms. Davis added.

In this instance, Samuel warned Philip about the danger of slipping down the bluff. "*You'll fall*," Samuel said, expressing concern for his peer, just as Erin had earlier. He mimicked Ms. Arnold's earlier warning. Little did he know that Philip had already slid down the bluff several times without getting hurt. Ms. Davis, although she did not try to stop Philip from sliding, expressed a slightly exaggerated worry that the group would not be able to get out of the landing should the bluff continue to erode. While it is certainly important to redirect children away from potential hazards, it is also important to accurately portray such dangers so as not to instill anxiety in children.

Knocking Rocks Down from Bank Edge—Patrick's Point of View

Patrick watched Ms. Arnold talking to the kids about rocks falling down the banks.
"You make it unsteady," she told them.
Patrick walked near to Ms. Arnold and his classmates. He looked at the wall. He kicked the rocks and the wall crumbled
"Ah! Whoa!" Patrick exclaimed.
He struck the wall again.
"Patrick! I need you to stop kicking the side," Ms. Arnold yelled.
"When you kick the sides of it, you make it unsteady. Then all of these rocks will come falling down onto you. Do you want the rocks to fall on you?" Ms. Arnold asked.
"No," Patrick answered.
"I know it looks really cool, but I just want you to be safe here. We don't want that to happen," Ms. Arnold said.
"Huh," Patrick said, walking towards the other children to join them in fishing.

In this interaction, as in the one previously presented, Patrick observed Ms. Arnold misinform the children about their role in making the bluff unsteady. She suggested they played a significant role when, in fact, the children were playing only a small part in the bluff's current and future form. Ms. Arnold's worry about the bluff collapsing seemed to be out of context in this wilderness setting. While certainly erosion might be a legitimate concern on one's property or in a city or neighbourhood, in the context of this wilderness setting, the rocky bluff had its own agency, changing and shifting with the tide. Ms. Arnold seemed to be applying a colonized understanding of human dominion or control over the environment to the children's interaction with the Land. Patrick's "*huh*" indicated he may not have understood Ms. Arnold or her concerns.

A few minutes later, the camera showed Patrick looking at the wall.
"*Hey look, we don't want all of those falling down. Remember?"* Ms. Arnold said to Patrick.
"Do not kick the sides!" Ms. Arnold yelled at Jackson and Patrick.
"Do you want to climb up there? Let's go back up there." Ms. Arnold pointed to the bluff.
"If you want to come back up, walk this way," Ms. Arnold said. She walked along the rock wall until it became less steep. Patrick watched.
He picked up a rock and threw it.
"Oh," he hollered as it made a splash in the water.
Ms. Arnold walked to the edge of the bluff where it was less steep. Patrick stayed back next to the water. He threw another rock in the water.
"If you want to come up here, go this way," Ms. Arnold yelled from a distance.
Patrick watched the water.
"No is … argh!" Patrick groaned, picking up a huge rock and throwing it in the water.
"Oh, that's a big one!"
Ms. Arnold stood at her position on the bank with her hands on her hips, watching Patrick.
"Huh?" Patrick said. Ms. Arnold appeared to be saying something to him.
Patrick threw another rock in the water.

Again, this interaction shows a miscommunication between Patrick and Ms. Arnold. Ms. Arnold tried to lead Patrick away from the water, but Patrick appeared to have no interest in leaving the water or the rocks on the shoreline. Ms. Arnold directed Patrick to a place where the bluff became significantly smaller, that is, to a place where it would be easier to ascend. Yet Patrick seemed to be drawn to taking challenges rather than looking for ease or convenience. Of his own accord, he lifted a very heavy rock and hurled it into the water.

The Iñupiaq value *Savvaqtułiq*—Hard Work—is important for learning how to live and survive on the Land. By challenging himself, Patrick was developing his strength and skills. In enacting wild pedagogies, educators should support and encourage children to hone their skills through challenges. At the same time, educators should consider the individual skill level and experience of each child. While Patrick was up for the challenge, some children may not so readily undertake trying situations. However, it is through overcoming tensions—both physical and psychological—that a child's environmental identity is strengthened (Green, 2018b).

Goodbye Waterfall, Goodbye Rainbow—Steven's Point of View

Steven ran to the edge of the bluff and looked out towards the water.
"Watch where the water falls," Steven said to himself.
Nearby, Chloe picked up a large curled branch, carried it to the edge of the bluff, and threw it into the water.
Steven watched the branch float away.
"Hey, stay over here," Ms. Arnold yelled in the background.
Steven noted a bird flying in the air.
"Look at that one. It's so cool," Steven said.
The children stood together on the embankment, waiting for permission to return to the water. Steven kicked rocks down the bluff.
"Where are we going?" Steven asked.
"Ms. Arnold, where are we going?" Steven repeated.
No answer. Steven returned to edge of the bluff, watching the water. He picked up a stick and threw it. He watched the stick flow with the tide into the ocean.

Steven and his friends stood on the bluff, watching the water flow down the creek and into the ocean. They waited for permission to cross an imposed boundary, which limited the way that they interacted with the water and the Land. Colonized forms of education separated, and continue to divide, our children from the wild. For the children at Pebble Creek, Nature is not separate from themselves but rather part of who they are and how they see themselves. Way up in the sky, Steven noted a bird flying overhead. He appreciated its agency: *"Look at that one. It's so cool."* In spite of the imposed boundaries, the children found ways to interact with the Land. Steven was intent on "*watch[ing] where the water falls*." The camera shows him observing the current carry Chloe's stick from the creek to the ocean. Steven was learning about the water's agency.

A few minutes later, Steven's teacher announced it was time to go back to school.
"I want to go fishing," Steven said, looking back towards the water.
"I want to go fishing!" Steven spoke more loudly.
Ms. Arnold stood at the edge of the bluff, blocking the children from going near to the water.
"Bye waterfall. Bye sticks," Steven said. He walked slowly, kicking rocks as he looked back towards the water.
"Huh? I see a rainbow!" Steven said, *"I saw a rainbow."*
"Bye rainbow," Steven said.
"Bye," Emma repeated, walking beside Steven.
"Bye," Steven said again, looking back at the rainbow.
"Bye rainbow," Emma repeated.
"Bye rainbow!" Steven blew the rainbow a kiss.

Like Chloe's spotting of the moose, Steven wanted to subsist; he wanted to fish, to live out the Iñupiaq value of *Aŋunialguɬiq*—Hunter Success. Steven did not want to return to the four walls of his school; he wanted to stay on and be with the Land. As he walked towards the trucks, Steven kicked the rocks beneath his feet and a rainbow lit his path. The Land was speaking, sharing the light of being in and with place. Steven said his goodbyes to each being of the Land: the waterfall, the sticks, the rainbow. He showed appreciation for Nature, enacting the Iñupiaq value of *Kamaksriɬiq Nutim Iñiqtanik*—Respect for All Living Beings.

Concluding Discussion

The findings presented in this paper stem from my attempt to identify Nature as both colonized and co-teacher (Blenkinsop & Ford, 2018). I trouble what it means for educators and researchers to enact wild pedagogies when they inevitably still carry colonial baggage.

I write from a critical lens of watching and listening to children's interactions with their places, inferring meaning through their verbal and non-verbal expressions. In this study, I did not attempt to speak for the children, nor did I attempt to claim complete understanding of their Indigenous cultural heritage. Rather, it was my goal to listen, to learn, and to come to understand how cultural clashes between my own Western ways of knowing and their Indigenous ways of being affect how children live and experience their Land. I drew upon *Iñupiat Ilitqusiat* (Iñupiaq Values) to interpret the children's interactions with the Land in an effort to honour a biocultural perspective in which language, culture, and ecology inform an interconnected, diverse, and complex system (Skerrett & Ritchie, 2020). It is my hope that the messages shared in this paper can inspire all to engage in deeper, more meaningful enactments of wild pedagogies.

The Bluff as a Barrier

The bluff, both concretely and abstractly, symbolizes a barrier created by colonized notions of how humans should relate to their place. The phrases, *"Don't get too close! Stop! Do not touch!"* impose a false barrier between children and Land, which prohibits children from fully interacting with their Land. Ms. Arnold's directives positioned the children at a distance from the edge of the bluff, restricting access to who and what they are supposed to be. Western colonized messaging, which marks the Land as a place that is dangerous and off-limits, has the potential to instill in children fear, anxiety, and/or disdain for the environment and other living beings (Green, 2018b). Furthermore, by hovering over children, and not allowing them the space to be and become, they will not develop the skills and competencies necessary for survival. The complexity, spontaneity, and challenges that Nature poses help to refine our children's abilities to become stronger and more resilient.

Colonizing pedagogies seep in subtly, and more often than not they go unnamed and unrecognized (Tuck et al., 2014). It is a difficult challenge to reteach ourselves practices and approaches that have been ingrained in us over a lifetime (Taylor, 2017). Notions of taming the wild—namely, Euro-American values such as "kill the Indian, save the man" and "children should be seen and not heard"—were historically, and are presently, enacted through the separation of children from their culture, their families, and their Land (Churchill, 2004). Western forms of education perpetuate this model of separation by limiting children's access to the natural world. This paper adds to the dialogue on wild pedagogies by naming the colonized forms of education that subtly seep into early childhood educational practices and identifying the tensions that arise from taking children outside in the wild. If we are to move past such tensions and reflect on how we inadvertently perpetuate colonization in our own educational and research practices, we must exercise place consciousness in our educational practices (Greenwood, 2013). The following questions might help educators and researchers take a critical stance in enacting wild pedagogies: *In what ways do I try to control children's experiences outdoors? Is this measure of control necessary to keep others safe and to respect the agency of other living beings—both human and more-than-human? Do I respect the diverse ways in which others exercise their agency in the wilderness? Are my actions prohibiting others from being and becoming in-tune with and a part of their environment?*

The Bluff as Summit of Possibility

By leaning in and sliding down the bluff, the children sank into and became part of the Land. They were not afraid to get dirty, to dig into the sand. When necessary, they wiped off their hands, or shook out their boots and tried again. The children sought challenge, carving out their own ways to learn from the Land. In climbing up and sliding down the bluff, the children refined their strength and resiliency,

developing the necessary skills *Savvaqtuɬiq*—Hard Work—and *Savaqatigiiyuɬiq*—Cooperation—to subsist and survive in relationship with the Land.

The children listened to what the Land was trying to teach them, enacting *Kamakkutiɬiq*—Respect for Others—and *Kamaksriɬiq Nutim Iñiqtanik*—Respect for Nature. The children noted patterns and movement. For example, Chloe spotted a moose several kilometres away, and Steven watched the tide carry his stick from the creek into the ocean. Through acts of observing and acknowledging the agency of others in their place—the birds, the rainbow, the moose, the water—these children are learning what it means to be part of the Land. The Land is teaching them who they are. The rainbow symbolizes *Kaŋiqsimauraaɬiq Irrutchikun*—Spirituality—and all the beauty of their place. Wild pedagogies require listening deeply to other forms of languages, tuning into a shared state of existence and being on the Land (Blekensip & Ford, 2018; Greenwood, 2013; Jickling et al., 2018a; Lunda & Green, 2020; Skerrett & Ritchie, 2018).

Most importantly, the excerpts cited above show how these children, at 4- and 5-years-old, are enacting *Aŋayuqaaġiich Savaaksraŋich*—Family Roles. Although Chloe has not yet reached an age to hunt on her own, her careful observation of the moose, related at the beginning of this paper, contributes to the well-being of her people. Furthermore, Steven's inclination to go fishing plays a crucial role in subsisting, through which he has achieved *Aŋunialguɬiq*—Hunter Success. In these children's lives, the Land as teacher establishes a pathway towards sustainability and survival, in which all peoples can learn to re-attune ourselves to what it means to rewild and reinvigorate our connections with Land and place.

Notes

[1] Land and Nature are both capitalized throughout this article because the author is referring to both the natural environment as well as the spiritual aspects of the living and non-living environment.

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