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# *Guest Editorial*
# Wild Pedagogies for Change

Aage Jensen, Marianne Presthus Heggen, Bob Jickling, & Sean Blenkinsop

## 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 ecophilosphy, 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 Iñupiaq 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 Hempsall 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 resent 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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# Experiments With Lyric Philosophy and the Wilding of Educational Research

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***Abstract***

*This project engages Jan Zwicky's lyric philosophy to reach into terrain beyond the bounds of logico-linguistic analysis. The work in this paper, composed primarily of pinhole photographs and written responses to place, consists of a series of ontological experiments made with participants during a Wild Pedagogies gathering in Finse, Norway, in August 2019. Through photographic experiences in the landscape surrounding the Hardangerjøkulen glacier, paired with written text, these experiments interrogate ways to represent places and ideas. In conducting this research, we began with an informal walking workshop on pinhole photography, followed by the making and developing of pictures in-situ. The written expressions of the work are composed of short evocative representations of experience that seek to pivot in the moment and work toward a series of linked, lyric arguments.*

***Résumé***

*Le projet met à contribution la philosophie lyrique de Jan Zwicky pour atteindre un terrain de réflexion qui dépasse les frontières de l'analyse logico-linguistique. Le présent travail, composé principalement de photographies par sténopé et de textes produits en réaction à un lieu particulier, rapporte une série d'expériences ontologiques réalisées par les participants d'un colloque sur le thème des pédagogies de la nature tenu à Finse, en Norvège, en août 2019. En combinant écriture et expérimentations photographiques ayant pour objet le paysage entourant le glacier Hardangerjøkulen, différentes façons de représenter les lieux et les idées sont explorées. Dans le cadre de la présente recherche, nous avons d'abord organisé une randonnée pendant laquelle s'est donné un atelier informel sur la photographie par sténopé, suivi de la prise et du développement de photographies in situ. Les textes accompagnant les œuvres photographiques constituent de courtes représentations évocatrices d'une expérience qui cherche à s'appuyer sur le moment pour créer une série d'arguments lyriques reliés entre eux.*

*Keywords:* lyric philosophy, Wild Pedagogy, environmental education, pinhole photography, Jan Zwicky

*Mots-clés* : philosophie lyrique, pédagogies de la nature, éducation à l'environnement, photographie par sténopé, Jan Zwicky

## Introduction

We traverse new terrain as Earth moves between geological epochs—between the Holocene and the Anthropocene. The Earth is writing a new geo-story, and humans are largely bystanders who barely seem to have noticed. We are living on an increasingly threadbare planet and we—especially the most privileged—cannot continue do the same things—perpetuate the same relationships—and have a viable future for all. This is a predicament to which education must respond.

This work begins to address two concerns. The first is a need to problematize issues of control—both methodological and epistemological. We see a need for research methodologies that consciously break from the parallel and often hidden authorities that tend to control both research and human relationships within a more-than-human world (see for example, Blenkinsop et al., 2019; Crex Crex Collective, 2018). Second, we see a need to address the limitations of philosophy as constrained by linguistics and logic. To this end, we riff from the lyric philosophy developed by Canadian philosopher Jan Zwicky (1992, 2003, 2015). This riff takes shape as a small research experiment that offers an avenue forward for researchers who are determined to try something different. We fear that without bold moves that seek to represent existential experience in new ways, research and education will be hamstrung in their attempts to reveal radical breaks from the status quo. New ways to conduct research are needed.

In this paper, we use paired pages as described in Zwicky's work (see for example, 1992, 2003). However, in this project, the left-hand pages are written responses to the images arising through physical experiences in the place, at the moment of photography. The right-hand pages consist of photographs taken with a pinhole camera. At times, the writing arises from the fresh experience of making photographs. At other times, the experience of *being present* inspires the photography.

This research took place during a week-long Wild Pedagogies gathering in August 2019, in Finse, Norway, and the landscape surrounding the Hardangerjøkulen glacier. We began with an informal walking workshop on pinhole photography, including the making of pictures, as well as developing them in-situ. Concurrently, participants were invited to write within the place. Place mattered; we theorized that each place has its own character, its own agential relations, and its own voice (Crex Crex Collective, 2018). These qualities, then, were uniquely imprinted within the experiences of participants, incorporated in their conversations, and reflected in their photographs and writing.

## Viewing the Work

The following pages are designed to be viewed as pairs—text on the left and pinhole photographs on the right. Because this paper is published digitally, viewers will need to find imaginative ways to achieve this simultaneous pairing. We encourage viewing lyrics and corresponding photographs side by side.

Together, these parings invite readers to explore patterned resonances in the world and to probe ontological positioning in spaces beyond what linguistic expression and artistic representation might singularly provide. The representation of this in side-by-side pairings seeks to engage the connoisseur—the reader of text and viewer of images—with our experiment. Lyric arguments will arise from the work on their own terms, with each connoisseur. Outcomes will be expressive and individual (Eisner, 1985). For this reason, we resist providing interpretations of the paired narratives. Pinhole photographs, and poems, are always a bit wild.

## Looking In

Every mossy rock
with a story
to tell. Get down
here where you can
really see.

*Stacy Boe Miller*

* * *

Reciprocal movement
In the breeze
Listening for stories
Stored in this place

*Marcus Morse*

* * *

A calm before the storm
An oasis
A sliver of silence
        A ripple in the pond
A haven of rock and stone
        sheep and wool
        reflection blowing in the wind

*Joshua David Bennett*

Looking In

## Cotton Grass

Cotton friends, wave above tundra.
Stems pierce the same moss
I rest upon
sharing the damp—the warm breeze
on our cheeks.

*Bob Jickling*

* * *

This cotton forest,
ruffled by Norwegian wind,
keeps my eyes dancing.

Lee Beavington

* * *

Cotton grass seeds know two lives,
fertile darkness and sun-swept delight.

*Lee Beavington*

* * *

We bend ourselves
to the sun when we see
the sun. We eat
what the morning gives.
we point,
for you,
to where the wind is going.

*Stacy Boe Miller*

Cotton Grass

## Resting on Rocks

Nesting clouds
lyrical foraging
cloudberry jamming
common worlding

*Karen Malone*

* * *

Sheepbell clang tied
to chewing
lichen. Baaaa

*Bob Jickling*

* * *

I know
a mountain
where little,
white flags
grow. Wind
shakes their slender
bodies and asks,
*Are you ready?*

*Stacy Boe Miller*

Resting on Rocks

## Weeping Glacier

Every part of the river is both a beginning and an end.

*Lee Beavington*

* * *

Midglacier melts
Marianne's tears.

*Bob Jickling*

* * *

Glacial meltwater
rushing the past
past

*Estella Kuchta*

* * *

Somewhere a rock
raises its face
above water.

*Stacy Boe Miller*

* * *

Earth veins tap my heart
stream ceremony takes shape
body of the clouds

*Lee Beavington*

Weeping Glacier

## I've Seen a Ghost

I've seen a ghost.

*Erika Kazi*

* * *

I can't keep myself
from the glacier. Secret
faces of pale stones.

*Stacy Boe Miller*

* * *

Movement, flow
Frozen in time
Go

*Deb Matlock*

* * *

The rhythms of the earth
Dance in souls
Keeping heartbeats
Alive

*Deb Matlock*

I've Seen a Ghost

## Melting Glacier

The wind refusing to chant its sylvan hymn.

*Stacy Boe Miller*

* * *

Drawn to the edgework,
slippage,
friction
wind.
What stories
shape this place?

*Marcus Morse*

* * *

Here are my prayers.
Muddy feet of a goddess.
Sorry I'm so late.

*Stacy Boe Miller*

* * *

Crying ice
Creating emptiness
The End?

*Sean Blenkinsop*

Melting Glacier

## Marianne's Rock

Everything moves in the wind here—
petals, paths, people, intent.
Wind swirls the silt-point of balance
of thousand-tonne stones
left-alones waiting.
Stability so unsteady.

*Chris Beeman*

* * *

Among fields of boulders
I am free and light

*Estella Kuchta*

Marianne's Rock

## In Arne's Chair

Wrapped in fog . . .
I try to remember what was

*Estella Kuchta*

* * *

Gray eats everything I was going to say.

Stacy Boe Miller

* * *

In this chair
by the window one last time.
Check the fire, get the wood, be the story
written by this place
one last time.

*Bob Jickling*

In Arne's Chair

## Afterword

### *A Few Thoughts on Methodology*

We have organized this paper with an unorthodox sequence for two reasons. First, since the above work is primarily artistic, yet intersecting with philosophy, we feel that it should be able stand on its own. It should be appreciated as it is. So, this is a kind of "spoiler alert." The reader may want to stop now. In this era of contemporary exhaustion, characterized by what Rosi Braidotti describes as "theory fatigue" (2019), this could be a good end point. Why spoil a good thing? So, step out now if you like; we won't be offended.

If you're still reading, we can say that there are two reasons for including this Afterword. First, for those who similarly feel that, in these times, we cannot continue to rely on the same approaches to research—to continue to do the same things—we would like to provide a larger accounting of ourselves and our approach.

Second, we are also responding to Braidotti's (2019) related challenge. She optimistically claims that the quotidian exhaustion felt by so many academics is not a pathological state that needs to be cured; rather, she sees it as a transformative threshold that calls for less fatigue and more conceptual creativity. What we have attempted through the Wild Pedagogies gathering in Finse has been to assemble a group of willing people, grounded for a time in a particular place, with particular more-than-human collaborators, to experiment with the expectations of academia. In a community-building exercise, our companions engaged in the playful actions proposed by this project, and they transgressed conventional norms. So, in the spirit of cultivating ever-more-creative transgression, and some wilding of research, we provide a little more methodological background.

### *Lyric Philosophy*

For Jan Zwicky, philosophy is too narrowly categorized when thought of as just logico-linguistic analysis Thus, her lyric form of philosophy attempts to arrive at an understanding of experiences that affect us as beings with bodies and emotions. Thus, for her and for this project, it ceases to be useful to distinguish between art and philosophy (Zwicky, 2015).

Zwicky's artful approach to lyric composition is to carefully arrange elements of her experiences as side-by-side comparisons—or duons. In representational terms, this is generally presented as a *left-hand page* that consists of a philosophical aphorism, or fragments of text, and a *right-hand page* that may consist of quotations from other scholars, geometric proofs, or even pieces of sheet music. The creative tensions between these paired pages can then open up a space that invites the reader to perceive *resonances* with their own experiences and imagination—to gain a sense of something

more than might be individually expressed (Lee, 2002, 2010). Thus, readers are invited to realize an impression of some shared ontological experience unconditioned by language.

Understanding is the sudden and simultaneous realization that aspects of the represented experience resonate with similar experiences of the connoisseur. This constitutes what Zwicky calls a lyric argument that attempts to assist others to see what we have seen, felt, and experienced (2015). In research terms, validity is in this phenomenological resonance. And, we maintain that there is verisimilitude in resonance.

### *The Right-Hand Side—Pinhole Photographs*

Pinhole photography is more than a historical artefact. In a rapidly digitizing era, it offers another way of experiencing the world. It uses a simple camera with a small hole instead of a lens to allow light to reach photosensitive paper, and it employs a photographer who is, in varying degrees, present during the artistic process (see for example, Jickling, 2015; Morse et al., 2018). The process places sensuous demands on the imagination and, indeed, on a participant-artist's whole being. Pinhole photographers literally feel their way across the landscape—sensing movements in the vegetation and changing light. They must learn to see without staring through a viewfinder. And, this encourages ontological repositioning.

Without a viewfinder, lens, or light meter, a different kind of attention is required. Pinhole photography invites people to slow down, attend to, and listen to the place where they are present—physically, sensually, and emotionally.

### *The Left-Hand Side—Atoms of Delight*

Participants were invited write about the lived experience of being in a place while making images, thus tilting the experiment toward phenomenological interpretation, and an artistic connective-aesthetic first conceived by Suzi Gablik (1992). For Gablik, this meant renewing our connective being in the world by making art that would inhabit environmental and social practices and would be politically responsive. Thus, the aesthetics of the process are as important as the aesthetics of the products. In following this lead, we hope to evoke openings, opportunities—or even radical shifts—in ways of capturing written aspects of intimacy within a time and a  place.

Participants were, thus, encouraged to write with concise and evocative expression. In the foreword to Alec Finlay's collection of poems, *Atoms of Delight* (2000), a model for our approach, Kenneth White speaks of the tiny poems:

> They delight through their simplicity and the pure intensity of concision, and through openness, wit and humour. These different forms are not ultimately rhetorical devices, but utterances within the moment that can be apprehended and felt. The

> poems pivot. The one-word poems and haiku turn in a similar way, suggesting the mind dancing from one perception to another—recalling once again the origins of haiku in the single gesture of hand and brush over ink and paper, or, as Bachelard describes, "a flicker of the soul." (p. 25-26)

Similarly, Zwicky speaks about how our attention responds to particularities. This cotton grass, this glacier, this rock, this chair. She says we are pierced with presence: "The this strikes us like a shaft of light. A bolt of *thisness*." (In Jickling, 2015, p 152.)

While written responses in our project take different forms, they are all short, sometimes hastily written, but these little atoms attempt to catch a glimpse of the *raw* experience of a few moments in time and place—and their own *thisness*. They dance amongst perceptions. And they evoke feelings. Their concise forms strike us as perfect expressions for wild travellers, where cumbersome writing can burden an instant of insight or awakening.

## A Parting Thought

We claim there is something *wild* in the lyric arguments presented in this paper. Analytic evaluation of such lyric pairings can, according to Zwicky, frequently block understanding. To this she adds, "to begin to understand how our understanding can be limited by fear, by a will to mastery, by a need to control, is to begin the learning/unlearning that constitutes the practice of lyric philosophy" (2015, p. 18). For these reasons, we believe that Wild Pedagogies and lyric philosophy can open new terrain in environmental education research by offering educators and researchers alternative ways of thinking and being in the world.

## Acknowledgments

We acknowledge our partners, both in this paper and in the larger Wild Pedagogies gathering in Finse, Norway. We were 29 humans who gathered and built a community of like-minded souls with shared interests, common worries, and overlapping approaches to research. But, we were not alone; we had research collaborators in the place itself—the creeks, lakes, rocks and glaciers—human histories, the lemmings, the lichen, and the ancient vegetation that was revealed as the glaciers melted and then was eaten by spiders foraging at the edges of the ice. So, we thank these collaborators—human and more-than-human. All have contributed to this work. We also give extra thanks to the collaborating authors represented here, and thanks to everyone who drifted in and out of various photography mini-workshops. It is not possible to identify every one of them with accuracy. However, we will acknowledge the indefatigable efforts of Marianne Presthus Heggen to photograph an important rock—and to share *her*

Finse with us all. The first seven pairings each play collective homage to this place, and our vast collaboration.

The eighth pairing pays homage to a different collaboration: one between a place high on the flank of the nearby mountain, Hallingskarvet, Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss, and his cabin, Tvergastein. This collaboration bloomed for a lifetime—and endures. Many Wild Pedagogies participants know of Næss through his writings (for example, Næss, 1988). In such a knowing, we are limited to the logico-linguistic Næss, with an occasional splash of the poetic. At this mountain cabin, though, we could *feel* Arne Næss's presence and know him more. Knowing and feeling are, too often, carelessly separated. For many of us at Tvergastein, there was a healing of the trauma this separation creates. At this place we also learned how, in declining years, Arne Næss returned one last time to re-inhabit *his* place, with more feeling than memory—with the kind of knowing that can happen when person and place become one *Place*. We recognize this acknowledgement is becoming perilously close to the kind of analysis eschewed earlier in this paper. So, we finish by thanking Aage Jensen for bringing us to Tvergastein, and Per Ingvar Haukeland for sharing his stories of friendship with Arne Næss.

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# The Paradox of Wild Pedagogies: Loss and Hope Next to a Norwegian Glacier

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***Abstract***

*This paper, an experiment in human and more-than-human multi-vocality, derives from the contributing authors' experience of a Wild Pedagogies colloquium in Finse, Norway. Five creative responses to visiting the disappearing glacier, Midtdalsbreen, are offered. "Norway Grey" contrasts usual conceptions of drab grey with other colours that emerge from it upon closer examination. "We thought we needed" matches the imagined, wretched incompatibility of immediate human need with what a dying world can give. "Lonesome Wanderer," originally an audio file, tells the story of collegial and family glacier visits and poses questions about ethics and self-representation. In recounting an incident on the day of our visit, "Hope" explores the movement from sadness to trust within humans. "A Sense of the Sacred" weaves ecopsychology, emotion, and ancestral family together on a hike to Arne Næss's cabin.*

***Résumé***

*Le présent article, qui traite de la multivocalité humaine et extrahumaine, découle de l'expérience vécue par les auteurs lors d'un colloque sur les pédagogies de la nature tenu à Finse, en Norvège. On y propose cinq réponses créatives à la visite du glacier en fonte de Midtdalsbreen. Le « gris norvégien »* (Norway Grey) *contraste avec les conceptions usuelles de gris morne, et d'autres couleurs en émergent lorsqu'on l'observe de plus près. L'idée que « nous pensons toujours avoir besoin de quelque chose »* (We thought we needed) *véhicule l'incompatibilité, imaginée et destructrice, entre les besoins immédiats des humains et ce que peut leur fournir un monde qui se meurt. Le « Vagabond solitaire »* (Lonesome Wanderer)*, un fichier audio à l'origine, raconte l'histoire de visites du glacier en groupe et en famille, et pose des questions sur l'éthique et l'autoreprésentation. Récit d'un incident survenu le jour de notre visite, « Espoir » (Hope) explore le passage de la tristesse à la confiance chez les humains. Prenant comme cadre un périple vers la cabane d'Arne Næss, le « Sens du sacré »* (A Sense of the Sacred*) tisse ensemble écopsychologie, émotion et famille ancestrale.*

*Keywords:* wild pedagogies, glacier, environmental education, climate change, emotion, wild co-researcher, poetic inquiry, deep ecology

*Mots-clés* : pédagogies de la nature, glacier, éducation à l'environnement, changements climatiques, émotion, co-chercheur en pédagogies de la nature, recherche poétique, écologisme fondamental

## Introduction

This paper is an experiment in human and more-than-human multi-vocality. Better yet, it is an attempt at rhizomatic and entangled theorizing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)—an unusual assembling agentially cut by a Norwegian glacier. Best of all, it is an adventure in wild co-researching (Blenkinsop, 2018). It involves five humans and a glacier playing with language, rolling in place, listening carefully to the past, present, and future, and noting connections, gaps, limits, and possibilities. Our hope is to invite the reader into the discussion while at the same time allowing them to consider and create a space of their own version of hope.

The form this paper takes arises from our own creative processes as a group gathered in Finse, Norway during a fifth Wild Pedagogies northern gathering in the summer of 2019. The organizers tasked us to find a way to share our experiences of place, of each other, and of wild pedagogies with the larger environmental educator network. We realized immediately that this was beyond our ken. How does one gather the complexities, the characters, the encounters, the emotions, the particularities, the intensities of this experience into a single 6,000-word shared document? In response, we chose to spend time contemplating this challenge individually, as humans, in selected places—namely, either next to or near the Midtdalsbreen glacier, or while hiking to Tvergastein, Arne Næss's cabin situated above Ustaoset—and then reflecting and ruminating together on the results. Thus, in the paper below, we used two lenses as we wove the individual reflections together with some of our shared discussions. The first lens attempted to focus on the place and its myriad denizens as actively present, as co-researchers and vocal partners; the second lens attempted to aim attention at how our results do and don't map onto or connect with the theories of wild pedagogies, and their touchstones.

The view through the latter lens was clear, as may be seen later in this paper. To the former, it might be argued that what was viewed through the first lens, by humans raised in the cult of the modern West, can never make an equal partner of what is foreign, even antithetical, to this upbringing: the world itself. To this we can only respond, "Agreed." But to stop there is to kill our attempt before it has a chance to try. A radical human-place division is at least challenged when we attempt to engage with the world differently.

This paper attempted to be conscious of our position as humans in conversation with the more-than-human world; we had a sincere wish to be open to the unguided influence of the world, and the emergent possibilities facilitated by unstructured time spent on the land. Perhaps this paper takes one of many preliminary steps on the path to altering humankind's current inability to listen and hear. Taking the time to listen, as the contributors to this paper did during their time with a fading glacier, reveals a deeply emotive aspect of the more-than-human world that otherwise goes unnoticed by humans. Not only do human listeners experience excruciating pain, guilt, sorrow, and loss through

hearing the slow decay of the iced structure and the eroded landscape, but the landscape also offers a playful response to our bleak emotions. In our own experience in the north, a few snowflakes teased our devastation of witnessing a melting glacier by reminding us of the cyclical nature of life—an ebbing and flowing of things that cease to exist and things that are brought into being.

***Reflection #1:*** *by Sean*

***Norway Grey***

*It is morning and I am just coming into that liminal space before full wakefulness. Last night I slept well on top of a vibrant forest of dwarf arctic willow. It took some time to find a spot protected enough from the evening wind that I wouldn't spend my night on constant alert, worrying about a rising gale flattening me inside my delicate nylon cocoon.*

*I love sleeping immersed in the world, embraced by this landscape, and softly held aloft by these tiny trees. The weather has changed this morning. I heard waves begin to lap on the near shore of the lake just below me in the middle of the night and knew I would emerge into something different. The partial clouds and deep blues of yesterday have given way to myriad greys. In the East I can just see the yellow glow from the rising sun but that is being pushed away by the deep slate of a saturated sky. To the south the cloud base has dropped and I sense, with some trepidation, that we will soon be enveloped by this fog. Lighter than the sky above, this living wraith slides over the landscape and makes route finding a more conscious, careful, and—when the trail turns quickly or skips across a boulder field—difficult process. I am quieted by the prospect of a day in fog, by this place where I paradoxically sense myself as both isolated and encountered, lonely and exhilarated. I love and fear the prospect.*

*Below me small wisps of mist glide across the silver grey of the becalmed lake. I can see them reflected like skeins of floating wool in its liquid eye. I move quickly to relieve myself because I feel the creeping cold. The moisture of the place and a temperature that hovers not far above zero means I need to monitor myself carefully today—to note inputs and outputs and respond to needs as soon as possible. To lose track of oneself in weather like this is like losing that tiny line of cairns across the plateau. As I lower the tent, eat, and locate my travelling companions, I am drawn into dialogue with the landscape, again. This is a place of ice and snow, of water and rock and I have been told that this will be a boulder-strewn day. We will be wending our way around, over, and through tons of rock arranged across the alpine by forces that are larger than I can comprehend. Here too, I encounter the deep greys of granite and gneiss. I am chastened by how well they carry their age. For though my own head is greyed with age and, apparently, over-exposure to particulate pollution, I am but a blink of an eye in this geo-storied world.*

*An hour into our day the wind and rain arrive in full throat. Thus far, I have noticed the tendency for this place to squall and then calm, like a small child seeking*

*its own way and then becoming distracted by an intriguing toy. But today the tantrum has settled upon us and we must continue on until it cries itself to sleep. But in spite of metaphors of tantrum and crying, clichés about weather that my culture invariably uses when it isn't sunny and warm, or at least "climate controlled," I feel enlivened. If I continue to move I will stay warm and dry and the caress and spatter of rain and mist on my face and hair makes me feel loved and I want to sing.*

*Grey is the day's operating motif. Although, to be fair, I am drawn into the struggles and successes of the greens, browns, umbers, ochres, brilliant flashes of yellow and pink, purple and even blue. The rocks themselves glow from the neon green radiance of high alpine lichen, symbiosis in action that makes room for other life. And in pockets protected from the wind or next to the creek there are all kinds of flowering plants, and ferns, and grasses, creating lives and being themselves in whatever ways they can. All are soaked in the celestial lake but whereas the rain and mist "beads" upon or "soaks" into my clothing, it shimmers and sparkles on the vegetation and bubbles and gurgles in the burgeoning creeks. But back to the grey, this is not the monolithic homogeneous colour of the ceilings in my grade school classrooms but a subtle, nuanced, rainbow of grey. Each is dynamic, active, and bearing messages of further rain, of obscured cliff or hidden lake, of high wind or thinning cloud. I try to follow this deluge of information and feel my emotions move and flex, become fluid and blend into one another as things change through shades of light and dark and as the wind rises and falls, the fog lifts and descends, and the rain strengthens or dissipates. And it is to these emotional inflections, nuances in my own systems of weather and changes in temperature, that my attention turns.*

One of the images from this reflection that drew our attention was the idea of a "rainbow of grey." Usually grey is thought of as an inconsequential colour—one that we so often encounter as a homogeneous, boring backdrop to the more vibrant foreground. And yet, in this reflection, the grey is diverse, complex, and singularly important to better understanding what is happening all around the observer. Sean's comparison to classroom walls and ceilings, to the greys and lime greens of institutions everywhere, pushed us to think about how wild pedagogies seeks to challenge the desire to control, to normalize things, to create efficient structures and systems, to seek uniformity (Jickling et al., 2018). And this search includes not only uniformity of colour, but also uniformity of answer, of teacher (witness how school districts simply move teachers and principals through schools and classrooms as if they were completely interchangeable), of curricular content, of learner, etc. But this reflection of immersion in the natural world challenges that project.

The second discussion that arose from this reflection was about how the various shades of grey map onto the diversity of one's inner emotional landscape. Emotions, in this case, are not simply a question of sadness or loneliness but rather a complex, roiling mix. It is another push against the desire to homogenize the human state and even limit emotional diversity through squeezing the rainbow of grey into a single shade.

***Reflection #2:*** *by Chris*

***We thought we needed***

Of all that was, this was all that was left:
apart from ashes,
a little bundle of green, rush-like things
and hidden deep inside
something we couldn't see
something blue and grey-flecked
a little like the colour of a distant, dying glacier.
And you, trying to make a fire with the rushes.

We were hungry, you and I.
We needed food; we needed fire.

So much fire.
Now all that could be burned
had burned
and all that was left
– these little, rush-like things,
the only greening lives
in a greyed-out land –
would not.

But you kept trying
hands shivering.
A match caught some thin or drier edge
and for a moment there was smouldering.
And then fluttering.
A bird emerged.

I saw her first
drew her out.
Tiny feathers near her eyes
rose up like shields.
A child playing peek-a-boo
– but then again
a child blinded by fire –
head still shimmering with heat:
a perfect, melting glacier.

The little bird whimpered –
I have never heard a bird do this –
and I cried with her.

Blue bird of happiness
green earth of plenty
wounded by our need
yet more by our desire.

We were drawn into this poem by our shared histories and by the potentially troublesome—even apocalyptic—result of one-directional desire disguised by the rationalizing smoke of need. There is a recognition of human responsibility at both the micro level—one tiny bird—and the macro level. The poem drew us into discussion about the colonial and imperialistic part of the modern western relationship toward other-than-humans (and toward many humans as well).

Wild pedagogies posits two touchstones (Crex Crex Collective, 2018) that relate to these ideas: The first names the colonial relationship with the natural world (Blenkinsop et al., 2016) and challenges educators to become activists (in whatever form they decide), ones who seek to adjust their own language and practices, who seek out allies and support, and who are willing to critically examine and imaginatively re-create the systems within which they work; the second seeks to deepen a human relationship with the natural world, to do this with a sense of humility, to find ways that shift the human from the centre of every equation, and to hear the voices of the natural as equal, agential, and important parts of one's community, culture, and decision making. This move in and of itself might push us to reconsider those things that we desire, particularly when it becomes clear that those desires are not vital to our own well-being and, more importantly, are detrimental to the flourishing of others.

A dream inspired this poem. The dream had a deep sense of reality: that what we were doing—burning what we needed in the long term because we had to have fire in the moment—was such a characteristically human blunder. To live, we now had to do what would destroy the world even more. We were incapable of discerning what could happen to other creatures, and we were only able to know the damage we had caused after it had occurred. We recognized too-late that, in our need to survive, we had destroyed such beauty. With this recognition came the feelings of longing and of loss—the sense that our identity had been shifted by our carelessness. This was the carelessness not so much of overlooking the bird-glacier hidden in a handful of rush-Earths, but of not noticing the difference between what we actually needed at this final hour—heat—and what we had thought we needed for so much of our earlier history: the burning with which the poem begins.

***Reflection #3:*** *by Marianne*

**Lonesome Wanderer**

Link to audio file: https://www.wildethic.com/media [1]

Experiencing nature is multi-faceted and complicated. To convey how we experience nature is even more complicated. There are many languages, many experiences and feelings, and many ways to communicate them. When trying to describe my *experiences*—my feelings and meaning making in an encounter between nature around and within me—I can only convey them in my mother tongue, in the language of my heart. My personal contribution to this paper lies in the audio file, where not only the language but also the voice, the sounds, and the feelings are sought and then communicated through the language of my heart rather than the foreign language (English) of my strict scientific profession. A translated version of a transcription would, however, be something like this:

*On a sunny, beautiful, autumn day, we walked up towards the glacier in search of a good place to bring the others who attended the workshop. We were going to Midtdalsbreen, a glacier that very clearly melts. I was well prepared. Having read up on the field I knew that this arm melts considerably. And that I had lots of exciting things to talk about, if we just got up there.*

*I've been on the glacier here many times, but not so often in recent years: it's not as much fun anymore. The glacier is so much smaller. It's just sad.*

*We set off, emerged from an unusual angle, and crossed over a ridge. I thought: "we will be there soon." But where I believed we were approaching the glacier, there was another mile left. First, beautiful scenery with cotton grass rolling in the wind. Moss in all shades of green, some grey, and some red. And then everything turned grey: grey stones and grey rock, a little grey moss in the beginning, then moor, silt, gravel, sludge. Large amounts of muddied melt water.*

*As we went through the lunar landscape, it became clear in all of its horror: There is no hope. Nature is changing too much. It is not a question of whether we can reverse the climatic changes, neither if we can stop them. There is no hope. I was not afraid for my great-grandchildren, not even for my grandchildren. It was clear: these changes are now, and they will be huge in the time of my children. Then, the tears came.*

*How can you bring strangers to visit a dying friend?*

*We found a great place to walk up to the glacier. We even found a safe piece of the glacier we could stand and walk on. But could I bring a group of people I didn't really know up here? Would they, who have never stood at the foot of the glacier and seen it rise high above Jøkulen (because it no longer does), those who have never played in its cracks, who have never swung down its snow-covered arms and tumbled, halfway in a Telemark turn: could they understand? Was it possible for them to understand? That this flat, sad, grey mass had once been a beautiful, rugged, majestic glacier, which automatically fostered respect? And without that understanding, what would they be left with? Did these academics, these poets, these great persons, but strangers, really deserve to join us on the death bed?*

*Of course, we went up together. The front had changed dramatically in the two days that had passed. But some of the impression remained. I tried to describe how the glacier had been before and how it had changed, and how it changed me when I was there two days earlier. Then we stood there. For some of us, our tears dripped in drops, while the glacier melted in cascades of melt water.*

*Visiting the glacier made an impression on my companions. I'm glad I brought them, because it was important. Maybe it can help us to manage to turn back time. In time for some, if not for the glacier.*

*A few weeks later I did what I really wanted. But not without torment. I took my family to Midtdalsbreen. Would I scare the kids? It wasn't what I wanted to do, to scare, yet I wasn't sure of my purpose. Maybe to let my kids greet my dying friend before it's too late? Most of all it was about letting my children play with the glacier. To smell, feel and listen. To share the good experiences that set themselves in the spinal cord. To feel what a glacier is and can be.*

*We saw the magic. We let the weekend be filled with the experiences that emerged. We played, we took pictures, we listened to the sounds, felt the cold and the heat, and we found great stones. We had a splendid family weekend in a tent, but the seriousness was there with us too. My son, who has given up his old dream of becoming a glaciologist, may have said it best: "Mom, there will be no glaciers left when I grow up."[2] Now he is seventeen. He does not know what to become instead of a glaciologist. I hope and believe he will be among all those contributing to change.*

We were drawn into the intimacy of this reflection, the depth of the relation, the desire to represent the glacier, the place, as holistically as possible. But we were also drawn into Marianne's profound sense of not wanting the glacier to be ignored, misunderstood, slipped back into a cultural narrative of inert rock and ice. The glacier is an animated being, and its death is one that is significant and painful, not only for the glacier itself but also for those who are in relationship with it. The question in the reflection is whether strangers will recognize and honour the solemnity of death and the end of this relationship. For us, as we explored the feelings so intimately shared in this reflection, we heard reverberations of those "sensitive" students who are often told not to feel what they feel with regard to trees being cut, ants being squashed (Blenkinsop et al., 2018), or frogs being dissected. We also wondered at the difference between the sight-seer and the witness, and we heard echoes of Indigenous educator Leanne Simpson's (2017) point about coming to the natural world with the right intentions—with an orientation of respect, and even good manners.

What does it mean to be asked to stand with a dying elder? To be present when their immediate family and community begins the process of saying goodbye? These questions of life and death are big, but wild pedagogies (Jickling et al., 2018) calls on us to support our students as they explore these questions, as they build relationships with an animate, living, teaching, speaking world and as they, in building these, become exposed to death and the pain of destruction.

There are important lessons to be learned from the literature on solidarity and allyship but also close examination of our own moral responsibility when it comes to exposing others to the pain that comes along with the joy of being in deep, intimate relations with natural beings and places.

***Reflection #4:*** *by Erika*

***Hope***

Rolling landscape,
decorated with hunched over bodies
of academics (or perhaps children?)
Investigating leaves in the small forests of moss,
the maps beneath our feet.
And sharing stories
of ancient lines in rocks.

Roosting above:
a frozen giant,
disappearing before us.
Our tears melt,
feeding the cloud berries.

The small moments of sunlit leaves
grinning green.
The birds dance around us
as if engaged in some belly-full
game of life I could only
wish to understand.

Yet somehow, the burden of
destruction weighs on me
in this open afternoon:

Oh, to be human
in a world
that desecrates
those who are not!

In spite of the gloom, I tuck
myself beneath the glacier
to discover the
illuminating blue.

Flinching when
rocks fell,
my giggles echo
through the cavern.

Remaining
knelt over,
smiling.
Amid chaos.

Drawn as we were to the paradoxical nature of hope and sadness, of life and death, of child and adult, this reflection led us to thinking about responsibility and engagement. Wild pedagogies ask adults to consider developing a practice (Jickling et al., 2018, pp. 91-97) of building and enhancing our relationships with the natural world, and it is maybe to children and "the birds … engaged in a belly-full game …" that we might look for advice. Children might help us find ways to bring the joy of discovery, the wonder of play, and the fullness of attention to bear on our growing practice. They might guide us in encountering nature without the weight of a culture focused on separation.

Wild pedagogies also remind us to be critical (Blenkinsop & Ford, 2018), to recognize not only that there is sadness for humans because of our seemingly enforced alienation from more-than-human others, but also that we are responsible, in our actions and in our quiet acquiescence to our cultures and institutions, for the violence wrought on that which is greater than us. But this knowledge cannot be allowed to incapacitate us: for us to stop responding, witnessing, and resisting because of this knowledge is to allow the destruction to continue and to place oneself back in the centre. For what are one's own struggles in the face of both loss and culpability when the victimization of the natural world is continuing? Especially when there is so much joy, beauty, laughter, and paradox happening amidst the rubble, in the protected spaces within the storm, in the wild lives amongst the controlling uniformity of human expanse, in the small moments of mystical hope.

***Reflection #5:*** *by Lee*

***A Sense of the Sacred: Deep Ecology and Emotion***

*The fog envelops me, as though the weight of the sky has settled on the earth. Thick cloud parts to unveil Arne Næss's cabin, a human offering on this alpine plateau. Tvergastein, his "benevolent, protecting father," (Næss, 2008, p. 53), both cabin and mountain, the birthplace of deep ecology. This human-built sanctuary disrupts the river-riven wilderness, yet in Næss's mind nature and culture blurred. Humans, rather than being a species apart, were woven into the web of life.*

*Inside, we hear the story of Naess's final visit to the cabin. Wheelchair bound, this proved an arduous journey for the 96-year-old. He settled one last time next to*

*his large window—famous for its spectacular view of the Norwegian landscape, and views into new philosophies—and then Næss did something that astounded them all. He stood up.*

*Naess wanted to check on the wood stove.*

*Something about the place shook him alive. His idle muscles and nearly centenarian physiology, previously wasting away in a hospital bed, felt reanimated. Perhaps, too, he was reminded of his responsibility for this place. As Naess (2008) wrote, "What does a gallon of boiling water mean in the cities? Nothing. At Tvergastein, it is a formidable luxury, enough to satisfy a host of essential services, a gift of nature of the most astonishing character" (p. 60). To elicit such gifts of nature, one needs to work for them. To offer what we can, and be grateful for what we are given, and live "in solidarity with, and respect for" (p. 54) this place, is to enter into a reciprocal relationship with the other-than-human.*

*Our storyteller, Per Ingvar Haukeland, when explaining Næss's last Tvergastein visit, breaks into tears. He cannot hide, nor does he want to, his profound feeling of wonder and loss. Exposed on the alpine landscape, the elements reveal something raw. You cannot hide from the mountain, from the colour of the smallest flower, from the forms of every cloud.*

*How can the outdoors facilitate heightened emotional states? Perhaps movement provokes body memory. Perhaps the wind and rain tug at the layers beneath the surface, teasing out dormant feelings. Or the breeze-blown oxygen, birthed from leaf and seaweed, allow us to breathe deeper, to expand our felt experience and bring clarity to mind and heart.*

*Our time at the cabin feels short. The thirty adventurous academics trek single file down the slope like the sheep that graze on this mountain's flank. Mist swallows the cabin. As one ethereal figure fades, through my fog of emotion another ghostly figure appears. My grandma.*

*In my Norway journal, I wrote about Grandma Norma appearing at Tvergastein: "Before she arrived, there was first the river, and nature, and song and fog." These were gifts bestowed by my grandma, who died 120 days prior to my landing in Oslo. This quartet of prerequisites, once fulfilled, permitted her arrival.*

*The first two prerequisites for arrival, river and nature, I accomplish by following the web of rivers funneling toward Finse and discovering the verdant moss and sapphire glaciers that call water family. An hour earlier, I sang* Morning Has Broken *in honour of my two departed aunts, Betty and Chrissie. I sang as their ashes flowed in the currents not far beneath Næss's cabin. Fog, the final requirement, now hangs about me in a cloak of memory.*

*My paternal grandma, born in 1927 as Norma Dora Herbert, grew up on a farm near Carrot River, Saskatchewan. Not the city, the* actual *river. As a child, she and her brothers once walked into a wall of rain. They ran in and out of this rain, over and over, delighted to be in a downpour one moment, and rainless the next. It had never occurred to her that rain has a beginning and an end. Did she also realize that life has an edge?*

*In her youth, Norma spent endless days outside, chasing piglets, yelping back at coyotes, and skating the frozen river. One day, on her way to school with her younger sister, she stumbled across a white wolf. The wolf stared them down, unblinking, canny eyes both thoughtful and predatory. Norma gripped her sister's hand, crossed the road, and walked on. She never forgot that encounter, relayed to me more than eighty years later. In fact, of the dozens of stories she told me, nearly all took place outside. And nearly all were tightly bound to a happy emotion.*

*These memories fall upon me now like sunlight on the sea. As a child, Grandma saw the world infused with a wondrous light that she thought everyone could see. As a matriarch, she brought our family connection and joy. She and I both experienced poignant—albeit divergent—moments in fog. But why, in Norway, is her presence so strong?*

*At Tvergastein, the vista is wide. Valleys, lakes, and mountains offer the eyes a long gaze. There is both a sense of geographical awe and a leafless vulnerability. Arne Næss lost his father when he was young. He came here, to this paternal mountain, to find what he so desperately sought: a "symbol of everything good that was lacking in the world and in myself" (Naess, 2008, p. 53). Tvergastein gave him clarity of thought, philosophical meditation, and a sense of being held by something larger than himself.*

*Per Ingvar, channeling Naess and his ecosophy, spoke to "renew[ing] a sense of the sacred" (personal communication, August 2019). I first stumbled upon deep ecology in an environmental ethics class during my undergrad at UBC in Vancouver. After four years of scientific study, from chromatography to carving up cats, the idea that all life could be held as sacred rang clear as a songbird at daybreak. After Naess grew empathy for the lab rats he worked with early in his career, he stopped doing experiments with caged animals.*

*The recorded benefits of nature experience are many: improved mental, physical, and emotional well-being. Epinephrine and other stress hormones stay nestled in their glands, while oxytocin—the calm, loving hormone—flows into blood's current. Being in nature can reduce feelings of anger and fear. Perhaps, too, this leads to an increased sensitivity toward other feelings, those often masked by anxiety. Kathleen Dean Moore (1995), in her book* Riverwalking, *speaks of feeling emotion "seeping into cracks between boulders" (p. 154). Held in the gentle yet rough-skinned hands of nature, a window opens toward vulnerability.*

*On the way down Tvergastein, our path winds with a mountain stream. I lose the trail for this river road, paved with mossy stones and glassy current.*

*Whether by choice or circumstance, my ancestral family is stitched to rivers. Grandma spent countless hours exploring Carrot River, and later in life lived on a houseboat on the Fraser. On my mother's side, her grandparents emigrated to Canada to escape a domineering Catholic family. They left the affluent inheritance of vineyards and stables to arrive in worthless scrubland near Cowley, Alberta. I recently found my great-grandfather's 1906 signature on his sworn statement for application of purchase. The address? Southwest of ¼, section 32, township 7,*

*range 1 North of the 5th meridian. This birthplace of my maternal grandmother is hugged on the north and east sides by a massive tributary, half a kilometre at its widest, minutes before it joins Oldman River, which links the Rocky Mountains to Hudson Bay. In southwestern Canada, my Dad and I have walked many mountain streams, scurrying up these meandering lotic paths through coastal rainforest. Lest there be any doubt, my son's middle name is River.*

*Emotion can be fluid as a river: tranquil, raging, and reflective, all in one day. As Moore (1995) writes, "Water is an agent of distortion and change, forcing a person to see things in new ways. Each turn of the river opens out a new landscape … a sense that the important facts are hidden from view" (p. 145). Water moves in, between, over, under and through. Like my grandmother, water holds it all together. Rain, glacier, stream, lake, falls. This network trickles down life from ice to ocean. I want to follow these currents to find the currents they support. To walk these patterns of Earth-veins coddled by moss. Like our bodies, the moss holds onto water.*

*Sitting riverside, I'm inspired to scrawl down a few poetic words. The next day, I return to the river to try and find the rest of my poem. Fragments of phrases and metaphors leap to mind. I try to capture these on the page, but the rain is insistent that I put my pen away. With my smudged ink pages stowed in my pack, I sit with the current. I am called to move closer. From the wet grey riverbank, eddies start to curl into my mind. The sound of these glacial tears flooding past is constant yet never the same. Perhaps my grandma has brought this rain, to awaken an ancient memory.*

*Time passes. My body opens. A stillness emerges in the whitewater rapids. Questions pour forth. I hear Arne Naess (2008) ask, "What would the place require of me?" (p. 55).*

***River Walker***

I will walk
this river
until I finish
this poem

such incessant noise
but beneath your current
a bed of stillness
meditative babbling
submerges my animal murmurings

River, what do you carry away?

*Listen*

each moss stone is a page
I riffle through volume after volume
fluent with your furrows
this currency of cloud
quivered by sky
swallows me whole

*Listen*

your Earth vein taps my heart
my blood gasps for breath
a flood of release
like an iceberg calving
into melted memorial

River, can you bear my grief?

glacial memories pool in my gut
tears the mountain cannot hold
is this guilt?
humans love to damn things

*Listen*
*There is more*

I strain every sense
stretch the cilia of my eustachian
into your torrential artery
yet all I hear
is the steady beat of my heart

*thu-thump thu-thump thu-thump*

this is why I follow you, River
to heed my voice within
a deep well of silence
going dry

*Listen to what you already know*

In this final reflection, we come full circle into greys and fogs. And yet, we spiral off as well, reminded that time is not so linear as we have come

to expect and that knowledge is not so easily compartmentalized or readily transferred. Poetry and prose written upon us by the natural world changes the metaphors and slides the human from the centre and the top into community. To change the nature–culture divide is to change the metaphors, the language, the positioning of *Homo sapiens*, and—as wild pedagogies suggests—the culture (Jickling et al., 2018).

Lee's reflection has drawn us into conversations about the importance of time spent immersed in the outdoors, how it appears in so many of our key moments even if we pretend not to notice. And how the affordances it provides, especially in the company of an Elder, of spirit or the more fleshy kind of animate beings, are still somehow more engaging, imaginatively expanding, than the best nursery school. We are brought up short by how important it is for us, as educators, to role model our relationships and to share our love(s) for the natural world with our students. More than anything, such sensorial, immersive, emotional nature experiences will resound for our students. In fact, it may even be the radical act of confessing one's love for the natural world—in a place, a school, where it is rarely even recognized—that might be the crack, or gap in the pavement, where wild pedagogies can find fertile ground.

## Conclusion

As we prepared to leave Finse, there was a smattering of snow at the train station—the first of the season. And while we waited, we could see it was snowing directly on the dying glacier. A kind of hope, a kind of renewal, touched us all. The overall direction the glacier is going may be known, but the natural systems of renewal were, for the moment, countervailing. Just as the writing of this paper can only happen through the lens of the human, the photograph below shows tourist bicycles foregrounding the glacier. Yet, the *subject* of the photograph is the almost miraculous, gentle, cool renewing of the glacier, despite the necessary veil of the human-lived-world.

There is something about these natural processes and forms of life that contest and act against our human understanding of the world and our role(s) therein. Once a likely pattern is known in the mind, what we observe tends to be confirming. If we are not careful, fatalism, rather than grief, can take over. Climate change scenarios are well-predicted, but as yet have not all come about, and most people seem unable to quantify what an agential and engaged planet might do in response. We know the likelihood of our current direction, but this need not be debilitating.

Wild pedagogies is about acting. Acting in consort with, in response to, and in respect for the myriad local beings that surround us always. Acting works in partnership with others who seek justice at the ecological, the social, the political, and all other levels. Acting recognizes our sadnesses, our privileges, our responsibilities, our meagre hope. And the act of co-teaching is something we

Figure 1. *The View from the Train Station in Finse, Norway*

can do. Wild pedagogies is not the answer but, like this paper, it is a challenge to act in response to crises we face; it is an active/activist response, a gathering of critical educational ideas, and a modicum of hope. The touchstones of wild pedagogies are built upon these premises, and they are built upon places of departure and return (Wild Pedagogies, 2019).

We felt a kind of delight and surprise when we saw the snow. The snow on Midtdalsbreen said to us, perhaps we may be lucky enough to be just a little bit wrong. Complex natural systems may find ways of acting against not just human activity but also the human mind's pattern-making systems, which can be very clear and useful, but also depressingly unrelenting and deterministic.

If there is anything to be learned from human-world knowing, as this paper purports, it is that we are in the presence of a dynamic other. In concert with this active other, we must act. If we become overwhelmed by tragedy, then our capacity to act is thus reduced. Like the complex tapestry of our emotions, the natural world presents itself in an ironic symphony of satire and grief. Just like the glimpse of sunlight or a genuine smile, the snow reminded us that along with the tragedy of a lost glacier is also the potential for one re-birthed.

## Notes

1 The audio file starts with the melancholic song of the Golden plover (Heilo), a local bird Norwegians call the "lonesome wanderer of the mountains." This song accompanied us in our stay at Finse.

2 Oliver Presthus Heggen, personal communication, September 2019.

## Notes on Contributors

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**Marianne Presthus Heggen** is a professor in the faculty of education and sports at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Bergen, Norway. Her background is in ecology and climate related research. She teaches early childhood teacher education, on such topics as natural sciences, outdoor learning, and environmental education. Her research foci are on education for sustainability and environmental education in early childhood, with a particular emphasis on children's reflections and contributions. She is currently engaged with the project, "Being and Becoming Eco-Citizens" at KINDknow – Kindergarten Knowledge Centre for Systemic Research on Diversity and Sustainable Futures. She prioritizes children in her research.

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# The Place of Ruin Within Wild Pedagogies

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***Abstract***

*This project uses critical place inquiry (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) to examine the Hanford Site to demonstrate the potential in wild pedagogies to engage not just immaculate and inspiring wildness places but also sites of ruin. Attending to places of ruin can illuminate the ways that the social, historical, and political are intimately intertwined with the ecological. Considering places of ruin, such as Hanford, as part of wild pedagogies and curriculum opens new and necessary ways for students to learn from nature (as co-teacher). Such an approach facilitates the critical examination of our current and past human relationships with nature, the land, the water, and the place itself and has the potential to foster new types of connection, ways of nurturing, and accountability in the world.*

***Résumé***

*lieux (Tuck et McKenzie, 2015) pour observer le site Hanford afin de montrer en quoi les pédagogies de la nature permettent d'entrer en relation non seulement avec les lieux sauvages immaculés et inspirants, mais aussi avec ceux qui tombent en ruine. Leur visite aide en effet à comprendre les l'interrelation étroite entre l'écologie et les aspects sociaux, historiques et politiques. L'intégration des lieux en ruine, comme Hanford, aux programmes et aux pédagogies de la nature ouvre aux élèves de nouvelles et nécessaires possibilités d'apprendre du monde naturel (comme co-enseignant). Ce type d'approche facilite l'examen critique des relations passées et présentes des humaines avec la nature, le territoire, l'eau et les lieux en tant que tels, et encourage l'émergence de nouveaux types de relations, de manières différentes de prendre soin des choses, et d'un sentiment de responsabilité envers le monde.*

*Keywords:* ruin, Hanford Nuclear Site, imperialism, settler colonialism, place

*Mots-clés* : ruines, site nucléaire Hanford, impérialisme, colonialisme, lieu

## The Place of Ruin within Wild Pedagogies

In November of 2019, work at the 324 Building of the Hanford Nuclear Site was halted when low-level contamination was discovered on the skin of an employee working there. Building 324 is located about one mile (approx. 0.6 kilometres) from Richland, Washington and about 300 yards (approx. 275 metres) from the Columbia River. It sits atop highly contaminated radioactive soil that resulted from a spill discovered in 2010. Even though the soil beneath the building is "so radioactive that it would be lethal within two minutes of contact" (Cary,

2017), this was the eighth worker exposure in 2019 alone (Cary, 2019). These terrifying moments at the Hanford Site, and the many others that have occurred there since its inception, present a constant reminder of the ways in which Hanford, as the United States' most contaminated nuclear site, causes ongoing and widespread ecological destruction (Brown, 2014).

Wild pedagogies "re-examine relationships with places, landscapes, nature, more-than-human beings, and the wild" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 2) in an effort to cultivate new ways of understanding, relating to, and engaging with the world. This pedagogical approach emerges from a critique of human-centric constructions of the world, with wild pedagogies operating from an understanding of the land, more-than-humans, and places as co-teachers/co-researchers (Jickling et al., 2018, pp. 7–11). Hanford and other places of ecological disaster, which I am calling "places of ruin," may not seem like obvious sites for wild pedagogies, which often seek out less contaminated, confined, and controlled spaces of nature. In this project, I use critical place inquiry methodology (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) to examine sites of ruin in general, and Hanford specifically, as "wildness" (Jickling et al., 2018, pp. 43–44).

Approaching place through a critical place inquiry methodology allows scholars to take seriously the multiple dimensions of place by enabling an examination of "not only the physical and spatial aspects of place in relation to the social, but also more deeply with how places and our orientations to them are informed by, and determinants of, history, empire, and culture" (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 1). Ultimately, this article asks educators and scholars of wild pedagogies to consider how including places of ruin as "wildness" (Jickling et al., 2018, pp. 24-29) within wild pedagogies might offer additional ways of connecting with and learning from nature.

In this conceptual project, I use critical place inquiry methods to examine Hanford as a case study, in order to demonstrate the potential of including ruin within wild pedagogies. I understand ruin not as a fixed and static state, nor as a means to signify a place as being permanently destroyed. Instead, I draw on Tongson's (2011) notion of queer space and time in order to consider how ruin encompasses the moments when the failures and excesses of empire-building are visible—when a place has no future. This understanding of ruin opens up new possibilities for understanding human-caused environmental changes as being central to ideologies of imperialism and colonization rather than as being positioned upon "purity politics" (Shotwell, 2016).

While I explicitly examine the Hanford Site as a particular place of ruin, there are many such spaces that have been central to empire-building and are now the empire's leftover excesses that could be taken up within wild pedagogies. In this article, I suggest that attending to spaces of ruin has the potential to support the aims of wild pedagogies and to offer learners new routes of connection to both the more-than-human and place. Places of ruin such as Hanford illuminate how the social, historical, and political are intimately intertwined with the ecological. Considering them as part of wild pedagogies and curriculum opens up additional

and necessary ways for students to learn from nature (as co-teacher) and to critically examine our current and past relationships with the land, the water, the more-than-human beings, and the place itself (all of which I take as part of what we call "nature"), with the intent of fostering new types of connection, care, and accountability.

## Wild Pedagogies (Re)defining Wildness and Wilderness

Wild pedagogues have reignited a conversation about "wilderness" and "wildness." Within this dialogue, they call for both a material and conceptual understanding of nature that does not reduce wilderness to human-centred social creations but instead recognizes the material particularities of wildness and wilderness places. Wild pedagogy scholars describe wilderness as "self-willed land" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 40), where the land "and the more-than-human have freedoms and abilities to live and dwell on their own terms … where there is the freedom to flourish" (Jickling et al., 2018, pp. 26–27). In this rethinking of wilderness, wild pedagogies scholars have carefully reimagined and described both wildness and wilderness, delicately navigating between the problematic notions of wilderness as pristine and untouched on the one hand and as socially constructed and everywhere on the other.

Within wild pedagogies, the 'freedom' of a place is understood as *not an absence of human presence*, but rather as premised upon *a particular type of relationship between places and humans* that recognizes the existing relationship between the two and a responsibility toward each other. Wild pedagogies scholars recognize that all places have been impacted by and are to some extent controlled by humans. Thus, this state of being *free*, which characterizes wilderness, is dependent upon a particular type of control — "healthful control" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 41) — that cultivates the "freedom to flourish" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 47) within a place. Wild pedagogies scholars distinguish between "healthful controls" and "destructive controls" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 41) with healthful control as human recognition of and responsibility to the place–human interrelationship. These conditions for wilderness are not just effects of humans. Rather, there is also an attention to the *agency* of place, that is, place as a "self-willed" being (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 26).

As wild pedagogies scholars (re)think the concept of wilderness, refuting the notions that it is either pristine and untouched or ubiquitous, they highlight the existence of a third state: "wildness" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 24). Wild pedagogues build on the work of William Cronon, who links wildness to wonder:

> The striking power of the wild is that wonder in the face of it requires no act of will, but forces itself upon us—as an expression of the nonhuman world experienced through the lens of our cultural history—as proof that ours is not the only presence in the universe. (Cronon as cited in Jickling et al., 2018, p. 35)

Both wild pedagogies scholars and Cronon refute that the idea that wilderness is only located in pristine landscapes; instead, the wildness that exists in wild pedagogies includes "woodlots, parks, school grounds, and vacant lots" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 43), each of which represents wilderness but at a different scale. Like wilderness, wildness is a concept that conveys a state of being "uncontrolled — even free," (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 20) but is differentiated from wilderness in that the latter is "a continuum—with more or less degrees of wildness" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 43). Thus, within wild pedagogies, wildness is a foundation of wilderness and ultimately operates as a way of quantifying it. Both wildness and wilderness as concepts are characterized as being free or having the freedom to flourish (Jickling et al., 2018). Yet, wilderness necessitates a particular type of human-nature relationship premised upon healthful controls that results in "a more intricate web of ecological relationships" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 43) than is found within wildness alone. This suggests that the distinction between wildness and wilderness is the type of human-nature relationship and the degree of wildness present.

Building on the understanding of wildness and wilderness outlined above, wild pedagogies scholars avoid reinscribing wilderness as places devoid of human presence or impact; instead, they rework notions of wilderness around degrees of human control and freedom. However, this conceptual framework does not always retain its rejection of the altered/untouched binary when it is applied to actual places.

### *Illuminating the Existing Focus on the Pristine*

Wild pedagogies scholarship has been cautious about the notion of "pristine" being a defining quality of wildness or wilderness. Yet wild pedagogues inadvertently continue to seek out places that are *seemingly* or *almost* pristine and untouched as ideal wildernesses. Wild pedagogues' argument for a recuperation of wilderness as not merely social construction depends upon there being an unquestionable, perceivable, and real material significance within wilderness (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 25-29). The argument is likewise contingent on the notion that wildness operates on a continuum, with *more* wildness adding up to wilderness, as "wild places are not all equivalent" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 43). To quantify wilderness is to defend it against becoming an empty signifier; however, this often results in wild pedagogues seeking out wild places, as sites for learning from and with nature, that reflect wilderness. This is evident in the ways that wild pedagogies differentiate wildness from wilderness, by stating that "wild pedagogy must be clear about when, where, and what wildness we seek to nurture. Urban parks and trees in our gardens can be wondrous, but they are themselves colonized sites" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 44). This distinction that wildness, while wonderous, is colonized and therefore a less desirable site of connection, contains the implication that wilderness is *not* colonized and therefore the ideal within the wild pedagogies approach.

Part of the work of wild pedagogies has been to rethink the concept of wilderness and "…its relationship with the world … as [concepts] live, shift, and vary between interpreters and their places of arising" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 25). Despite efforts by wild pedagogues to (re)define wildness and wilderness as open and expansive, there is clearly a particular form of *nature* that underpins the reconstruction of these concepts and is positioned as the ideal type of nature for connection within wild pedagogies. This is a nature that is not pure and pristine but is nevertheless as close to it as possible. This is a nature that is not untouched by humans, but the human impacts are still minimal and "healthful" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 41). This is a nature that looks like lush national forests and parks, remote expanses of designated and protected spaces, and serene shorelines of scenic rivers, all of which are characterized as wilderness. This is the nature of parks, gardens, and schoolyards that mark wildness (as fragmented representations of wilderness). The nature that comprises wildness and wilderness within wild pedagogies is one that is not (yet) found in places of ruin. Thus, this article considers where we might locate ruin within existing wild pedagogies frameworks as a site of wildness. Shifting the focus within wild pedagogies from wilderness spaces as *seemingly* "pristine" and "uncolonized," I aim attention at places of ruin. This focus contributes a new approach to wild pedagogies that acknowledges the omnipresence and agency of nature, even in the toxic, disrupted, and decimated spaces of ruin.

### *Locating Ruin as Wildness within Wild Pedagogies*

I argue that wildness, as described within wild pedagogies as a place of wonder, is a concept that not only captures beautiful and pristine places but should also include ruin. Like wonder, ruin is a place that often "forces itself upon us," a place where the more-than-human and materiality of the place often *refuse to remain contained and controlled* by humans, thereby illuminating that "…ours is not the only presence in the universe" (Cronon as cited in Jickling et al., 2018, p. 35). Thus, I argue below that ruin, too, is a place of wonder and should be considered a site of wildness.

Considering ruin as wildness offers wild pedagogies the opportunity to embrace the realities of the Anthropocene. Such a consideration rejects wild pedagogues' tendency to apply their thinking and pedagogical approaches predominantly to "wilderness" spaces—that is, spaces that appear to be *less* managed and *less* touched by humans. Embracing the places of ruin for what they are, and refusing to consider them strictly as either the desired state of nature or some romanticized apocalyptic adventure (akin to dark tourism), permits us to cultivate a concern for and investment in these places, and ultimately beckons us to be accountable for our impact on nature. Attending to ruin allows us to acknowledge the inherent value of all nature, even that which is currently characterized by "destructive control" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 41).

Focusing on ruin within wild pedagogies has the potential to complement existing approaches that have been centred on more "pristine" wildness and wilderness natural spaces by illuminating an alternative—ruin—and thus revealing the human technologies and histories that have so dramatically influenced these spaces. By gaining insight into ruin and wilderness together, we can illuminate some of the ways in which past human actions, values, and relationships toward the land, water, and more-than-human world can cultivate ruin or wilderness, and ultimately this insight can foster new ways of being in all spaces.

By aiming attention at ruin, wild pedagogues can build upon work done by critical environmental education scholars who have critiqued the optimism of many environmental educators, which they argue has done little to curb consumption and production practices (McGregor, 2013). Critical environmental education scholars have called attention to how such hope-filled approaches to education are dependent upon the certainty of a future *for humans,* and thus hinge on an anthropocentric approach to issues related to the environment and ecosystems. In an effort to push back against these anthropocentric and often naive approaches, Selby (2010, 2015) and Wals (2010) describe how humans who have failed to grapple with the realities of catastrophic ecological destruction and loss need to embrace the "uncertain" as a means to coming to terms with the dire state of the planet and as the only way to help people "reach tipping points wherein their thinking is pushed over the edge to make sure their mind is unfrozen" (McGregor, 2013, p. 3566).

The research that calls for humans to face the reality of the Anthropocene parallels the recent emergence of "eco-grief" (Willox, 2012, p. 138) as a concept that advocates for the embrace of environmentally-based grief that comes from witnessing, experiencing, or anticipating the loss of more-than-human bodies and places. Eco-grief scholarship acknowledges the realities of our current ecological and climate crisis and calls upon the public to confront the realities and mourn the resulting losses. In this context, grief and mourning are not acts of despair, but rather are an embodied, emotional, and psychological experience of loss that seeks to find "hope in the responses ecological grief is likely to invoke" (Ellis & Cunsolo, 2018, p. 3).

This paper expands upon the invitation to embrace "the uncertain" and the grief that is brought on by changes to and loss of landscapes, ecosystems, species, and places. It calls on environmental educators to turn toward places of ruin, where there are unmistakable signs of doom, disaster, and catastrophe. Turning toward places of ruin requires that we, as humans, reckon with the destruction that we have caused, which has been disproportionately enacted by particular populations, in the interest of white supremacy, settler colonialism, capitalism, anti-Blackness, and heteropatriarchy. By attending to places of ruin as co-constituted with the social, the more-than-human, the ecosystems, and the materiality of land/water, humans might be able to hold themselves accountable

for their acts of destruction and strive to change. To do so, we must examine places of ruin, rather than only the places of beauty and abundance.

## The Hanford Site as a Place of Ruin: A Case Study

Shining a spotlight on human-created places of ruin illuminates how war, empire, and imperialism are intimately linked to ecological destruction and short-sighted technological inventions. Such realizations can prompt learners to reconsider narratives about the United States' history as one of undeniable victory and exceptionalism. By adopting a critical place inquiry approach to Hanford as a site that was once imperative to imperialism, but now signifies disavowed excesses, we can highlight the possibilities of ruin within wild pedagogies.

The Hanford Site was established as part of the Manhattan Project in 1943, during World War II. The Manhattan Project's mission was to develop the first atomic bomb, which it aimed to achieve through the establishment of several nuclear research laboratories and factories across the United States (Gephart, 2003, p. 1.3). The details and the work of the Hanford Site, like all the Manhattan Project sites, was cloaked in secrecy, and thus it was with great consideration that the location of Hanford was selected so as to remain a secret. Scientists, the military, and the government were aware of the power and potential catastrophic effects of such an endeavour, and thus sought sites where an accident would have a lesser impact and fewer casualties (Gephart, 2003, p. 1.4). Colonel Franklin Matthias, who was tasked with site selection, scoured locations across the western United States, and selected what appeared to be a desolate, desert sagebrush wasteland in south central Washington State. Yet, in reality, this shrub-steppe ecosystem was home to a variety of rare native plants and provides habitat for numerous endangered species (Hanford Reach National Monument CCP, 2008, p. 1:4). What would become the Hanford Site was situated along the banks of the mighty Columbia River, whose waters would be ideal for cooling reactors. Additionally, the region had a mild climate and small population. Once decided on, Hanford was established on a 670-square mile (approx. 1,735 $km^2$) tract of land at the base of Rattlesnake Mountain, about seven miles (approx. 11 km) from the small town of Richland, Washington (Gephart, 2003, p. 1.4–1.5; Gerber, 2007, pp. 19–20).

The Hanford Site was one of two nuclear material production sites where uranium was transformed into plutonium. Just nine months after construction, Hanford produced its first plutonium, which would be used in the catastrophic bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan in 1945 that killed hundreds of thousands of people, most of whom were civilians (Kelly, 2009). Thus, Hanford, as a place, was essential to U.S. empire-building. The atomic bombs dropped on Japan have been said to have ended World War II, as Japan surrendered one day after the second bomb was detonated. As a result, workers at Hanford believed that their efforts had contributed to world peace and were proud of their role

in national defence (Gerber, 2007, pp. 58–59). The local Richland newspaper headlines following Japan's surrender read, "PEACE! OUR BOMB CLINCHED IT!" (Gerber, 2007, p. 59).

During the Cold War, Hanford was expanded to include nine additional plutonium reactors along the river. Today, the entire facility now extends over 586 square miles (approx. 1,517 $km^2$) (United States Department of Energy, 2019). Once the site of nuclear production used in more than 60,000 war bombs (Gallucci, 2020, p. 26), intimately linked to global war-making processes and paramount to U.S. imperialism, Hanford is now a decommissioned complex and national monument. It is also the United States' largest nuclear cleanup site.

Since its inception, and now through its phase of cleanup, Hanford has emitted radioactive and chemical wastes. For example, cooling reactors released billions of gallons of contaminated cooling water into the Columbia River and the surrounding soil. Traces of radioactive material have been found in the fish, insects, and plants, as well as in the groundwater, air, and soil at the Hanford Site. This material originates from leaking waste storage tanks; contaminated cooling water that was dumped directly into the Columbia River; air emissions; and direct injection wells, trenches, and drums (Columbia Riverkeeper, 2011).

Located on land seized from the Wanapum and Yakama Tribes, Hanford threatens the sovereignty of all the Columbia River tribes. The 1855 treaties between the United States and the Nez Perce, Umatilla, Warm Springs, and Yakama tribal nations provide the legal grounds for the Columbia River tribes to maintain the natural resources upon which their cultures depend by establishing that "the four tribes each reserved the right to harvest fish within their respective reservations and at 'all usual and accustomed fishing places' outside the reservations and ceded areas" (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, 2013). Hanford poses many threats to tribal sovereignty as the facility currently occupies and is contaminating Indigenous lands as well as the plants and more-than-human relations on which their cultures depend (Schneider, 2016).

One of the most urgent concerns for Native people is how Hanford has and is continuing to harm the region's salmon populations. Some of the salmon spawning within the Hanford Reach, a free-flowing section of the Columbia River that is adjacent to Hanford, have been found to be "contaminated by chromium, strontium-90, uranium, and other pollutants" (Columbia Riverkeeper, 2011, p. 9). According to the City of Richmond, current nuclear levels do not pose a threat to human drinking water standards, yet local non-profits have pointed out that "current health standards do not account for the potential bioaccumulation of pollutants in the food chain and the above-average rates of fish consumption by some populations, particularly Native Americans" (Columbia Riverkeeper, 2011, p. 13). Thus, radioactive and carcinogenic contamination not only threatens the life of the salmon themselves but also disproportionately impacts Indigenous peoples, as tribal nations throughout the Columbia River watershed continue to depend on salmon for subsistence and economic survival (Schneider, 2016).

By considering Hanford as ruin within wild pedagogies, learners are driven to question the *costs* of U.S. exceptionalism and imperialism. Thus far the price has been paid by the land, water, more-than-human, and human communities that comprise Hanford and the surrounding area, as well as those who experienced the bombings in Japan. The Hanford Site's legacy as a toxic waste site illuminates our relationship to land, nature, and water as being predicated upon extraction, consumption, and disposal, with little regard for the place itself or the other inhabitants with whom we coexist. It is this separation of humans from nature, and a denial of the reality that humans are in an interdependent relationship with nature, that underpins much of the ideological framework which enables such ecological destruction. However, sites of ruin have the potential to operate as teaching points within wild pedagogies by illuminating the ways in which humans and nature are intertwined and by demonstrating that we must cultivate new relationships—ones that are not predicated upon fueling imperialist wars.

### *Learning from Ruin Within Wild Pedagogies*

Centring ruins such as Hanford within wild pedagogies has the potential to illuminate settler colonialism, imperialism, and ecological destruction as intimately intertwined and ongoing processes. This is not to say that settler colonialism is not central to all land, including seemingly pristine and untouched wilderness places, but rather that ruin offers a particular lens through which to engage and challenge settler colonialism. While wild pedagogues differentiate between wilderness and wildness, by stating that the later is colonized (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 44), it is not just wildness that is colonized. Instead, all spaces—including ruin, wildness, and wilderness—are colonized, and they are simultaneously particular, in so far as colonization shapes the literal land and more-than-humans in distinct ways (Schneider, 2013). As McCoy et al (2016) illuminate, place is always intertwined with land, and thus with settler colonialism as well. The "healthful impact" that wild pedagogies uses to define wilderness spaces is all too often the result of a formal designation such as national park, wilderness area, or wildlife refuge. Indigenous scholars have long pointed out that such conservation enclosures are the direct result of settler colonial theft (Carroll, 2014). Without an explicit consideration of the ways that imperialism and settler colonialism continue to structure places—including wildness and wilderness—environmental education generally, and wild pedagogies in particular, have the potential to reinforce ahistorical and apolitical approaches to learning, at the cost of considering social, historical, and political frameworks that impact place (Gough, 2013). Such an approach in education is always problematic, but in the United States, Canada, and other settler states, this is particularly troubling, as it operates as erasure and reinforces settler colonialism. Wolfe (2006) describes this process of erasure as the "logic of elimination" (p. 387), whereby settler colonialism seeks to remove and/or

destroy the Native in order to gain access and claim rights to a territory. This ongoing omission of settler colonialism within academic curriculum, pedagogy, and discourses operates in conjunction with the physical and ongoing violence of settler colonialist policies, ideologies and frameworks that seek to remove and/or exterminate Indigenous communities (Falzetti, 2015, p. 5). I argue that wild pedagogies should always grapple with the colonial contexts that shape all lands, including places of wildness and wilderness, in order to resist reinforcing settler colonialism through logics of erasure. Examining places of ruin within wild pedagogies illuminates the explicit ways that ecological destruction of the land and water is intimately tied to structures of violence, empire, and settler colonialism.

If we are to alter our current trajectory away from continued ecological destruction, it is crucial that curriculum and pedagogy must take up and engage histories of empire-building and colonialism as foundational. Only then can we create new ways of being in relationship to the more-than-human and places. By exclusively looking toward wilderness that *appears* pristine, natural, free, and untouched, we may miss the lessons of how such destruction within ruin was *created* through values and behaviours centred on white supremacy, capitalism, imperialism, and settler colonialism. We miss the lessons to be learned from the ruin, the ongoing histories with which we must reckon, and the behaviour and ontological changes needed to halt such destruction. Turning only toward wilderness and wildness characterized by obvious abundance and beauty can inadvertently operate as an escape from the realities of ongoing social and ecological violence and destruction, and disavow the role many humans (and nation-states) play in (re)producing it. Ultimately, to foster investment in something that is considered beautiful and awe-inspiring like wilderness is an important endeavour. It is much more difficult to develop care and accountability, and even recognize our own interdependency with that which is considered damaged or ruined, however, it is a necessary task and one that I argue wild pedagogies has much to gain by taking on.

### *Tracing Radioactive Waste: Disrupting the Boundaries Between Wilderness and Ruin*

In this paper, I have called upon environmental educators, particularly those engaging in wild pedagogies, to examine and connect not just to healthfully controlled natural spaces, but also to places of ruin, as such places have the potential to illuminate the ways in which history, culture, empire, and politics are all intertwined with the environment. Places of ruin also offer different lessons on the ways that many humans, in the interest of capitalism, settler colonialism, white supremacy, and imperialism have created this ruin, thereby dramatically altering the land, water, ecosystems, and more-than-humans. At the same time, I recognize that an examination of the materiality of ruin and the more-than-human who inhabit it, reveals that the line between wilderness and ruin is a

mythical one. All places have been and continue to be constructed, impacted, controlled, colonized, and managed by humans. Places are never separate from humans, and yet they are also agentic. Thus, they are be both simultaneously untamed/wild and restrained/managed. Likewise, human efforts to contain/conserve spaces all fail, as our boundaries—whether socially-produced or material—are still permeable.

By understanding that the land and the more-than-human world at Hanford are agentic beings, we can learn how the line between ruin and pristine is blurred. This is evident in the ways in which the carbon steel drums that were built to contain the nuclear waste have failed. It is evidenced in the radioactive traces that are now found in the groundwater, the surrounding soil, the air, and the more-than-human beings. The salmon, impacted and contaminated by this radioactive nuclear waste that has been seeping into the Columbia River, carry these radioactive toxins with them, often travelling great distances across our socially-produced state and national boundary lines. As Schneider (2013) discusses, the salmon who spawn in the Columbia River beds and nearby tributaries, as anadromous fish, do not remain within the contaminated zones of the river near Hanford. Rather, as young fry they will travel hundreds of kilometres downriver to the Pacific Ocean, where they will live for several years. They may travel hundreds and even thousands of kilometres in the ocean to feeding grounds before returning to the same riverbed to spawn.

The river's contamination not only threatens the salmon's own life and the lives of Indigenous peoples but also imperils the many other more-than-human species who also rely on salmon as a food source. For example, sea lions, bears, eagles, and river otters all prey on salmon, and the threatened southern resident killer whale population relies on them almost exclusively. Thus, this radioactive contamination has the potential to travel via the salmon to other species of animals and to other places beyond the confines of Hanford. Salmon that do not return to their spawning grounds, instead becoming sustenance for other species or perishing in the journey, run the risk of contaminating other animal species, soil, and waters. By tracing radioactive material in the more-than-human world, as the agency of place, it is obvious that the radioactive contamination and ecological threat of Hanford has the potential to impact the wilderness places beyond our imagined boundaries and borderlines. Ruin and wilderness are dynamic and interrelated.

Reading ruin as a potential site within wild pedagogies illuminates that there is no completely 'free' place, one that is outside human influence, impact, and control. Examining the Hanford Site as a particular place of ruin and tracing the movement of radioactive nuclear waste as a force in itself reveals that the line between ruin and wilderness – as a modern human technology – is permeable. The notion that we can draw a boundary around a National Park, a forest, an urban park, or a wilderness space and presume that this line will keep the place within pristine, wild, uncontrolled, untainted, uncontaminated,

and/or ultimately unchanged by what we do in the spaces outside this line is an illusion. Likewise, imagining that we can draw boundaries around ruined spaces like Hanford and contain the damage within is also illusory. Places, composed as they are of land, water, humans, and more-than-humans, are agentic and elude complete human control.

Returning to the Hanford example, engaging ruin within wild pedagogies creates possibilities for students to learn from radioactive material's agency as it moves through boundaries. Thus, approaching ruin within wild pedagogies opens conversations about how such lines are socially-produced and permeable. Yet, an even deeper lesson could be one predicated on *how* material differences between wildness and ruin result from how humans relate to and are accountable to a place—that is, *how* humans control a place through either "healthful" or "destructive" engagement. The ways in which the more-than-human world, contaminated water, soil, winds, and the radioactive material itself at Hanford resist and defy human containment and control "untames" this place of ruin; it is thus a type of wildness within wild pedagogies. The distinction between wilderness and ruin is therefore not whether the place is "free to flourish" or "controlled," but rather what kinds of relationships and histories we have had with that place. Wilderness is constructed as a place where humans' relationship to more-than-humans is premised on awe, reverence, and respect. Places outside these imaginary boundaries, and particularly places that are considered ruined, have been predicated upon relationships of extraction, profit, consumption, disposability, and possession. Both ruin and wilderness places are agentic, impacted by human histories, uncontrollable, and interrelated with humans. Both ruin and wilderness are wildness, and they merit emphasis within wild pedagogies.

### *Ruin as Re-Membering Education*

Examining ruin within wild pedagogies can be a challenging topic in which to engage students because it has the potential to rupture status quo thinking and behaviours, and is overtly political (although all educational approaches are political). For students who live in Richland in particular, and southern central Washington in general, examining the social and ecological impacts of such histories of Hanford is fraught with emotion. For students whose families have experienced the direct impacts of contamination as "downwinders" (Edelstein, 2007) and the corresponding high rates of cancer, hypothyroidism, and spontaneous miscarriages, the dangers of Hanford are all too real. Yet, by critically engaging with ruin through a wild pedagogies approach, the common narrative of government betrayal, secrecy, and manipulation can be nuanced by through the facilitation of conversations about imperialism, U.S. exceptionalism, and settler colonialism. At the same time, instructors can foster the idea that investing in and caring for similarly damaged land, water, and more-than-human beings is worthwhile.

For other students – those whose families have an investment in Hanford and a sense of pride in the story of how Hanford brought in thousands of jobs to the region, played an essential role in U.S. victory in WWII, and holds the key to a "clean" nuclear energy future – ruin complicates these narratives. Critical examinations of Hanford as ruin offer these students a realistic view of the *costs* of cleanup, imperialism, and the dangers of such clean energy, in so far as it also produces nuclear waste. This might be a "tough sell" for a place such as Richland, where a Boeing B-17 Bomber is the high school mascot and a mushroom cloud from an atomic bomb is the school logo. Richland is a place where "proud of the cloud" is a common chant (Cary, 2019), echoing the sentiments of the area in 1945 when Hanford workers were heralded as war heroes for their role in Japan's surrender and the end of the war. Yet, the work of wild pedagogies is to disrupt the greening (or in this case the "red, white, and blueing") of the status quo. Existing wild pedagogies approaches help students to re-examine their relationships with places, landscapes, nature, the more-than-human, and the wild. However, wild pedagogies that also take up places of ruin have the potential to encourage students to reconsider history, the cultural narratives of U.S. exceptionalism, and the real impacts and costs of such histories, with the aim of helping students to reimagine and enact new ways of being in the world. Ultimately, places of ruin within wild pedagogies have the potential to advance a form of "re-membering" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 71).

Ruin within wild pedagogies offers students a way toward re-membering as a call to be a part of this place, to care for this place, "to defend human and natural communities, to build cultural and ecological diversity, to value and recognize wholeness and integrity… and to recognize our crucial co-dependency" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 71) with all places, including places of ruin. This supports both a critical analysis of the historical and ongoing logics of violence that created such ruin, and the opportunity to learn from the more-than-human world and the land that continue to exert agency in the face of human destruction. Under this framework, connecting to places of ruin is a rebel form of education that refuses the status quo.

In order to cultivate new ways of relating to *place* that challenge Anthropocentric frameworks, students must learn other narratives, histories, and frameworks that demonstrate how capitalism, settler colonialism, white supremacy, and imperialism are central the production of ruin. This learning has the potential to prompt new perspectives that move students toward understanding and engaging the land, water, and the more-than-human as interconnected with their own lives and as central to life itself. In order to foster new relationships with the land and more-than-humans—to learn to care for, nurture, invest in, and be accountable to them—and seek out new ways of being that are not predicated on violence, students must learn not only from the places of beauty that appear to have escaped these destructive histories, but also from both ruin and our human histories of creating ruin. Wild pedagogies which centre on ruin have the potential to teach students to not just *discard* that

which we have broken and exclusively take up seemingly untouched wilderness spaces, but rather to learn to care for that which lies beneath the damage and invest in repairing it.

## Notes on Contributor

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# An Inquiry into Education and Well-Being: Perspectives from a Himalayan Contemplative Tradition and Wild Pedagogies

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***Abstract***

*Over the last few centuries, the purpose of knowledge and well-being has been confined to our perceived need for survival in a materialist society, dominated by the idea of economic growth. However, the social and environment impacts, and the heavy cost of this approach, have compelled us to ask questions such as: What is the purpose of knowledge and education, ultimately? What is well-being in its true sense? Is pure knowledge accessible to us, complete on its own? This paper explores alternative ideas about well-being and knowledge, drawing from the contemplative tradition of Dudjom Tersar, which is practised in the Himalayas of West Nepal.*

***Résumé***

*Depuis quelques siècles, le but de la connaissance et du bien-être se confine à notre besoin perçu de survivre dans une société matérialiste dominée par l'idée de croissance économique. Toutefois, les impacts sociaux et environnementaux, ainsi que le lourd tribut de cette approche, nous poussent à nous demander « Quel est, au fond, le but de la connaissance et de l'éducation? Quel est le véritable sens du bien-être? La connaissance pure nous est-elle accessible et est-elle complète en elle-même? ». Le présent article explore des conceptions parallèles du bien-être et de la connaissance en s'inspirant de la tradition contemplative du Dudjom Tersar, pratiquée dans l'Himalaya, dans l'ouest du Népal.*

*Keywords:* perception, natural awareness, well-being, wild pedagogies, education

*Mots-clés* perception, conscience naturelle, bien-être, pédagogies de la nature, éducation

## Introduction

In a remote region between West Tibet and Nepal, a Tibetan meditation teacher and hermit Tsewang Dorje is telling a story about a boy who was born in 1873 in Eastern Tibet. Drawn into contemplation and virtue from a young age, the boy was unlike other children. Despite his father's wish for him to take care of household duties, the boy was dedicated to fostering his spirituality. His family finally bent to the determination of the boy and he entered a local Monastery at the age of 5. As he grew, he received teachings and over the years meditated for nine years under extreme asceticism being able to cultivate and abide in

extended meditative concentration. But he still wasn't fully content. He still was left with questions about the nature of reality. One day, his teacher suggested that he visit the master named Dudjom Dorje, also known as Dudjom Lingpa, to clear away his doubts.

He reached his destination, with offerings for the master. After waiting several days, the boy was invited in. All at once, just as he appeared in front of the master, the sun arose and the tea arrived. The vapours from the tea formed a rainbow in the sunlight. The visual effect was celestial. His desire to clarify various meditative experiences from the past, one by one, all cleared away in a single instant. He had nothing left to ask. Thoughts of ordinary perception ceased, and all his doubts subsided into non-conceptual wisdom. He became one of the finest teachers of his time, and was even revered by the 13th Dalai Lama, who regarded him as one of his teachers. (Tsewang & Tsokhang, 1985)

The Tibetan Buddhist world is rich with stories of student–teacher interactions, where devoted disciples encounter a sudden advent of pure knowledge and discover hidden dimensions of their awareness, ones that transcend ordinary perception. But with socio-political changes over the centuries, these accounts and the tradition of education were lost into obscurity, accessible only to the devoted few.

During the 1970s, the remote Himalayas of Nepal were experiencing a major change in education, following a government-led initiative (Mathema, 2007). Many of the rural children from Humla—a vibrant community living on healthy subsistence agriculture—enrolled in schools, both nearby and in cities. I was among these children. By the 1990s, when many of the youth returned from the schools in town, the fields which fed our people were barren due to lack of manure and also to a reduction in workforce. Animal husbandry was also lost not only because of a lack of people but also because of forest conservation laws that restricted herders from grazing in protected conservation areas. Many youths returned as high school graduates; their education had no relevance to our community life, based as it was in agriculture. This was the case for thousands of others in other rural areas as well.

Later on, in the early days of the 21st century, there were efforts from the government to make primary education relevant and inclusive, but they were rarely implemented (Subedi, 2018). During this time, I began working for non-profit organizations, trying to help locals with community development projects; however, I kept asking myself, "Is the approach of seeking well-being through education the right one?" I began investigating traditional beliefs about knowledge and quality of life. These thoughts and studies connected me with local hermits who were meditation practitioners of the Dudjom Tersar tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Somewhat later, they also brought me in contact with the concept of wild pedagogies, developed by a group of Western educators seeking to redefine education.

This paper aims to shed light on the perspective of the practitioners of the meditative tradition practised in West Nepal and on how knowledge is understood,

approached, and its role in ensuring well-being. The paper also considers how wild pedagogies can redefine education in the age of the Anthropocene.

## Methodologies and Objectives

During the course of my life and work, I had the opportunity to observe and study socio-economic changes and community development initiatives in the region. I approached these observations as a native to the region who was working for one of the area's first non-governmental organizations (NGO). I was also a local guide and interpreter for foreign visitors. This article is informed by the information and experiences I gained through the course of my engagement with local practitioners in rural development, local communities.

With regard to the elements of contemplative practice, I relied on the teachers of the spiritual tradition known as Dudjom Tersar tradition, including teachers Pema Riktsal Rinpoche from Namkha Khyung Dzong Monastery, Lama Gyatso Rinpoche, Lama Damdul of the same tradition, along with texts and commentaries of Degyal Rinpoche and other past teachers. The article thus discusses on the way they approach education, wellbeing and how it relates to the contradictions we find in modern times. But there also is a growing argument against the relevance of the traditional indigenous knowledge to address the issues of our times. The article thus leads into reflections and discussion on wild pedagogies, with the aim of exploring alternative approaches to education and modes of acquiring knowledge that enhance well-being and broaden one's potential and capabilities.

## Background

In mainstream societies today, our sensorial perception is believed to be central to all theories of knowledge. Empirical knowledge, it is believed, is gained from how one sees, hears, touches, smells, and tastes the environment and the objects therein (Audi, 2003). But, how reliable are our senses and perceptions as a source of knowledge? The ability of our senses to perceive things and our environment correctly has been questioned by thinkers of all ages (Powell, 1898). In Plato's *Phaedo* (360 BCE), for instance, Socrates argues that pure knowledge is attained not with the introduction or intrusion of sight (or any other sense) upon the act of thought. For reason, he maintains, is the very light of the mind in her own clearness. René Descartes (596-1650) argues that knowledge is conviction based on a reason so strong that it can never be shaken by any stronger reason (Newman, 2019). And in recent times, there is a growing argument that perception may not present realities as they are (Hoffman, 2008), thereby indicating that reality is subjective.

We live in a world in which our ways of life, and how these modes impact the environment, are exceeding some planetary boundaries and endangering the "planetary life support systems" that are essential for human survival (Steffen et al., 2015). We are in an unprecedented moment in history, in which human activity has become a dominant force shaping the planet. Major changes to how we live, work, and cooperate are needed to alter this destructive course (United Nations, 2020). As we confront this urgent need for change, individually, we are faced with such questions as, "Is our struggle for well-being and education that prepares for it merely an exercise to accumulate physical, material needs, or is there an underlying pure knowledge complete on its own, accessible to all of us?"

## Perspectives from the Contemplative Tradition of Humla

### *Initial Reflections*

Years ago, as a community development worker dealing with social and individual issues, I asked the abbot of the local monastic community how they approached ensuring individual and societal well-being. The abbot answered with an analogy of a lion: "Imagine if someone threw a stone at a lion. The lion would not chase after the stone, as a dog would do, but rather would observe the situation and pursue the person throwing it." This highlighted the importance of properly observing a problematic situation, investigating the phenomena, and addressing the root cause.

The analogy proposes that our ordinary senses and perceptions give us a flawed, incomplete view of phenomena, that we often do not see the root cause, and that we are bothered by its symptoms. To achieve a clear view of the phenomena, we must seek its root, just like the lion. Such a pursuit is needed to clear away misperceptions and bring about solutions.

What are the misperceptions of our phenomena including our environment and individual and how are they addressed?

In my view, holistic knowledge or wisdom in the meditative tradition of Dudjom Tersar is achieved by learning at three levels: hearing and study; reflection and analysis; and personal experience. Any knowledge one hears and reads is thus tested through reflection and analysis. At the foundational level, a devoted student in search of such knowledge thus pursues by analyzing the nature of the external phenomena as well as the internal subject who perceives it. In many cases, what we perceive in our sensorial experiences are momentary, existing at a relative level and deceiving. And due to this, our fixation to sensorial experiences including vision, smell and tase, and leads to disappointment later. When a practitioner realizes this, one strives toward an understanding that distinguishes the holistic nature of phenomena. This leads towards recognition of awareness, mind as the main subject, in which one gains a holistic view.

At the outset of their quest of such knowledge, a practitioner engages in four reflections of phenomena: rarity and value of life; impermanence; cause and effect; drawbacks of mundane life. Reflecting on and accepting the value of life, impermanent nature of any phenomenon helps one to scale back their endless cravings for material gain. One assumes a humble life. And, by reflecting on cause and effect and understanding the interdependent nature of all things, one gives up all unwholesome actions and adopts the wholesome. When one sees the fundamental drawbacks of human life (e.g., aging, sickness, death), one develops an urge to achieve one's greatest life purpose, to seek higher meaning and hold to one's values. By refraining from distraction and honing one's skills in mental concentration, one gains a state of calm and delves in subtle levels of consciousness. What is more, one gains a sharpened insight that allows them to further discern phenomena at its subtlest levels. One is eventually led to the direct cognition of an ultimate state of awareness. That is, one achieves wisdom in which they find subjective well-being for the self and compassion to serve others.

*Distinguishing Illusion from Reality*

One realizes that, at the centre of perception, is the idea of a 'self' which holds to pronouns such as "me" and then perceives the environment around it. Upon coming into contact with objects, there is feeling: pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. Pleasant experiences lead us to want to gain more of those experiences, to attach to them; unpleasant experiences, by contrast, lead us to revulsion and an impulse to eliminate them. Likewise, neutral experiences lead to indifference. These latter experiences form the basis for actions motivated by attachment, hatred, desire, ignorance, and anger, which lead to their subsequent harmful results such as conflicts, war, exploitation, negligence, social injustices of all kind. Thus, the way we perceive experiences is central to our fate. But do our perceptions accurately reflect the reality of what we are perceiving?

The example of an illusion, a circle of fire, helps us explore the reality of our perceptions. In a dark night, a person lights a torch and circles it around in the sky. From a distance, we see a ring of fire. It fascinates us. If we analyze it, however, we will see that there is no circle of fire; there is just a flame and a person moving it in the air. Similarly, but at a subtler level, the landscape we see around us is, in reality, changing perpetually. Old plants, rocks, and animals are dying and new ones are replacing them. The same is true of our body: Old cells are dying and new cells are replacing them; we are perpetually changing and transforming. But in all these visions—circle of fire, or more subtly, landscape, or our own body—we have a perception of a solid, static vision. Our perception is unable to catch the subtle changes, the actual reality. All actions aimed to feed our emotions, therefore, become an endless endeavour, like trying to hold illusions in your hands.

What view and practice does one adopt in the face of such a realization?

The nature of reality in the Dudjom Tersar tradition, in my opinion, is explained at two levels: what we see with our senses (perceptions); and what we find through analysis, investigation, and direct experience.

The following example may further illustrate the above. When we walk in dim light, we may see what we perceive to be a snake and become frightened by it. But later, when we light a torch, we see that what we thought was a snake was actually just a rope. This is one layer of our perception: Something appears to us that does not exist. But, of what is a rope ultimately composed? Though it appears to be a single, solid element, the rope is actually a combination of thread, wool, labour, heat, and water. These are the elements involved in its production. When we separate all these elements, there is no independent rope. Rather, the name *rope* signifies a collection of things that are not known as *rope*. In the same vein, if we break down the constituent elements of earth, water, and fire, they too have no independent existence. At the end, one realizes all appearances to be no more than as ideas on our consciousness. The way phenomena appear to us as reality can also be compared with a rainbow that appears when moisture, warmth, and space converge. Seeing phenomena in this depth and totality, and directly seeing the basic nature of awareness constitutes arriving at ultimate reality: the ultimate perfection of wisdom.

### *Natural State, Explained in Four Metaphors*

In the teachings practised here (Dewi Gyalbo, 1928), arriving at a natural state is introduced with four metaphors: surface of a lake; sesame seed; gold; and fertile field.

*Surface of a lake*: Just as the reflections on the surface of a lake appear as one dimension—there is no distinction between the highs and lows of mountains and plains—so too is our basic natural awareness said to be in a state of perfect equanimity, without differentiation between subjective mind and objects, self and others, hope and fear, pleasure and pain, past and future.

*Sesame seed*: Just as oil is the essence of a sesame seed, so too are all beings taught to have pure natural awareness as the essence of their mind stream. This essence can be extracted by peeling off the layers of perception through mindful reflection, introspection, and direct knowledge.

*Gold (precious substance)*: Like gold, jewels, when their value is recognized and utilized, have the potential of alleviating poverty. Similarly, when one arrives at a state of natural awareness one understands how all phenomena, emotions, and cognitions emerge and subside. When natural awareness is recognized, we can achieve well-being because that awareness offers insight into all other forms of knowledge and brings about a state of total contentment and relief.

*Fertile field*: Just as a fertile field serves as the ground for any seed to germinate and grow, the basic natural state of all phenomena is a fertile ground for ideas and creativity. As long as we bring causes and conditions together, we can have limitless creativity.

### *A Cup of Tea With a Hermit*

I happened to visit one of the hermits of the Dudjom Tersar tradition, hoping to receive advice about social development issues of the time. The region was finally seeing peace after a decade-long Maoist insurgency. Upon my arrival to his humble hut, and after our greetings, I asked him, "Grandfather, we believe that our culture and traditions are valuable for future generations. Can you suggest ways that we could help in conserving the local culture and traditions? Ways that we could develop our community?"

He didn't immediately respond to my questions. Instead, he kept moving around his narrow kitchen, trying to prepare tea and a meal for my colleagues and me—his visitors. It grew late, and still I received no answers. Eventually, he walked to a small room which served as his bedroom, meditation cell, library, and storage area. We followed. He sat on his bed, wrapped in a blanket, and said to us, to our surprise, "Everything is subject to change. You don't need to stop, or change anything."

His statement implied that many of the issues we perceive around us are momentary and appear in the course of change. In most cases, they are just projections of our perception, that is, they are our mental fabric. Like cloudy weather, they arise and subside as parts of a natural, ever-changing course. By giving ourselves too much control over phenomena—including over one's identity, status, society—and by trying to change them, we bring endless trouble to ourselves and others. In contrast, by accommodating all phenomena, expanding our awareness into its sky-like openness, we are unaffected, like sky unsullied by clouds, rain and thunder.

In the days when my colleagues and I were visiting this hermit, life was challenging in the mountains. The Maoist insurgency had promised to bring change to the region. And yet, thousands of lives were lost in the uprising, and there was much suffering and woe. The charitable works I was involved in were not bringing sustainable change. But away from the main trail, this hermit, and hermits like him, lived a life of contentment in an otherworldly manner. He was already nearly 90 years old, but his relaxed openness, contentment, and cheerfulness were fresh and lively, and were thus in complete contrast with the problems and issues prevalent in the valley, which was faced with economic woes, political instability, and much more.

The hermit's dwelling place was surrounded by juniper trees, flowers, and barley fields and a water spring still running ceaselessly since I had last seen it decades ago. Within the dwelling place lived the wise old man, the hermit, who possessed the cheerfulness of a child and the confidence of a lion. When all

things one has to do have been done, what is left other than enjoying your tea and meal with friends, families, or even an enemy?

We enjoyed this great cup of tea and a meal from a hermit.

## Reflections and Lessons

As I descended from the mountain cave where I visited the hermit, I reflected on the lessons that he imparted. Maybe, I thought, the approach to genuine knowledge begins with deconstructing misconceptions and misperceptions we have built, de-learning our "off-the-ground" ideas and habits (Henderson & Jensen, 2015). Maybe achieving "sustainable environments" involves an attempt to enlarge the scale and scope of our cognition with regard to the entities found in nature that add meaning to life (Drew & Gurung, 2016). Maybe there is a state of ultimate understanding and knowledge, the knowing of which leads, on its own, to well-being (Dudjom, 2004).

The current mode of modern educational practice, with its control over subjects, structures, measurements, and routines, is in many ways contrary to direct relational engagements with the natural world and the epistemological positionings required for mutual flourishing of and relationship between humans and more-than-humans. These observations, these reflections, suggest the need to address them and start wilding lifestyles in general and educational policies in particular (Jickling et al., 2018).

## Wild Pedagogies: Convergence and Applications in Well-Being and Education

Naropa was one of the most learned scholars in 11th-century India. One day, having realized that he knew words but not their ultimate meaning, Naropa abandoned his position at the monastic university and went in search of hermit Tilopa, who was said to have realized words' ultimate meaning. Naropa spent six years searching for the hermit, undergoing twelve hardships during his quest to reach Tilopa. When he finally met the hermit, he was made to undergo another twelve major hardships, spending six more years confronting them before he was permitted to speak with Tilopa. Still, upon speaking with him, Naropa received no direct instructions that would lead to ultimate meaning.

Finally, one day, when he and Tilopa were at an empty plain, the hermit said, "Now make a mandala offering so I can give you the key instructions." Naropa looked around and said, "There are neither flowers nor any water here to make an offering." Tilopa answered, "Does your body not have blood and fingers?" So Naropa cut himself and sprinkled the ground with his own blood. Tilopa then struck him with a muddy sandal and knocked him unconscious. When he woke up, he was able to clearly see the nature of everything. He was also healed from

his wounds, after which received further instructions in recognizing ultimate meaning. Naropa realized that through the hardship he endured, he was peeling off layers of his conceptual understandings of the nature of phenomena, which opened him up to deeper meaning and instructions into ultimate knowledge. He became proficient both in words and their ultimate meaning (Gunther, 1974).

In another case, there was once a teacher in Tibet who had a very thick-headed disciple. No matter how much the master taught him about natural awareness, the disciple was unable to understand. One day, the teacher came up with a new teaching method. Appearing furious at the student, he said, "I want you to carry this bag full of barley to the top of that mountain. But you mustn't stop to rest until you get to the top." Being a simple man, the disciple took the instruction literally: He picked up the bag and carried it up the slope of the mountain, without stopping. When he reached the top, completely exhausted, he dropped the bag, threw his body down beside it, and deeply relaxed. All his tiredness and struggle dissolved during this rest and with it, his ordinary mind. Everything just seemed to stop. At that instant, he realized the ultimate meaning of knowledge. "Ah! This is what my master has been showing me all along," he thought.

As I was seeking alternative ways to practise education and well-being, I came into contact with wild pedagogies, which aims to renegotiate what it means to be human, as well as what it means to be in relationship with the world. Wild pedagogies pursues answers to these reflections by using educational practices to engage in deep and transformational change. Drawing on wild pedagogies' six touchstones, I now offer a reflection on how wild pedagogies aligns with the Himalayan contemplative tradition.

### *Nature as Co-Teacher*

Since time immemorial, people in the mountains have learned life skills from nature, through agriculture, forestry, or other areas. In many ways, the classroom-based teaching that is foundational to modern education has undermined the link between people and nature, as have urban lifestyles. This has resulted in the loss of many traditional skills (Sharma et al., 2009). In addition, concentration is considered an important component of enhancing learning and gaining wisdom which, in our daily lives, is currently limited due to constant distractions of media, entertainment, internet, consumer products and constant struggle for survival, social violence and so on. Nature and solitude enhance one's concentration and lead to the unravelling of many hidden qualities within the mind such as humility, creativity, compassion (Rinpoche, 1994). A cup of muddy water can help us understand the way our mind, when in solitude and nature, settles and refines itself. When that water is allowed to calm, it settles itself naturally, revealing its pure, clear, and nourishing qualities. So too does the mind calm down when it is offered the opportunity to do so in nature.

*Complexity, the Unknown, and Spontaneity*

As we connect with the wild and nature and come to appreciate its many functions, we begin to see a complex diversity in flora and fauna. We also see the interdependence of all elements. The soil serves as the basis of plants; plants serve as the basis of animals; animals serve as the basis of manure that nourishes soil. Likewise, one can observe the natural elements' connections to humans, to societies, to culture, and to the universe. Within nature's complexity, there is also spontaneity, naturalness, and simplicity. One aspect we learn from nature's complexity is to live in harmony with it. This awareness can be compared with the art of swimming. If we learn to flow with the water, relaxed, we will be able to swim and float quite easily. However, if we do not find this harmony and balance, we struggle. Our experience with the water becomes complex, and we drown. Finding balance and harmony in the complexity is also the way one discovers a musician within.

All of the reflections in contemplative traditions are believed to find familiarity with how things are in nature and to train in recognizing the natural balance and harmony. When one is finally led to direct first-person knowledge; that is, one becomes the source of knowledge itself. At this point, one has arrived at the simplicity within complexity. Nature's wild provides a favourable environment for this process.

*Locating the Wild*

In my view, locating the wild in our modern-day life involves extending connections with nature, solitude, and free inquiry wherever one lives, studies, and works. It may mean finding a few minutes, hours, and days to connect with elements of nature and reflect on one's own potential at a deeper level. If the institution you are involved in is unhealthy and exerts control over all that you do, then locating the wild may involve finding a livelihood in an institution or profession that provides more freedom—one in which, through making room for initiative and enterprise, productivity is enhanced. In all cases, locating the wild demands curiosity, and a willingness to accept challenges. .

*Time and Practice*

To ripen into fruit, all forms of knowledge and work require time and practice. We can observe such growth in the wild, where a seed will, over seasons, turn into ripe, organic fruit. We can't push or rush the seed if we are to expect a healthy, organic product. But, if we utilize time with diligence and focus, things which we consider unachievable may, in time, be achieved. It is possible to make breakthrough in learning. In contemplative traditions, this transformation is compared with the way in which soft drops of water can, by falling continuously,

penetrate and shape a hard, solid rock. All subjects of knowledge that we consider solid and impenetrable are in fact penetrable.

Modern-day students are limited, pressured by burdensome distractions such as profit, self-interest, and short-term goals. They expect results before there has been time for their knowledge and skills to ripen. The result is an immature understanding of their subject, field and poor products that come from such understanding. Such a poor result can, in my view, be resolved by eliminating the pressures of time, profit, and economic stress on a student. When an eager mind is relieved of such bondages, and is connected to the wild through time and practice, great wonders can occur. This, in my view, will result in great thinkers, leaders, artists, designers, engineers, etc.

*Sociocultural Change*

In my view, one should study, reflect and familiarise in one's area of knowledge, until one gains a definite understanding, reaching its maturation with time and practice. One then gains a state of perfection in which there appears spontaneity and simplicity. This stage is when one can inspire others and catalyze sociocultural change that the world urgent needs. I believe that it is time to inspire individuals to move toward this state, as well as toward policies and approaches to education, social development that appreciate nature, human potential, and our collective well-being.

*Building Alliances and the Human Community*

We live in an age of advanced technology, where the potential for great change exists in both positive and negative ways. The evidence of our interdependent nature has never been more apparent. Therefore, in the phases of learning and bringing about positive change, building alliances is crucial. Such alliances can be between societies, geographies, and fields of knowledge. Deeper reflection on interdependence with nature, and on our impermanence, also leads to a natural spirit of altruism, community , and an instinctive joy in the reflection we're undertaking. This, in my view, is the basis on which wider alliances can be built.

## Recommendations

The following are some recommendations for pedagogical practices that have the potential to enhance education and the general well-being of humans and the natural world. They have been developed in light of the above touchstones and the Himalayan reflective tradition. There should be:

- greater allocation of time for students to spend in nature, wild communities, and away from closed environments;

- emphasis on free exploration, personal search, and inquiry rather than on fixed subjects chosen by educational institutions; and
- a reduction in classroom days and hours to accommodate practical on-site learning for students to engage in such activities as helping in family occupations, farming, social events, and individual pursuits.

Also:

- The drive for economic growth as a measure of progress could be redefined in the context of general human and environmental well-being.
- The study of economics and business, along with other subjects, should be taught in light of their impacts on the natural world, and on life in general.
- Recognition and understanding of the touchstones of wild pedagogies can help guide these aspirations.

## Notes on Contributor

**NB Lama Jigme** is a rural development specialist, having worked for more than 20 years in various regions of Nepal, benefiting several hundred thousand people through projects ranging from health, education, employment generation, environment, and cultural heritage conservation to ecotourism and agriculture development. These projects have continued even during the decade-long civil war in Nepal. When Jigme was faced with extremely difficult societal and personal strife, he set out on a search for alternative answers to the quest for well-being. This eventually led him back to the meditation masters of his homeland. He trained with these masters for many years, following the Namkha Khyungdzong tradition of the ancient school of Tibetan Buddhism, in which he is now a practising Lama. He also holds a bachelor's degree in Buddhist studies and a master's degree in rural development, both from Tribhuvan University, Nepal. He is currently involved in the preservation and sharing of the Himalayan contemplative tradition, and occasionally leads slow, immersive journeys into the Himalayas.

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# 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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# Reflections on Campfire Experiences as Wild Pedagogy

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***Abstract***

*Today's environmental challenges present us with the opportunity to enhance our ability to hear the voices of the more-than-human world. This was an aptitude that was central to our ancestral practices. Efforts to develop pedagogies that redirect our ways of being in the world are emerging under the broad title, "wild pedagogies." This article describes Canadian teacher candidates' (TCs) experiences of a variety of campfire-based activities on a single night of their annual field camp and the TCs' evaluation of their efficacy as alternative experiences with Fire. The article presents excerpts of student narratives that articulate the successes and challenges of such an endeavour, and the impact of the discovery of Fire as a more-than-human voice on their developing teaching philosophy. The analysis in this paper is grounded in the six touchstones for wild pedagogies in practice.*

***Résumé***

*Les enjeux environnementaux actuels sont l'occasion d'améliorer notre écoute des voix du monde extrahumain, une aptitude qui était centrale aux pratiques de nos ancêtres. On applique le vocable général de « pédagogies de la nature » au résultat des efforts déployés pour élaborer des pédagogies qui redirigent nos façons d'être dans le monde. Le présent article décrit les expériences vécues par de futurs enseignants canadiens lors de différentes activités réalisées autour d'un feu pendant une soirée de leur camp annuel, ainsi que l'évaluation, par ces mêmes futurs enseignants, de l'efficacité des activités proposées comme expériences non habituelles du Feu. L'article présente des extraits de récits d'étudiants mettant en mots les réussites et les difficultés d'une telle approche, et les effets de la découverte du Feu comme voix extrahumaine pour illustrer leur philosophie de l'enseignement en devenir. L'analyse repose sur les six pierres d'assise de la mise en pratique des pédagogies de la nature.*

*Keywords:* wild pedagogies, experiential, campfire, education, more-than-human

*Mots-clés* : pédagogies de la nature, expérientiel, feu de camp, éducation, extrahumain

## Introduction & Background

Each year since 2001, the Outdoor & Experiential Education (OEE) program at Queen's University, Ontario, Canada has offered teacher candidates (TCs) a unique campfire experience as one evening event at their annual field camp. I was at the beginning of my career when I received the appointment of program

coordinator. I labelled this evening Deep Ecology Campfire (DEC), in part to distinguish it from the campfires held on other nights. The DEC was specifically aimed at introducing TCs to a perception of the world that emphasized a deeper appreciation for the more-than-human world. As the term *wild pedagogies* had yet to be introduced, the term *deep ecology* came closest to describing the principles I hoped to explore during the evening's activities.

The annual field camp takes place over a five-day, four-night period in a beautiful forest location on the Canadian Shield. The site is located next to a field at the end of a dirt road and overlooks a lake. The only on-site structure is a combined kitchen and dining hall. The setting has four semi-permanent campfire rings, two of which are in a clearing in the forest. Wild areas are always close at hand.

I facilitate the activities on the first night. This evening sees the participants quietly sitting, sipping their tea, and looking out at a tree-lined lake on the Canadian Shield as the sun sets. Students are asked to spend this time focusing on the location and what it has to offer.

The activities on nights two, three, and four take place around a campfire. Each evening is facilitated by a leadership team, derived from an activity that loosely sorts TCs interests into three groups. The activities on nights two and four emphasize conventional, well-known campfire games and songs. These evenings are designed to help the class bond as a group. The field camp concludes with a summation and reflection. This article focuses on the activities of the third evening, emphasizing the efforts and methods of the leadership team as they push the boundaries of conventional campfire activities.

When I explain the broad objective of the third night's activities to the leadership team, I refer to the evening using the loosely defined term *deep ecology*; however, I tell the campfire team they can name the evening whatever they wish. As a result, over the years, the TCs have come to use a variety of terms to describe the evening with two common ones being *primal* and *wild*. Only the TCs' narratives about the evening of the DEC will be used to explored the six touchstones for wild pedagogies in practice as outlined by the Crex Crex Collective (2018).

Late on the first day of field camp, I lead an activity resulting in the DEC leadership team being self-selected after considering their subjective interest in; drumming, chanting, dancing, animal mimicry, and other creative expressions. For instance, they choose between identifying as busy beavers, playful otters and wolves howling (DEC evening). Those TCs who select the most criteria associated with the DEC evening become part of the DEC leadership team. On the whole, OEE TCs tend to be energetic and strongly motivated to think outside the box. They commonly self-identify as emerging leaders, and they want to lead dynamic innovative activities.

The instructions provided to each year's DEC leaders have evolved over the 20 years of OEE field camps, but they have also remained true to the annual event's core concepts: offering experiences that focus on our relationship with

fire in new ways; developing a sense of community that extends beyond human language; and questioning the norms and conventions we possess with respect to how we relate to the places in which campfires occur. Time is limited at field camp, as it is in most educational programs. Thus, unfortunately, only one night can be specifically designated to exploring our connection with Fire as a more-than-human phenomenon. The evening invariably has a significant impact, and is often recalled during the subsequent school year. The evening's events provide a philosophical perspective, which in turn enables the exploration and integration of diverse pedagogical concepts.

My explanation to the DEC leadership team of their evening task must be brief as it occurs in the last block of time on the first day, right before dinner must be prepared. I begin my explanation by asking them to imagine litter floating down a river:

> *People are gathered on the shore, the majority of whom are focused on picking up the litter. This can be considered shallow ecology. At the same time, a smaller group of people are looking upriver to determine and understand the source of the pollution—the how and why of the problem. These people are practising deep ecology because they are seeking to understand the bigger picture: Why have cultures become so destructive to the environment? Think of your leadership team as comprising 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 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 DEC leaders are also informed that everyone will have made a shaker in time for the DEC, which they can incorporate into the evening's activities. I also let the leaders know that if participants want a snack, there is popcorn that can be made. Overall, the DEC nights have proven very successful, and they are the evening I most look forward to during the school year.

Every year, the DEC evening is different. The evening unfolds 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 amazing rhythmic vocalizations will be created. Over the years, the DEC has given birth to a wide range of creative activities that foster each TC's ability to approach and experience Fire in a deep, introspective, community-based manner. It is worth noting that the DEC activities described herein provide a consciousness-expanding experience that focuses on the here and now, and which does not involve external chemical stimuli.

The campfire leaders typically organize the evening so that activities will gather participants, build energy and intensity and then close the evening

in impressionable ways. Over the years, the initial warm-up activities have included participants being blindfolded and led on a sensory walk, or having their faces painted with mud or charcoal. One year participants were asked to assume the identity of a selected animal as they wait in a field for darkness to arrive before parading to the designated campfire setting. On the way to the fire ring, participants might follow a trail of lit lanterns or be asked to move toward the sound of intense drumming. One year's introductory activities were exceptionally captivating: 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. The action resulted in sparks flying and subsequent cheering. Simultaneously, the source of the unusual sounds became evident.

One effective activity the DEC leaders have frequently used is to produce the sound of a thunderstorm. The activity uses few words and depends upon participants imitating the leaders' gestures. The process has been particularly effective for encouraging participant interaction and setting a precedent to follow the leaders' non-verbal clues. Call and response is another technique the leaders have used involve participants in the creation of a soundscape. Leaders invoke a symbol of animals approaching a watering hole 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 has also yielded 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.

On Each annual DEC evening, the leaders designate an activity to mark the end of the planned experience. Many times over the years, the evening has concluded with a spontaneous outbreak of euphoric group-howling. One year ended when the leaders all pointing at Fire until everyone else copied them, after which the leaders pointed to the sky and, one by one spiralled away from Fire to lie alone in a nearby field, fingers still pointing upwards; at this point all the remaining TCs followed and spiraled out to their own location still pointing to the sky. For me, the connection made between Fires on earth and the fiery stars in the distance engendered a strong sense of wonder.

The TCs' feedback about the DECs each year furthers my recognition of the evening as a core component of wild pedagogies. I receive student feedback on the DECs in three different ways: post-event discussions, field camp journals, and a final paper assignment entitled the Significance Paper. This paper requires

TCs to choose one activity and elaborate upon why it was the most significant learning activity for them at field camp. Over the course of 20 years, even when TCs are able to choose any topic from their field camp experience to elaborate on, the most popular subject matter chosen has been the DEC evening. Indeed, throughout the year, students return to the evening's activities as an experiential point of reference when discussing other wild pedagogic issues, particularly when exploring the disconnection from the natural world they feel in most of their educational course work. The students' ideas and accounts of the DEC 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 DEC originated in part from my own life journey. As a child, I was interested in primitive skills, an interest which carried through to my adult life and my professional work as an outdoor environmental educator. I first encountered the term *wild pedagogies* as a participant at the Yukon River gathering in 2014 entitled *Wild Pedagogies: A Floating Colloquium*. At the gathering, I realized that I was predisposed to many of the ideas discussed within the concept of wild pedagogies because of my previous participation in deep ecology workshops, explorations of Earth-based spiritual practices, and my experience teaching in remote First Nations schools that still held traditional ceremonies. If I were only beginning to facilitate the DEC activities today, I would likely refer to them as wild pedagogies campfires.

After reading *Wild Pedagogies: Touchstones for Re-Negotiating Education and the Environment in the Anthropocene* (Crex Crex Collective, 2018), it was apparent to me that the six touchstones presented in the book strongly reinforce that the DECs constituted an example of wild pedagogy, one crafted to further the rewilding of education. As the authors contend, "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 TCs to listen to Fire, a more-than-human voice. The six touchstones for wild pedagogies in practice that are presented in *Wild Pedagogies* (Crex Crex Collective, 2018) provide a useful framework for studying the components of the DECs; at the same time, they serve to illustrate the flexible and evolving character of wild pedagogies. 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).

Below, I will identify and define each touchstone by the names used in *Wild Pedagogies* (Crex Crex Collective, 2018). I will draw on a direct quote from the publication and then elaborate on this quote before specifically connecting the touchstone with certain aspects of the DEC.

*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 [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 incorporate the perspective that the more-than-human—Fire—is a co-teacher. This oral direction's 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 rather is a teacher worthy of being asked questions. Our task as humans is to be open and listen. For what is likely the first time, leaders are asked to consider the source of the campfire curricula they have been exposed to and question the role of popular culture (e.g., Disney, Hollywood) 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 when considering valid teachers rather than to more-than-human ones in general and Fire in particular.

The concept of Fire as teacher redefines Fire by decentring the anthropocentric voice. The campfire leaders are asked to do what the Crex Crex Collective describe as the first touchstone: "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-centring more-than-human voices" (2018, 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.

I answer any additional questions from the leaders regarding their task before informing them that it is their responsibility to find the additional time required 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 successfully articulate a new way of being around Fire to their peers. One TC, on the DEC leadership team, journal entry captured the way the DEC facilitated their capacity to recall a previous deeper connection with the more-than-human: "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 the opening activity they chose. 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 TCs silently circle Fire and bow reverently to

the more-than-human teacher before turning and bowing to the humans struck me as a beautiful and poignant act. It demonstrated in a profound way how much we all owe to Fire. Many anthropologists consider our relationship to Fire to be the defining more-than-human entity for humanity (Cobb & Goldwhite 1995; Tattersall, 2012; Warren, 2020). The respectful bowing to Fire as teacher acknowledges the archetypal importance of Fire to humanity. Two additional student journal entries 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, 2018, p. 84)

Over time, I have increasingly encouraged DEC leaders to communicate without words. Upon first encountering the concept of silent communication, TCs are often both thrilled and terrified; they are sensing the unknown possibilities of the second touchstone. The removal of spoken communication from the leader–TC dialogue eliminates DEC leaders' usual method of providing instruction and any acknowledgement that given directions are understood. The non-verbal aspect of the evening moves the participants into the unknown and brings the need for flexibility of perception and spontaneity of action. This is because, without words, the requisite space for subjective interpretation of events is created.

In such a form of wordless communication, 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 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, silent or wordless communication provides the means to spontaneously communicate in new and pleasant ways. This form of communication builds on our sensations of the more-than-human world. 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 DECs, only two times have they resulted in prolonged moments of bewildered staring and minimal participation in the movement and dancing component. When participants in the DEC evenings embrace 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" (2018, p. 84). TCs' journal entries repeatedly describe the evening as having invoked something powerful and foreign. Their entries confirm that the TCs feel encouraged and supported to question and think deeply about what they have experienced. For example, 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 journals).

Each year, I evaluate the cumulative experience of the previous DECs and, when necessary, I modify the description I offer to the campfire leaders. I give particular consideration to what has previously led to either euphoric or awkward moments. Student journal entries and group discussions have offered critical input for shaping the directions I provide the following year. For example, after the second DEC, my explanation to the leaders emphasized the importance of beginning the evening with sensory-based activities (e.g., blindfolding, mud paint, animal calls). 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 DEC, 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 raised the bar for focus on non-verbal communication, informing each new crop of leaders that in previous years the entire campfire had been successfully executed without the use of 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. As a result, the night began with much confusion, 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 to accept that they are to expect the unexpected and feel free to participate.

Students often record what constitutes effective instruction 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 DEC. One student wrote the following:

> 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 directive to communicate non-verbally 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. It is an unfortunate characteristic of many educational systems and institutions that the learning experience consists of the static observation of electronic screens, or the reading of text. These practices—especially the first—fail to recognize the disconnect between the two-dimensional experience of viewing images on a screen and that of *being* in the wild; in such pedagogies, images can be readily altered and distorted. By contrast, the authenticity of experiencing the wild in wild pedagogies cannot. Learning through imitation, especially when directed towards the more-than-human world, acknowledges and reinforces and the way most young mammals learn. When humans imitate the more-than-human world without judgement, they find a way to access and learn what Devall and Session describe as deep ecology, that is, "a more sensitive openness to ourselves and the nonhuman life around us" (1985, p. 65).

Kurt Hahn, founder of Outward Bound, aptly refers to one of the industrial world's societal deficits as "spectatoritis"; he maintains that this is the result of a decline of most people's initiative and enterprise (Hahn, n.d.). My experience with the DECs has highlighted the importance of having leaders set up the experience so that participants will understand enough of what is taking place that they will feel inclined to imitate and participate. This will enable their ability to briefly reclaim their childlike tendencies to perceive the world holistically and in the present moment. Of this holistic form of communication, one student noted the following: "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)

Campfire leaders face the challenge of facilitating the participants' ability to focus so they can attend to the wildness of the setting and central Fire. Such an aim challenges their preconceived notions of what should occur around a campfire.

One exception to the lack of popular cultures attendance to fire is the simple song "Campfire Burning" (origins unknown), sung in a round to the tune of "London Bridges." This song is commonly sung around campfires in Canada and

at the OEE field camp on both the first and third night. The lyrics ask the singers to "draw nearer, draw nearer" to Fire's lessons. By contrast, many contemporary songs and activities that take place around a campfire encourage us to laugh and sing; they build on our collective popular culture and in so doing pull us away from the wild, directing us toward what can be conveyed by electronic screens and profit-driven industries eager to turn our watching into an addiction. 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). That year all the DEC leaders expressed strongly that their conversation around this raised point served as a pivotal moment in the shaping of their plan, and ability to successfully lead without speaking. They all expressed that their confidence in their own leadership was the result of the support they had agreed to give each other. Likewise, they confirmed that their collective self-confidence had resulted in successful participant engagement. The leaders' universal acknowledgement of the importance of mutual support reinforced for me that this concept of team members having each other's back 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 wondrous journey to meet the more-than-human world. When leaders are hesitant to act the fool, or when they are reluctant to share their wild encounters for fear that their story will fall on deaf ears, we diminish our ability to grow as wild pedagogues. With each successive DEC, I realized I must find the means to effectively communicate my support to both leaders and participants, helping to foster an environment in which they could adopt new perspectives and foster novel 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"; and "Something that was brought up was our idea of 'crazy' and why we thought acting 'primal' was considered crazy—we call things we're not used to or familiar with 'crazy' even when they are not. Goal: Eliminate the word 'crazy' from my vocabulary" (student journals).

### *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. … 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, 2018, pp. 94–95).

Time and practice assist in the formation of wild pedagogues' deep awareness of the more-than-human world. Even after 20 years of experiencing DECs and countless hours spent cooking over fires, stoking winter woodstoves, and attending community Fire-based events (e.g., Solstice celebrations), I still seek to spend more time with Fire and create a deeper practice with and understanding of Fire. OEE students likewise express their craving to spend more time outdoors with the more-than-human world. One year, an OEE student who had been one of the DEC leaders, chose to improve her fire-making skills as part of a course assignment. In pursuing her goal, she spent a lot of time over two school terms establishing a practice of being with Fire. At her class's year-end gathering, she shared with her peers what her time and practice with Fire had resulted in; what she shared was recognizable to me as the fostering of her wild pedagogies knowledge through a relationship with Fire.

One of the student's objectives was to learn various ways to make fire by friction, and her honed skill allowed her to confidently help her peers do the same at the final class gathering. She provided few oral directions when organizing her classmates, and, once organized, everyone worked co-operatively to use a large spindle to create fire by friction. As the students 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 was successfully 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. Of particular note was the way in which the TCs had risen to *an expression of the wild* through their collective activities, and without my direct input. Importantly, the students had created a second DEC and in so doing had demonstrated their willingness and ability to further experience the wild. The furthering and deepening of being with Fire had been due to one skilled peer and everyone's previous collective experience of the first DEC evening.

It was very rewarding to reflect upon this year-end fire event with my earlier years of hesitantly offering a DEC, frequently feeling unsure of the outcome and questioning whether I should be venturing into unknown pedagogical terrain in a university course. Each year in those early days, I worried the evening would be a failure. However, with every successive year, as I observed the leaders offering innovative DEC activities that were followed by the written and oral reflections on the night's outcomes, my confidence grew. With time and practice, my insecurity about offering this activity to TCs—without the use of words, aiming for everyone to dance freely around Fire—decreased. The positive feedback from the students' journal entries as well as the fact that most students had chosen the DEC as the topic for their significant paper provided me with enough positive outcomes to continue to offer the evening.

I came to understand and appreciate how strongly TCs 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 rather than in 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 spent interacting with the more-than-human world. One student expressed an interest in practising 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).

Reflecting on the success of the DEC evenings, I have come to the realization that it is critical to my role as a wild pedagogue that I dedicate the time and space for TCs to experience the wild. The DECs have proven to be a high point in the busy schedules of TCs and offering DECs is my way of being a wild pedagogue that offers unconventional curricula even when working in orthodox educational settings. It is my hope that sharing the inspired lessons that emerge from the DECs will help TCs and other wild pedagogues to further their own and others' relationships with Fire.

### *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. … In response, we seek wild pedagogies that are actively and politically aimed towards telling a new geostory of a world in which all beings can flourish. (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p. 97)

In Canada, the increasing awareness of the inappropriateness of cultural appropriation and the stereotyping of Indigenous peoples has highlighted the need to examine the extent to which contemporary engagement in traditional, pan-cultural activities and rituals (e.g., drumming, chanting, face/body painting) is appropriate. Widespread media coverage about the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* has rightfully raised awareness about how appropriating First Nations, Inuit, and Métis cultures has harmed these Indigenous populations.

As wild pedagogues, we must ensure that our efforts to encourage ethical socio-cultural changes in society do not simultaneously impose counterproductive 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 world.

Participation in diverse art forms and workshops (e.g., pew dancing, hand drumming, Feminist Spiritual circles, 5Rhythm dance [Roth, 1989]) enhances 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 world. Redmond (1997) writes about how drumming is once again becoming a tool for individual and cultural healing and transformation: "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 (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). Warren (2020) describes how few Americans (with specific ethnic-group exceptions) are comfortable sharing private concepts, particularly precious or reverent ones. Warren concludes that many Americans "secretly crave ceremony" (p. 103).

Overcoming my personal feelings that I am musically disinclined and incapable of participating in rhythmic-based movement practices has helped me recognize the ancient participatory aspect of these worldwide art forms and understand that they are not exclusive to any specific cultural group or community. The more exposure I have to folk traditions from around world, the more I realize most historical practices emphasize participatory collective forms of art and expression in contrast to for-profit art experiences led by specialized, paid, so-called experts. The DEC provides TCs with the opportunity to experience the participatory aspect of a broad spectrum of art forms, demonstrating the commonality of these practices in all cultures through time. TCs own backgrounds influence the degree to which they consider events to be either spiritual or ritualistic.

With increased student awareness of cultural appropriation issues, it has become more common for students to express concerns about the subject after the DEC. Students ask questions such as, "Should we have sung that song, it sounded Native?" and "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, and particularly those concerning human relationships with place. Because participants lack awareness of the pan-cultural, archetypic character of many cultural practices, they may worry that they are inappropriately copying another culture. It is reasonable for students to raise these concerns; however, it is more important that any concern does not hinder their ability to be present in the here and now. My task has been to encourage leaders' abilities to avoid these tensions and, if possible, deal with them at another time in order to allow participants the opportunity to attend to the present moment and any new perspective of Fire.

When appropriation concerns first arose, I dealt with them by interjecting at these moments with a response directed at quelling any rising fears. I asked students to think about what cultures they are aware of that do not have a tradition of dance or music to express their understanding of the world or spiritual connection. I asked students to explore if practices such as dance or music are specific to one people or culture, or if they have threads that weave across diverse cultures. I also asked students to reflect upon the reason humans use fire for other occasions, such as the celebratory lighting of a candle. Ultimately, I wanted students to feel comfortable dancing and singing around a fire; by asking students to explore the commonality in a diversity of cultural forms of expression, I hoped they would recognize their own ability to participate in these practices because of the ways in which they broaden personal perspectives.

I began to prioritize students' ability to embrace the DEC by encouraging them to explore their own family practices and heritage. I did this by requesting, on the field camp equipment list, that they bring an example of a celebratory activity from their own cultural ancestry and experiences that they identified as connecting people to the land. During field camp and afterwards, I insured these activities were shared and discussed in the context of DEC. These discussions allowed 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. After one DEC, a student asked,

> 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[ed] 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 DEC and these conversations about expanded consciousness in cultural practices ultimately allow educators to adopt pedagogies that cultivate our character and, in so doing, allow us not only to heal from our industrial-dependent lives but also to find commonality in many historical cultural practices that celebrate the human–land relationship. By recognizing and reclaiming those cultural practices that connect us to the more than human world, we will engage in what Orr (2017) describes as the education required at this time—education that values and stresses our connectedness in the fullest sense of the word.

*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. … This touchstone suggests that we can "wild" our communities when we seek collaboration amongst allies. … Re-wilding our communities is about recognizing the agency within all beings, including human beings, and the ways in which that agency has been ignored or oppressed, and then striving for a positive resolution equitable to all, including the more-than-human world (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, pp. 104–105).

Early in my career, as I sought a deeper understanding of the influence of Fire on civilization, I conceived of and began to develop the DECs I now offer to TCs. Since then, my broad objective has been to share my personal interest in Fire with a wide audience in order to work collectively to build alliances between ourselves and Fire. The TCs in the OEE community have been energetic about and open to supporting this objective. The positive comments I receive each year from students indicate that the DECs have succeeded in offering an "agent of continued discovery" (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p. 20).

I have fairly recently begun to introduce the practice of DECs to outdoor education allies beyond the OEE community, and this larger audience has reacted with strong and positive interest. Over a year after an introductory workshop, followed by a DEC that I gave at the 2018 Council of Ontario Outdoor Educators Annual Conference (COEO), one participant sought me out to thank me for running the event. He said, "the night and ideas shared have really stayed with me, I think about them every time I light a fire." Positive feedback and further inquiries from people in attendance at the presentation I made on the DECs at the 2018, 8th International Outdoor Education Research Conference in Australia resulted in continued conversations with colleagues from around the world who expressed an interest in trying to run a similar activity in their home community.

After receiving an invitation to attend a friend's Sacred Fire Community, I began to understand that there was a growing effort worldwide to build community through rekindling and reintegrating our relationship with Fire. The Sacred Fire Community is a movement that was initiated in part by a Mexican shaman who invokes Grandfather Fire's presence to inspire us to manifest deeper courage and insight in meeting the challenges of our lives (https://www.sacredfire.org/). My own attendance at a Sacred Fire Community event in my home region reinforced for me how sitting around a campfire and dialoguing about our personal experiences of connection with the world is a nurturing experience that is heightened by the simple ritual of acknowledging Fire's presence through offerings. Two central foci of these events, from which attendees ultimately benefitted, are spending *time* with Fire and developing a monthly practice of gathering around Fire.

Two decades of receiving journal entries and papers that articulate how the DECs have encouraged TCs to relate to Fire in new ways have confirmed how the many simple aspects involved in gathering around a campfire help build a sense of community. Fire can be not only a co-teacher but also a co-nurturer, one which supports community building efforts and the development of wild pedagogues. One student described this idea as follows:

> I once read a paper about how important it is to have camp fires 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 camp fires 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 helps us to grow in a way that is similar to a small spark that 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 connection when the DEC provided them with the opportunity to progress as a teacher and clarify where their vision of education still needs to be broadened: "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'" (student 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 quote summarizes how one student planned to take forward the lessons they learned from the DEC:

> 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 in which to examine what often appears to be an intangible relationship with the more-than-human world. Modern Western culture and language encourage the adoption of an anthropocentric philosophy,

one in which we perceive ourselves as separate from more-than-humans. What is more, anthropocentrism commonly leaves us without the ability to attend to phenomena that are not of human origin and production. The DECs described herein illuminate one educator's experience of challenging outdoor-focused TCs to design curriculum that integrates the philosophy of deep ecology through campfire programming.

The TCs' voices confirm that the co-created campfires broaden the participants' perceptions of the world in new and profound ways—ones which centre on Fire as more-than-human. Further, the narrations of the TCs, when viewed through the lens of the six wild pedagogies touchstones, confirm that establishing a greater connection to fire can aid wild pedagogues to enrich their own, and others' connection to the wild. Relating the DEC to the philosophical principles outlined in the Crex Crex Collective's six wild pedagogies touchstones is an example of forwarding an objective (i.e., deeper exploration into human-more-than-human relationships) through publications of mutually supporting experiences.

Educators, regardless of their role (student teachers, environmental and outdoor educators, wild pedagogues), can share the models and methods described above to further develop and create their own wild pedagogies. The touchstones offer wild pedagogues a functional but unorthodox toolbox to help 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.

## Notes

[1] Fire is capitalized herein to encourage this more-than-human phenomenon to be considered co-teacher.

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research projects integrated the art of storytelling and bow-drill Fire construction to explain the rhythm of the land. Her master's degree was obtained from the Audubon Expedition Institute, where she travelled on a bus in a consensus-based community across North America, camping out every night.

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# Friluftsliv in a Pedagogical Context – a Wild Pedagogy Path toward Environmental Awareness

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***Abstract***

*While outdoor education may traditionally be linked to such aspects as personal development and outdoor skills, environmental issues now prompt a consideration of how outdoor education can contribute to pro-environmental changes. In this article, we explore one pedagogical perspective on friluftsliv as an approach to wild pedagogies. Special attention is directed toward friluftsliv's environmental dimension and the possible potential such a quality could have in the development of environmental awareness.*

***Résumé***

*Si, par le passé, l'enseignement en plein air était plutôt, entre autres aspects, axé sur le développement personnel et les aptitudes liées au plein air, les questions écologiques nous forcent maintenant à voir comment il peut participer aux changements pro-environnementaux. Dans le présent article, nous explorons l'un des points de vue envisageant le friluftsliv en tant qu'approche des pédagogies de la nature. La dimension environnementale du friluftsliv y fait l'objet d'une attention particulière, de même que son potentiel éventuel pour favoriser le développement de la conscience environnementale.*

*Keywords:* friluftsliv, wild pedagogies, outdoor education, environmental education, environmental awareness, nature experience, ecophilosophy

*Mots-clés* : friluftsliv, pédagogies de la nature, enseignement en plein air, éducation à l'environnement, conscience environnementale, expérience de la nature, écophilosophie

## Introduction

We are engaging in a continuous struggle to change our ways despite recognizing that we are in the midst of ongoing environmental crises. Perceiving our challenges, we must have hope that future generations can change the course from a non-viable Servoglobe to Gaia (Setreng, 1991). This hope of which we speak was recently reignited when upon our analysis of written material from the end-of-course evaluation of a Fjords and Glaciers outdoor education course. In the students' comments and reflections, they expressed an awareness related to the importance of changing our ways, and seemingly a willingness to do

so. This discovery prompted us to write this article. Our intent is to elaborate on what we refer to as our *ecocentric pedagogical friluftsliv perspective*, which corresponds with ideas from wild pedagogies, and how such a perspective relates to pedagogical work with the environmental dimension. Our ecocentric pedagogical perspective takes as a given that nature is the centre of attention and humans are one species among many, all of whom have equal worth (Washington, et al., 2017). Such a perspective accepts that pedagogical activity and nature are co-dependent (Heggen, 2015), and also that nature is not just a stage where the activity takes place but also a co-teacher (Tordsson, 1993a). We believe we share this ecocentric perspective with wild pedagogies, among other through touchstone one; agency and role of nature as co-teacher (Jickling et al., 2018).

Fjords and Glaciers is a four-month, 30 ECTS-credit outdoor education fall course. In the course we use an ecocentric pedagogical perspective on friluftsliv, adapted from the Nordic tradition and culture. The course provides additional qualifications for international students pursuing various teacher education programs, where outdoor education would be a relevant and valuable addition.

Central to the course are four different multi-day excursions in the following natural environments:

- lakes, water systems, and forests
- sea and fjords
- mountains
- glaciers

Each of these excursions are proximal to the Stord campus, located on the west coast of Norway. The length of each may vary slightly in accordance with the students' abilities. Nevertheless, in each different environment, students' experiences align with Straker et al.'s (2017) observation: "Experiencing a range of outdoor locations provides students with opportunities to learn in diverse ways. In moving away from the familiar students become more cognizant of where they are from, seeing things afresh" (Straker et al., 2017, p. 105). By introducing students to four different, unfamiliar and to some degree, wild, environments (or, types of self-willed nature), the students have the opportunity to experience and reflect upon elements related to wild pedagogies' six touchstones (Jickling et al., 2018), several times and in different settings. In short, they have the opportunity to open their eyes to the wild.

In what follows, we will elaborate on our perspective of pedagogical friluftsliv as a wild pedagogy. To put it another way, we will consider how wild pedagogies is an integrated part of friluftsliv pedagogies. How one perceives the relationship is merely a question about point of view, as "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet" (Shakespeare, 1599). In this epoch of the Anthropocene, what is central to our friluftsliv pedagogy is the environmental

dimension. This article will elaborate on this subject, following which it will present comments and reflections from our students related to this matter. We will conclude with our interpretation of the six touchstones and what we hope to achieve through our wild pedagogy friluftsliv approach to outdoor education. The most important question we may consider as we explore this subject is probably, as Tordsson (1993b, p. 10) so accurately puts it, "Does a real change take place?" Will our educational efforts contribute to a sociocultural change consistent with touchstone five (Henderson, 2020)? These are questions we believe are essential to address in any approach to wild pedagogies.

## Our perspective on pedagogical friluftsliv as a wild pedagogy

As Henderson (2020) writes with regard to the foundational touchstones of wild pedagogies, "these touchstones do not feel new to me" (p. 6). Henderson's sentiment aligns with our own perspective on friluftsliv pedagogies. One implication of these similarities is that our ecocentric pedagogical friluftsliv perspective is not new in and of itself. It could in fact be distilled down to a combination of Faarlund's and Tordsson's ecophilosophical-pedagogical writings related to friluftsliv, in addition to ecophilosophical ideas and concepts from especially Næss and Setreng. These elements are key components in the Fjords and Glaciers course, and are as such emphasized in what follows to elaborate on our perspective.

Faarlund, one of the pioneers of Norwegian friluftsliv, claims that Western culture has become extracted from the home of humankind; he also contends that we belong to a culture that has failed to recreate a sense of free nature as our true home —archetypical nature, recognized by its rhythms and tides (Reed & Rothenberg, 1993). In his writings about what friluftsliv is, as well as why and how we should practise it, Faarlund emphasizes that identification with free nature in accord with the Norwegian tradition of friluftsliv has intrinsic value. In addition, it must also be an approach to challenge the consumptive patterns of thought, values, and lifestyle imposed by modernity (Faarlund, 2003). In order to bring this over in a pedagogical context, Faarlund developed the methodology of *veg-gledning*. His English term for this is *conveyorship*, which relays a way to find "words to share the many aspects of identification with nature" (Faarlund, 2002, p. 19). The task of the conveyors will be to facilitate authentic meetings with self-willed nature, sharing the nature experience, learning from it, and developing. All within the ideology in the tradition of friluftsliv, for the joy of identification as well as a path toward a way of life where nature is the home of culture.

Like Faarlund, Tordsson has practised pedagogical friluftsliv for many years, and he uses the term *nature mentoring* in reference to veg-gledning in friluftsliv (Tordsson, 1993b). Nature mentoring is a concept for a methodology in Friluftsliv education used in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Tordsson (2005) emphasizes

that nature mentoring is about planning friluftsliv trips together in small groups, learning from nature in different situations and discussing experiences. We can draw on those experiences to generalize what we have learnt, which can influence our attitudes, values, and even lifestyle. Tordsson has operationalized nature mentoring into 12 key aspects which the nature mentor should utilize. The focus is on creating a friendship with nature and having a joyful life in self-willed nature through active cooperation and shared responsibility from all members in the group participating on the trip. The 12 key aspects are: 1) size of the group; 2) composition of the group; 3) choice of nature; 4) time; 5) the way of living; 6) integrated experiences; 7) trip according to ability; 8) learning in and from situations in nature; 9) progression; 10) situational leadership; 11) review; and 12) does a real change take place? (Tordson, 2005).

The inspiration drawn from the ecophilosophical ideas and concepts from among other Næss and Setreng are perhaps the strongest advocates for change in our perspective on friluftsliv. Just as wild pedagogies focuses on "responding to the challenges of our time" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 160), so do we in our pedagogy—with inspiration from Setreng's ecophilosophical concepts (Setreng, 2014, 2015) in addition to Næss' *ecosophy* and the deep ecology movement (Næss, 1991). By including these elements in educational activities, teachers also assume the role of activists, working for sociocultural change and building alliances that are similar to those which can be found in touchstones five and six (respectively, socio-cultural change and building alliances and the human community [Henderson, 2020]). According to Næss, "friluftsliv represents a critique of modern technical and complicated lifestyles and advocates a paradigm shift toward a simpler way of life in closer contact with nature" (as cited in Reed & Rothenberg, 1993, p. 9). Næss supports Faarlund's approach to friluftsliv and sees it as a respectful and alternative way of life in self-willed nature that seeks "to touch the earth lightly" (Reed & Rothenberg, 1993, p. 8). The deep ecology movement could thus be seen as an amplification of the values and norms already innate in friluftsliv, constituting a friluftsliv saturated with values and norms, working for a better future.

We like and support the wild pedagogies project, and we consider our perspective to contribute to the perspectives of what we hope will be an ever-growing family—one building alliances together. Wild pedagogies unites all perspectives, working toward the same goals in a reinvigorated effort for change. In the next part of the article, we will expand on how we work with our students toward change within the environmental dimension of friluftsliv.

## Approach to the environmental dimension

As the effects of humankind's activities become more apparent in the Anthropocene, we imagine most programs and courses related to outdoor education have increased their attention on environmental issues and sustainability. This is also

true of the Fjords and Glaciers course, where we leverage friluftsliv's long history: the environmental dimension has been a part of friluftsliv pedagogies for more than 100 years (Abelsen et al., 2019; Faarlund, 2003; Ministry of Climate and Environment, 2020). With that in mind, in this section of the article, we will provide an outline of our approach to the environmental dimension of friluftsliv. Our perspective does not revolve so much around presenting our students with the most up-to-date research, but rather is more about giving students insight into an interconnected construct of pedagogy, ideology, and ecophilosophy. This is one of the ways in which our approach resonates with the wild pedagogies project. We also attempt to use Norwegian sources as much as possible in order to provide our international students with something they might not receive anywhere else. In addition, as readers will discover, our approach is not structured around the six wild pedagogies touchstones per se, albeit in our opinion they are a natural and integrated part of the different elements of our approach.

The environment is one of three interlaced dimensions of friluftsliv, and is especially important in a pedagogical context. The other two dimensions are the *nature experience* and the *quality-of-life* dimension. These dimensions are determined through the analysis of acknowledged definitions of friluftsliv and related writings, in a pedagogical and philosophical context (Nerland, 2021). An example of a definition from this context is, "Friluftsliv is travel and living in close contact with the free nature, while aiming for experiences and adventures" (Tordsson, 1993a, p. 32). This definition may be considered to be both pedagogical and ecophilosophical as it underlines the importance of gaining experience as a foundation for development and learning, while the terms *living*, and *free nature* are used to give directions as to what values should be considered important. Another example could be Faarlund's (1992): "Nature is the home of culture, friluftsliv is a way home" (p. 16). Faarlund has drawn on this remark several times; though it encapsulates so much, one can see that way in which it points to the importance of nature as the origin of the human culture and friluftsliv as a way of living in keeping with nature. The broader ramifications of these two definitions have clear similarities with the ideology and intention found in wild pedagogies and the six key touchstones as clarified by Jickling et al. (2018).

We must now turn our attention to the matter of environmental awareness in order to elaborate on how we approach the environmental dimension of friluftsliv with our students. Respect for nature and environmentally friendly behaviour are key components in friluftsliv. Consider for instance the modest yet profound Norwegian tenet and norm *sporløs ferdsel* (traceless travel), that friluftsliv practitioners are supposed to follow. Both values and normative guidelines are found in this principle. At its simplest, *sporløs ferdsel* could be related to tidying up a campsite properly. If we consider this component in a purely hypothetical sense and at its most profound, *sporløs ferdsel* could have the potential to solve some of the environmental problems the world faces today. *Sporløs ferdsel* is a derivative and simplification of some of the

content in Norway's *Outdoor Recreation Act*, which, since 1957, has secured the historic right of public access as a foundation for friluftsliv (Ministry of Climate and Environment, 2020). This legislation provides not only rights but also responsibilities related to environmental awareness. Friluftsliv activity must be executed in a considerate manner and with due diligence in order to avoid contributing to the deterioration of nature (Ministry of Climate and Environment, 2020).

Concepts and models for environmental education that have already been established could inform friluftsliv pedagogies' approaches to environmental issues. Of the current models in use in Norwegian educational institutions today, education for sustainable development (ESD) and the *environmental staircase model* are probably the most relevant (Heggen, 2015). The latter is central to our approach, and a closer consideration of this model from the perspective of pedagogical friluftsliv will provide further insight into how friluftsliv can contribute to developing environmental awareness. Being a pedagogical model implies that it is a simplification of reality as all models are. To the best of our knowledge, there are no scientific studies demonstrating that this model, in its entirety, automatically leads to environmental awareness. Nonetheless, parts of the model are supported by environmental education research, indicating it could function as a valuable aid, providing sensible suggestion to progression in educational work concerning environmental awareness.

There are several versions of the environmental staircase, but a pyramid-shaped model would be preferable, indicating the construction of a foundation that together with the other levels gradually develop in a dynamic interaction. When used in the context of pedagogical friluftsliv, an advanced version of the model below (Fig. 1) would even include the formation of a personal ecosophy at the top.

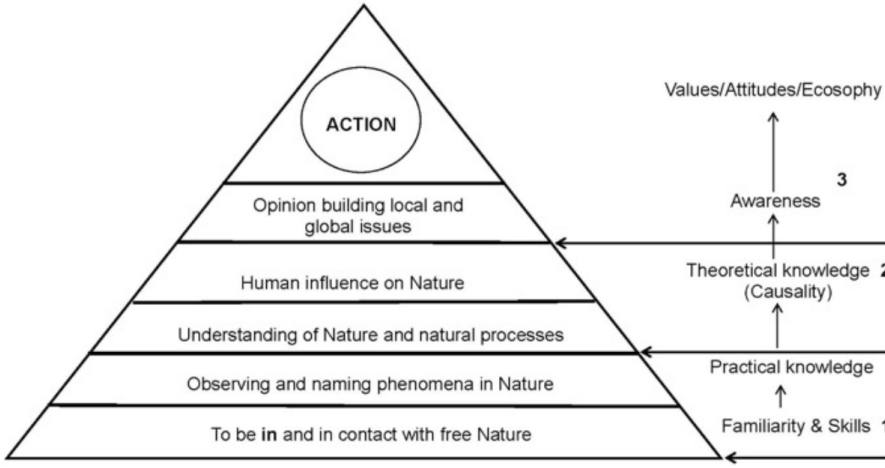


Figure 1. *Advanced Environmental Staircase Model* (Nerland & Nygård, 2019).

One of the advantages of friluftsliv pedagogy can be found in the process of constructing the foundation. According to Jensen (2002), this process can be described as *tumbling and fumbling*. While tumbling and fumbling in nature, students cultivate their relationship with and understanding of nature through experiential learning processes that develop students' skills and practical knowledge . The tumbling and fumbling stage has similarities with touchstone two (complexity, the unknown, and spontaneity [Henderson, 2020]) in so far as it provides students with initial insight into nature's complexity; moreover, it offers them experiences in the unknown and provides them with spontaneous interactions with nature. They start to perceive affordances in nature (Gibson, 1979). The students awareness of nature's complexity is further developed by introducing them to Setreng's (2000) ecophilosophical concept *complexity versus complication*. It is important to prioritize the processes involved in constructing the foundation as it requires time and practice to get on speaking terms with nature (Næss, 1991).

Tumbling and fumbling involves close contact with nature. The combination of humans in activity in nature (the fundamental factors in friluftsliv), cause an emotional engagement associated with the nature experience dimension. This is another of friluftsliv's strengths in an environmental perspective, and Wilson (1984) claims that this emotion lies at the very core to understand the human motivation for protecting nature. Humans care for the things associated with positive emotions. The importance of the emotional perspective is also supported in environmental education research (Ampuero et al., 2015; Green et al., 2015). A part of the pedagogical intention at this stage in the progression is to facilitate the generation of autonomy in nature, and that the bond between students and nature develops in to a relationship of mutual trust. Barratt et al. (2014) suggest that the development of such a relationship with nature is crucial for the progression towards environmental awareness. Its importance is supported by other researchers who state, "Time spent in nature is essential to the development of environmental competencies and that establishing a sense of belonging and deeper relations with place an the more-than-human environment is essential to promoting pro-environmental values and behaviors" (Green et al., 2015, p. 10). The importance of spending time in nature is supported by Beery's (2013) research that shows a significantly higher degree of environmental connectedness among friluftsliv practitioners compared to non-practitioners.

The deep relationship between humans and nature is also central in Faarlund's ecophilosophically inspired friluftsliv pedagogy (Faarlund, 2003). He links this bond in his own way to the term *kjennskap* (Faarlund, 1996). *Kjennskap* is more than just a word. It is in fact a constructed element in Faarlund's pedagogical and ecophilosophical perspective. One could say it is a result of, and interconnected with fumbling and tumbling, but it is a difficult construct to explain in English (Jensen, 2002). A direct understanding could perhaps be something like practical

and experience-based knowledge, but this would omit the value and emotional aspects included in the understanding of this construct. Jensen (2002) seems to link *kjennskap* to a kind of extended nature wisdom, a wisdom that "teaches us to take care not only for ourselves, but even more importantly, for nature" (p. 21). A possible English word for *kjennskap* could perhaps be familiarity. In the same way familiarity between humans can develop into friendship, so could also individual's familiarity with nature through friluftsliv develop emotionally to a friendship with nature. And with friendship comes commitment. You take care of your friends.

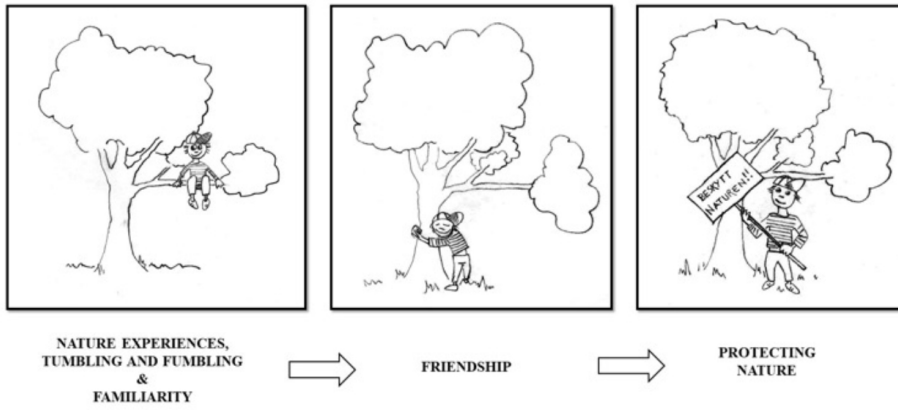


Figure 2. Familiarity becomes friendship and leads to environmental awareness. Illustration by Nils E. Horneland.

Through interaction with nature's biodiversity in pedagogical friluftsliv, the increasing familiarity will also contribute to more theoretical knowledge and a nascent understanding of natural processes. Knowledge about nature and the understanding of natural processes are linked to the middle levels of the environmental staircase model (Fig. 1). Normally educational activities related to these topics would be associated with the natural sciences, but knowledge about nature is also an important aspect in many friluftsliv activities. In example, activities derived from the subsistence living culture where harvesting from nature's resources certainly require knowledge about nature. Kellert's (1980, 1996) research show among other findings that mean knowledge about nature is higher among outdoor practitioners compared to other groups. Nerland (2002) found that especially participating in harvesting activities related to hunting have a significant positive effect on the degree of nature knowledge among different groups of friluftsliv practitioners. Various friluftsliv activities related to harvesting also appear to have a positive effect among the youngest practitioners educators work within the context of pedagogical friluftsliv. A quasi-experimental study

conducted in kindergarten revealed that the use of harvesting activities as an educational framework led to significantly higher knowledge about nature in the experimental group compared to the reference group (Nerland & Nygård, 2019). Nugent & Beames (2015) have also studied the use of foraging in educational activities in kindergarten. Development of environmental knowledge, pro-environmental behaviours and positive attitudes towards nature environments seem to be some of the positive outcome that could be related to foraging as a pedagogical activity. In addition, they point out the importance of transferal of cultural norms between educators and pupils (Nugent & Beames, 2015). That makes the role of what Faarlund (2002) and Jensen (2002) refers to as friluftsliv conwayors important. Outdoor educators need to show what Næss (1991; also Næss & Haukeland, 2005) calls *glow* in order to make outdoor educational experiences as beneficial as possible. *Glow* is associated with quality of life, and enthusiasm and exuberance about what you are doing. All problems could be overcome with sufficient *glow*, and it is as such an important quality to possess working in education as an activist, building alliances for socio-cultural change.

The knowledge about nature that students obtain during pedagogical friluftsliv will contribute to an increased understanding of natural processes and insight in how humans' interaction with nature can affect the environment. Development in these lower and middle levels of the environmental staircase model (Fig. 1) would likely lead to conscious decision-making in relevant environmental issues. Depending on the context, this could involve everything from composting in kindergarten to the climate protests seen recently among students. From the perspective of pedagogical friluftsliv, the highest levels of the environmental staircase model (Fig. 1) could be linked to aspects from ecophilsophy and the encouragement to live according to the friluftsliv slogan *a rich life with simple means*. Inspiration is to some extent drawn from both ideas originated in *deep ecology*, and from the concept of *ecosophy*. The *deep ecology movement* is Næss's (1991) answer to the inherent paradox in sustainable development. A complication in today's approach to sustainable development is that solutions should be found within the paradigm of the western world's economy run, technology based industrial society. There appear to be no will to consider real change related to living standards and the mindset of indefinite economical growth. According to Næss (1991), technological innovation and development are not enough to solve the ecological crisis. It is necessary with a fundamental change in how the interaction between the humankind, nature and society is understood. *Deep ecology* consists therefore of a deeper reasoning and understanding of why it is necessary with considerable changes, what these changes should be, and also basic norms. The relevance of the deep ecology movement's connection with environmental awareness development reaches far beyond Norwegian borders and is renowned internationally (Sandell & Öhman, 2010). Eight points, often called the belt, constitutes the platform of the *deep ecology movement* (Devall & Sessions, 1985). Slightly simplified this platform stipulates the following:

- The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
- Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
- Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
- The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantially smaller human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires a smaller human population.
- Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
- Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
- The ideological change will be mainly that of appreciating life quality rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between bigness and greatness.
- Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try implement the necessary changes.

In a *deep ecology* context, the importance of life and its intrinsic value should be understood in an extended sense. As such, it also adheres to rivers, mountains, and other non-living elements in nature that individuals can identify themselves with through among other subjective nature experiences. Such a personalization of values and norms brings *deep ecology* over to a personal level and is what Næss refers to as *ecosophy* (as cited in Leirhaug, 2003). Næss' own version, *ecosophy T*, is established from his philosophical foundation and inspired by the living conditions in the biosphere (Næss, 1991). He considers friluftsliv, done the right way, could be one path to achieve the goals in *deep ecology* and his *ecosphy T* (Næss, 1991, 1994; Reed & Rothenberg, 1993). A path to socio-cultural change. This view seems to be supported by Quay and Jensen (2018), who argue that Næss' guidelines for friluftsliv, encouraging increased implementation of friluftsliv for the sake of humanity and nature, give friluftsliv an edge in promoting change in everyday life. To achieve this, alliances are needed to spread the culture and tradition of friluftsliv.

*Ecosophy* is by us regarded as the highest level in the environmental staircase (Fig. 1) and environmental awareness development. We certainly do not expect our Fjords and Glaciers students to reach this level during the four months they stay with us. However, the approach we have outlined above is consistently a part of the four multiday excursions and other practical activities and should as such lead to some development both on a personal level and as future teachers. In the following part, we will share some comments and reflections from the students regarding the environmental dimension and their chosen profession.

## Comments and reflections from our students

After a resent alteration of our end-of-course evaluation procedure, we suddenly found ourselves in possession of an unexpected amount of written material from the students. In this material, they had commented on their thoughts and reflections related to different aspects of the course. In the process of analyzing this, with the main intent of getting pointers as to how we could improve the course, we discovered some interesting comments and reflections related to the environmental dimension and the students' future profession as teachers. Scientific value of this material is obviously low since there was no intended scientific context at all. Nevertheless, the selection we share here are the written thoughts from the students themselves and give as such valuable insight. Sentence structure and spelling have been adjusted for the benefit of the reader.

> Male, 19 years, Belgium: My relationship with nature has changed. I have not really been much in real and free nature before. That was a changing factor for me, and really nice to experience. Now I have learned to enjoy nature so much more. And what it has to offer. I respect it more now than I did before.
>
> Male, 23 years, Spain: I definitely feel more at home in nature and feel more secure about teaching outdoors. I feel a greater affection towards nature and all it has to offer in an educational and pedagogical setting.
>
> Female, 29 years, Norway: I now have a lot more knowledge about climate change and how being in nature and learning from nature can be a movement against it (climate change). I also learned how important it is for children to play in nature. I just always had the possibility as a child, so I never thought about how important it actually is.
>
> Female, 25 years, Austria: I am really trying to follow deep ecology in my life and thinking style. And I am trying to be a better person in this world. I think we all should live life as a part of something bigger (nature).
>
> Male, 21, Netherlands: I think it is important to teach people to stay in nature so that they do not lose their connection to it. In that way we can stop destroying it. Children should be able to go to school and be in nature. And learn how to handle a knife and climb around in the trees without anybody being worried.
>
> Female, 23 years, Switzerland: I think it is important for children to play in- and discover nature. Nature is an ideal place for them to learn and what they learn will help us maintain our future. Many children do not know about nature because they have never been in it, they may know theory, but it does not work. Nature offers a lot of content to learn.

The assessment system in the course is not designed to pick up these aspects in the students' experiences. It was therefore a bit of a surprise (positive as such) that the environmental dimension got so much attention in the evaluation. It is also interesting to se how accurate the students are in their comments related

to elements from the course. A future revision of the assessment system is definitely in the cards, but more important is the insight these comments and reflections give us regarding how the students seem to have developed during the course. From a strictly scientific point of view, it would be impossible to conclude with anything, since we have no pre-test, no documented starting point at all. However, we lived with these students for four months, and have witnessed firsthand the progression they have gone through. With that in mind, we interpret what the students express to be an indication of development, both as individuals and as future teachers.

There are of course some variations among the students' level of development. One can get an understanding of where the students are in their process of environmental awareness development if the progression embedded in the advanced environmental staircase model (Fig. 1) is utilized as an indicator. Accuracy is an obvious problem since the selection of comments and reflections presented here revolve around the environmental dimension as a whole, and with additional ties to pedagogical perspective. Nevertheless, we will suggest that most of them seem to be somewhere close to, or within level three, and our Austrian student might even be considered to be in the process of developing a personal *ecosophy*. This highly subjective interpretation will have to be investigated properly in a well-designed scientific study in the coming courses, but it is at least enough to revive our hope for a better future.

## The six touchstones according to our approach to the environmental dimension

The attention to the environmental dimension has increased in our perspective on pedagogical friluftsliv since the Fjords and Glaciers course begun in 2000. This is done as a direct consequence of the growing urgency to act on the self-inflicted threat to our existence. Even though our approach towards change is not directly structured around the six touchstones, we consider them integrated. The environmental staircase model (fig. 1) with affiliated elements from pedagogical friluftsliv and ecophilosophy, as described in the outline above, encompass key elements from wild pedagogies and the six touchstones. In a similar fashion to the way Quay and Jensen (2018) adjust and expand upon the touchstones according to their perspective, so do we according to ours. Based on our pedagogical friluftsliv perspective and approach to the environmental dimension, our interpretation of the touchstones would look something like this (partially extrapolated from a combination of Henderson [2020] and Jickling et al. [2018]):

1) Learning in and from nature in a playful context.
2) Nature is complex, never the same and offers spontaneous opportunities for learning in authentic situations. The opposite of the complicated servoglobe society.

3) Free and self-willed nature is all around us. Start in the local community and progress to the wild. Time in nature is more important than wilderness.
4) Nature experiences through tumbling and fumbling and other pedagogical activities in nature instigate kjennskap. This process requires time, practice, and glowing teachers to facilitate opportunities together with nature.
5) Kjennskap grows awareness about environmental problems and the need for action to change.
6) Ecophilosophy, deep ecology and the development of a personal ecosophy offers a path to change and a new world.

Our interpretation of the wild pedagogies ideology might seem radical, and perhaps unrealistic to some, but the end goals are indeed comparable; we need to change our ways, and the educational system plays a key role to make it happen. Jickling et al. (2018, p. 163) expressed it well when they wrote "… what is required is nothing short of a radical reworking of the relationships that we have with/in the world… And, what is desperately needed is an educational system that can promote and support such change". That brings us back to the topic of socio-cultural change in touchstone five (Henderson, 2020) and Tordsson's question "Does a real change take place?" (Tordsson, 1993b, p. 10). Will our perspective on pedagogical friluftsliv as a wild pedagogy and the approach to the environmental dimension change anything? The easy answer is that we do not know. We cannot be sure. However, if the comments and reflections from our students really are true representations of how they have changed as individuals and future teachers, that would be a good start. Moreover, if they are able to bring this with them into their profession, that would really be something considering the possible ripple effects. A lot of ifs, but our hope is that we through our perspective to some degree will contribute to the last point in the deep ecology platform and play a part in changes for a better future.

## Notes on Contributors

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# *Friluftsliv* and Wild Pedagogies: Building Pedagogies for Early Childhood Education in A Time of Environmental Uncertainty

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***Abstract***

*This article seeks to put two pedagogical orientations, one influenced by* friluftsliv *and the other wild pedagogies, into dialogue. The theoretical section focuses on three key components: childhood, knowledge, and nature. Next, we frame* friluftsliv *and wild pedagogies and connect them to contemporary early childhood education contexts. Here, we offer a short summary of wild pedagogies' six touchstones: Nature as Co-Teacher; Complexity, the Unknown, and Spontaneity; Locating the Wild; Time and Practice; Socio-Cultural Change; and Building Alliances and the Human Community. In this section, we focus on the connections with, and challenges to,* friluftsliv *practices in a pedagogical setting. Then, we examine the possibilities for developing new pedagogies for both wild pedagogies and friluftsliv. The paper offers no definitive conclusion, rather returning to a reflection on the three key components.*

***Résumé***

*Le présent article a pour but d'établir un dialogue entre deux orientations pédagogiques, l'une influencée par le concept de* friluftsliv *et l'autre par les pédagogies de la nature. La section théorique s'articule autour de trois axes : l'enfance, la connaissance et la nature. Les concepts de* friluftsliv *et de pédagogies de la nature sont ensuite expliqués et mis en lien avec les contextes contemporains d'éducation de la petite enfance. Les six pierres d'assises des pédagogies de la nature (la nature comme co-enseignant; la complexité, l'inconnu et la spontanéité; la rencontre avec la nature; le temps et la pratique; le changement socioculturel; la création d'alliances et la communauté humaine) y sont brièvement résumées. Dans cette section, nous nous concentrons sur les liens avec les pratiques de* friluftsliv *en contexte pédagogique et les difficultés qui empêchent de les appliquer. Par la suite, nous examinons les possibilités d'élaborer de nouvelles approches à la fois pour les pédagogies de la nature et le concept de* friluftsliv. *L'article ne livre aucune conclusion définitive, mais ramène plutôt la réflexion sur les trois grands axes.*

*Keywords:* friluftsliv, wild pedagogies, childhood, knowledge, nature

*Mots-clés* : friluftsliv, pédagogies de la nature, enfance, connaissance, nature

## Introduction

This article seeks to put two pedagogical orientations into dialogue with each other—one influenced by the Norwegian concept of *friluftsliv* and the other a much more recent innovation called wild pedagogies. The impetus for this arises from a wild pedagogies gathering held in Norway in the summer of 2019, where it became clear that there were important overlaps and noticeable differences between these two concepts and that bringing them together might enhance both. The aim was, and is, to create a richer set of pedagogical practices and educational frameworks to address education and educators' struggles with the environmental and social challenges of the Anthropocene.

*Friluftsliv* is the older, more sophisticated, and more expansive participant in this encounter. It is more than just a pedagogy and has long played a central role in Norwegian culture. There is no direct English translation for *friluftsliv* and all that such a concept entails; for our purposes, *friluftsliv* includes both free-air-life and free-life-under-the-open-air. Said differently, it includes two concepts of freedom: one is a free and open nature and the other is a free and open life in nature for humans. Because there isn't a definitive word in English for this concept and the word *friluftsliv* is such an important part of Norwegian cultural traditions (Faarlund, 2007; Gurholt, 2008; Henderson & Vikander, 2007; Reed & Rothenberg, 1993), we shall simply use the Norwegian word throughout the paper.

The official definition of *friluftsliv,* offered by the Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment (2016), is that it emphasizes non-competitive outdoor activities on uncultivated land (nature), such as mountaineering, hiking, and skiing; it also aims attention at harvest activities, such as fishing, hunting, and berry picking. The *Act of Outdoor Recreation* ensures the right to roam unrestricted by private property ideas that be more recognizable in Canada (Outdoor Recreation Act, 1957; Ministry of Climate and Environment, 2016). Although *friluftsliv* was not originally directed at educational settings, today it is well-established in the national curricula, running from early childhood education through to the end of secondary school (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, 2020).

Despite the official definition clearly delineating what *friluftsliv* encompasses, its traditions, the formal framing, and the philosophical aspects make it a concept open to different interpretations. The authors of this paper, for example, see the value of developing an understanding of the practical implications of humans' co-existence with other living beings and a joy of being in nature (Næss, 1995) as central to early childhood pedagogy and as a vital part of our definition of the concept.

Wild pedagogies is a more recent and more specifically pedagogical framework than *friluftsliv*, which means it comes with fewer examples and less controversy. Currently, wild pedagogies is comprehensively described in a book bearing the same name—*Wild Pedagogies* (Jickling et al., 2018a). This pedagogical orientation arose in response to worries about the overuse of centralized control in modern western culture's relationship to the natural world and, by extension,

to public schooling in the global north. However, wild pedagogies and *friluftsliv* pedagogies, both developed from traditions of nature connectedness and ecosophy, share concerns about the ongoing marginalization of the other-than-human, as well as the expanding crises related to the environment. Moreover, they both share concerns for connections with nature and freedom. Thus, in this paper, *free* from *friluftsliv* and *wild* from wild pedagogies will be seen as being intertwined. Additionally, while *friluftsliv* has a pedagogical tradition that is aimed at developing skills, it also strives to improve human connections with nature (Næss, 1993; Hallås & Heggen, 2018); similarly, wild pedagogies also "aims to renegotiate what it means to be human in relationship with the world by engaging in deep and transformational change" (Wild Pedagogies, 2021).

All four contributors to this paper are engaged in working with children, teachers, outdoor pedagogy, and *friluftsliv*. Part of our interest in the work of this paper is that we believe that the development of new pedagogies in the Anthropocene is necessary and will require creativity, sharing ideas, crossing unusual boundaries, and an active criticality. It is in that spirit that the paper is offered. It not as a prescription of practices but rather as a contribution to the ongoing development of new and more ecologically aware and socially just pedagogies for these challenging times.

The paper begins with a framing of *friluftsliv's* pedagogical approach to understanding early childhood knowledge and views of nature. In this section, we also introduce ideas about nature and pedagogy that are derived from the Norwegian eco-philosopher, Arne Næss. We emphasize Næss because of his contribution to the translation of *friluftsliv* practices into pedagogy; his thinking also influenced wild pedagogies. We then bring wild pedagogies and *friluftsliv* into dialogue. This will be done by presenting a short summary of each of wild pedagogies' six pedagogical touchstones in a way that illustrates components of these touchstones that both connect with, and present challenges to, *friluftsliv* practices. We provide practical examples of these touchstones as we bring wild pedagogies and *friluftsliv* into dialogue and consider the fruits of this conversation. The paper will not end with a conclusion, for in many ways this work is a beginning; instead, it will gather together and reflect on key threads. The aim of this article is not to frame all possible connections between wild pedagogies and *friluftsliv* but rather to see how they might "play together"—how they might enhance, clarify, challenge, disagree, and support one another. To narrow the scope, we place a particular emphasis on early childhood education, knowledge, and nature.

### *Theoretical Background*

The theoretical framing below focuses particularly on how we as teachers in *friluftsliv* interpret and understand childhood, knowledge, and nature. Yet, reference will be made to wild pedagogies as well in order to begin the process of bringing these concepts into conversation with each other.

*Early Childhood*

Historically in Norway, children being in nature has been seen as a positive (Dyblie-Nilsen, 2009). Up to 100 years ago, it was common for children in rural areas to partake in everyday work outdoors, such as harvesting, looking after animals and—as in the Indigenous Sámi culture—living a nomadic life following reindeer. Even in the city, children up to a century ago spent long hours in nature-based free play (i.e., with little specialized equipment). As a result, these cultural traditions prioritized one's relationship to, and immersion in, the natural world.

Even earlier, pedagogical theorists such as Rousseau and Fröbel, advocated outdoor educational time, and influenced the creation of early childhood institutions that were committed to being outdoors (Borge et al., 2003). The result is that, even today, it is not unusual for children to spend multiple hours outside each day (Moser & Martinsen, 2010) In many kindergartens and primary schools in Norway, there are designated campsites and outdoor classrooms within walking distance of the institutional buildings. The practice of *friluftsliv* varies for different age groups, but at the early childhood level, activities can include: harvest-based *friluftsliv* (e.g., picking berries and mushrooms) intertwined with play-based outdoor activities; more contemplative *friluftsliv* practices, where the focus is on being present, having time, being mindful, and experiencing nature; and a more active *friluftsliv*, with a focus on what might be seen as more adventurous activities (Lundhaug & Neegaard, 2013).

At the early childhood level, the formal framing of being outdoors and what we understand as children's *friluftsliv* comes from the Framework Plan for Content and Tasks of Kindergarten. In this framework, *friluftsliv* includes being outdoors on a daily basis throughout the year and giving children opportunities for play in challenging yet safe environments (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 7). *Friluftsliv* in this setting is more than just having the natural world as a backdrop for activities; it is not simply a part of Norwegian cultural traditions that value being outdoors (Ministry of Climate and Environment, 2016), but also about playing in and with nature, building a connection with an intrinsically valuable world and its myriad beings.

At this point, wild pedagogies is too young to be positioned within any early childhood pedagogical framework, especially since wild pedagogues actively resist the desire to control the learners and the outcomes that appears to underlie many frameworks (Jickling et al., 2018b). However, we are drawn to wild pedagogies' interests in allowing learners the freedom to explore, to discover as they wish, to have the rights of full citizenship, and to not be entirely controlled by institutional or cultural norms, learning outcomes, or proscribed goals. Wild pedagogies is a convergence of ideas and a reclamation of language about wilderness, education, and the complexity of freedom in the context of an emerging geological epoch—the Anthropocene.

*Knowledge*

At some point, all pedagogical orientations need to deal with the question of knowledge. What is it? How does it grow? How is it shared, transferred, and made available to others? The challenge for this paper is that, across *friluftsliv* pedagogies, there is a range of epistemological underpinnings; by contrast, for wild pedagogies, the epistemological commitments are understated. With this in mind, the best we can offer here is an incomplete frame for both *friluftsliv* and wild pedagogies, while noting that there would likely be a benefit to thinking more deeply about these questions of knowledge and to listening to each other while doing so.

For many, *friluftsliv* seeks to move beyond what is understood as the standard, mainstream focus on rational, reductionistic, and scientific forms of knowledge. In order to do this, some *friluftsliv* educators and theorists have turned their attention to Aristotle's three forms of knowledge: *episteme, techne*, and *phronesis* (Høyem, 2016; Sæle et.al., 2016; Tordsson, 2014). We see these as important and even necessary for the education of the whole child; we also consider them to be complementary to the basic principles of *friluftsliv*. The first, *episteme*, aligns with the aforementioned scientific and theoretical knowledge. We see this form as ultimately necessary to wild pedagogies and/or *friluftsliv*, but insufficient on its own for achieving these concepts' many aims.

The second, *techne,* is the knowledge related to craft, skills, and artistry. In *friluftsliv*, and ecosophy for that matter (we pick this concept up below), *techne* appears in the importance *friluftsliv* places on knowing how to use local plants, make food, carve, or dye wool, for example. Recognizing plant species may be part of this knowledge, but so is knowing how they smell and taste, where they grow, and what they require to flourish. This is a view of knowledge that is not only open to skills and crafts but extends to embodied perceptions of nature as well.

The third form of knowledge, *phronesis,* is often described as practical wisdom. In some ways, *phronesis* is the biggest move away from most institutionalized schooling. For *friluftsliv, phronesis* includes knowledge related to the ethical aspects of being part of the natural world, and the accompanying respect for and joy of that positioning. Yet, there is also a concern within this form of knowledge with what is the right (as in, morally correct) within the larger culture. For *friluftsliv* and ecosophy, the independent thinking that is encouraged through an education for self-cultivation— *bildung*—has the potential to support the renegotiation of what it means to be human in relationship with the natural world. *Bildung* is a German concept referring to both the process and the product in and of education. *Bildung* sees the practice of education as complex and occurring in relations with the world (Klafki, 2007). In *friluftsliv,* both humans and more-than-humans play important, even equitable roles in buildung.

The pedagogy of fumbling and tumbling provides one example of how *friluftsliv* pedagogy tries to gather all three of Aristotle's knowledge principles

(Jensen, 2007). According to *friluftsliv,* children are allowed to explore and solve problems (*episteme*) on their own (through play), ask questions, and have first-hand experiences. Such actions can include developing the skills (*techne*) to climb a tree, track an animal, or find their own path through the forest (Jensen, 2007, p. 102). Implicit however in all this seemingly undirected fumbling and tumbling is, for Norwegians, the possibility to gain wisdom (*phronesis*)—the wisdom of knowing what one's body can and can't do, how much weight a tree branch can take, or where one might find a lemming's home.

Reading between the lines, we might characterize the epistemology of wild pedagogies as being diffuse, incomplete, interconnected, and surprising. Because of its commitments to nature as teacher and to more-than-human agency, knowing becomes the purview of more than just human actors, which in turn diffuses it beyond our own species. This implies that any knowing is necessarily incomplete, for what does it mean to know the sun when any single human has access to such a limited range of sun-knowing? How does the hungry western red cedar know the sun? What meanings are being made by the krill that mass near the surface of the sun-drenched ocean? What is the cat contemplating as it rolls over and paws a sun beam? Wild pedagogical commitments to activism, social justice, and shared projects suggest that knowledge has fluidity to it in such a way that it is interconnectable and interrelatable, though clearly not all one. Finally, with ideas surrounding spontaneity and the agency of the natural world, one gets a sense that knowledge is filled with surprises; it is much less concrete than many teachers might expect.

### *Nature*

One significant inspiration for how nature is understood in a *friluftsliv* setting has been the work of philosopher Arne Næss. In his book, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (1989, Næss posits that nature and all-natural beings have intrinsic value (Næss & Rothenberg, 1989). And, he continues, it is through childhood experiences with and amongst these valued others that humans can come to care for the more-than-human.

Næss created five guidelines for an ethically responsible *friluftsliv*: 1) respecting all life and respecting landscapes; 2) providing the opportunity for people to have deep, varied, and rich experiences in and with nature; 3) placing minimal strain upon the natural world while also seeking to maximize self-realization; 4) having the opportunity to live a natural lifestyle; and 5) making time for adjustment when moving from an urban setting to more natural ones (Næss & Rothenberg, 1989).

We find these guidelines interesting as pedagogical ideas and practices for *friluftsliv* inspired Norwegian educational institutions. While Næss wrote these guidelines more than 40 years ago, they are as important as ever today. He rejected the idea of using technical solutions to overcome environmental

challenges, and he prioritized the development of a profound relationship with nature, which he called deep ecology (Næss, 1993; Næss & Rothenberg, 1989). Næss warned readers not to see these guidelines as static, and indeed when he revisited *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* two decades after the book was first published, he welcomed new interpretations and discussed what he saw as new contributions to the field. He added in this open invitation to the growth of his philosophy that, even if he does not agree with everything others contribute, he celebrates the importance of diversity and acknowledges that differences in culture and lifestyles may call for different solutions (Næss, 1995). These ideas have both risen from and inspired the development of *friluftsliv* within a pedagogical context in Norway. It is these ideas of building relations, of shared flourishing, of enacted freedom, and of a vibrant and agential natural world that resonate with wild pedagogies.

### *The Six Touchstones of Wild Pedagogies and* Friluftsliv: *Descriptions and Interpretations*

In the following paragraphs, we provide a concise summary of each of the six wild pedagogies touchstones that are described comprehensively in Jickling et al's (2018a) seminal book. Each summary, which has the aim of helping the reader better understand wild pedagogies, is followed by an example drawn from the authors of this article's own experiences working in Norwegian *friluftsliv* educational settings. The aim is to inspire further considerations of how *friluftsliv* and wild pedagogies tumble, fumble, challenge, and support each other. The methodology for this paper is predominantly a theoretical and exegetical analysis. Yet, in order to sustain the dialogue and do justice to education as a practice, we have chosen to include direct examples, micro-case studies, and narratives from our own experience. The hope is that such an approach both reflects theoretical and practical aspects of the project and better allows us to consider new, shared, and changing pedagogies.

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

This touchstone implies that the natural world is a vibrant, active, agential place that is worth listening to, attending to, and learning from. Accepting this touchstone and acting on it likely means that educators will spend more time outdoors—a practice that links *friluftsliv* and wild pedagogies. In the outdoors, different pedagogical possibilities may appear and new affordances may be engaged. At another level, this touchstone has significant implications for what knowledge is and how learning happens. If nature becomes a co-teacher, then the human as the sole possessor, arbiter, and conveyor of knowledge is de-centred, and learning becomes a shared project that is no longer complete or human-based.

*On a typical cold and rainy day, 1- to 3-year-old toddlers from a Norwegian preschool went hiking. Just outside of the fence, Phillip, 2.5 years, proclaimed, "Earthworm!" Everyone gathered around it, and after a while, Phillip picked it up from the asphalt and carried it with him in his mitten. Every now and then, he checked that it was OK. The children waded in a stream, sat in meltwater, stumbled over tree roots, enjoyed a long lunch, and hiked all the way back (over tree roots but faster through the stream). Phillip kept checking his mitten. The last thing I saw as he re-entered the preschool premises was the tail of a little earthworm.*

*The next day, Phillip hiked with a slug in his hand. The third day, he passed me with a larva: "No, this is not a worm," he told me.*

Children's *friluftsliv* in the Norwegian educational context is about play and the exploration of nature. Every landscape offers potential for children's learning, including hills for sliding, rocks for climbing, or berry bushes for picking. If children can play freely or observe the environment, they may see the possibilities for experience and exploration. In the example above, Phillip learned where and how his treasured animals lived, as well as their morphology.

If we see nature as a co-teacher, we need to engage and understand more-than-human life. In our example, Phillip found his earthworm/slug/larva because he was actively looking for something. He knew that nature would provide opportunities for finding small treasures. It is hard to know what fascinated him, but it was clear that he took good care of the small animals he found; he also started crying if he lost any of them. By letting Phillip follow his curiosity in an environment or at a certain place, his teachers gave space to nature to be present and to teach. To include nature as it occurs during different *friluftsliv* activities has long had a name in Norwegian pedagogical *friluftsliv*: the dead mouse pedagogy. The aim is to build upon what appears in nature or what nature brings forward, be it a dead mouse or a living earthworm. For the human teacher, this means releasing control and letting nature come forward as co-teacher. But this does not mean that the human teacher is abdicating all responsibility. We have all seen children step away from the "slimy, icky" worm or crush the offending slug under their heels, either as expressions of power over others or as a means to hurt them. Yet, beneath any particular individual behaviour there are often cultural norms that support the violence and distancing over the connecting and sharing of space. Here wild pedagogies postulates the possibility of human teachers who are actively and critically engaging in cultural change.

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

This touchstone prioritizes the unpredictable as it pushes back against the modernist desire to control and contain. Such an approach to learning allows for a diversity of voices and possibilities that are often marginalized or even lost in environments where standardized, measurable, and definable outcomes are the focus. For educators, this involves risk. It means fostering complex situations and

emerging curriculum design and that resist a focus on simply positing "desired learning outcomes" and pushing students towards those chosen particulars. By acting on this touchstone, educators are endorsing the suggestion that the world does not work in a clean, predictable, linear fashion—and that something important is lost when we assume it does.

> *A group of 3- to 5-year-olds hiked to one of their places in the forest. There, they know which plants taste good, which rocks are best for climbing, and which logs are greatest for balancing. After a while, the children became less active. At this point, a teacher exclaimed, "Who wants to find treasures?" With a group of eager children, she walked ten metres and turned a rock over. For the next hour, she and the children were buzzing around the critters under the rock, asking questions about what they saw and pondering the creatures and their actions.*

Wild nature is rich with life and possibility, and most nature meetings provide learners with the opportunity to experience this. *Friluftsliv* encourages us to get close to this rich and complex life of nature, and to do it in the simple ways provided in the example above. In *friluftsliv*, the act of going on a short hike, gently removing a stone to experience the life underneath, or quietly observing the immediate surroundings moves us closer to nature and allows us to revel in its complexity. Also, enjoying the aesthetic experiences of the bird song, or the feelings by the campfire, allows space for learners to follow their own interests and for nature to step forward as a co-teacher. These practices are seen as important factors influencing our relationship with nature.

Within an educational context, it is important to resist the urge to frame and organize activities too tightly. It is also crucial to emphasize the early childhood teacher's role in not controlling but at times meditating children's play and exploration. A teacher needs a well-developed toolbox of pedagogical practices and didactical tools to be able to: respond to possible situations and outcomes of children's play and exploration; be prepared for the spontaneous outburst from a child; support children's emotions in meeting nature; and be humble, allowing space for unexpected learning and outcomes.

In touchstone #1, we discussed how accepting nature as co-teacher meant giving up some control. Accepting a complex nature as co-teacher implies that the (human) teacher needs to accept a higher risk as well. A teacher that brings children (or students) outdoors knows that they cannot control what the children will encounter that day or how the children will respond to those encounters. Increasing the complexity of the experience intensifies the risk that the human teacher does not have all the answers. In the example above, the teacher, by turning the rock over (both literally and figuratively), opened up the possibilities for the children to experience nature's complexity and to enhance their sense of wonder and joy. She also willingly risked decentring herself as the "expert" knower for those moments in which the children asked questions that she could not answer. When we permit ourselves the experience of wondering along

with children, we all learn together; we learn from nature, and we discover that humans don't know everything. The willingness of the human teacher to take risks, move from the position of expert, and not know the answer is embedded in *friluftsliv* as well as in wild pedagogies.

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

This touchstone brings an active criticality into wild pedagogies by cautioning against both the cultural constraints of much of modern public education and the colonial orientations that modernity has toward the natural world. These cautions challenge educators to think about their own privileges, including those related to the natural world. They call on educators to be constantly aware of how the language and metaphors they use, the structures they work within, the tools they employ, and the ways they teach can either challenge problematic status quos or sustain them. This touchstone also suggests that the wild can be located anywhere: in rural and the urban places and also within individual beings. However, this wild presence is often obfuscated by cultural and colonial overlays. Thus, educators will be challenged to facilitate encounters with the wild that respond in critical ways to pedagogical obstacles and culturally normalized orientations.

> *On an excursion with students to a beach located on a small peninsula outside Oslo, we encountered a former student on a trip to the same area, but her group of children were playing in the beach volley sandpit. The area had rich climbing possibilities, a large diversity of costal birds, and a shoreline full of seaweed, shells, snails, crabs, and sea life. We asked her why they were playing here, 50 metres up, and not down at the water's edge. She replied that they were not allowed to play so close to the water because of the safety regulations imposed by the kindergarten owner.*

*Friluftsliv* is often defined as activities and nature experiences located on uncultivated land; yet, out of necessity, many of our pedagogical practices are in urban areas. One consequence of this is the importance of keeping uncultivated areas available for children's exploration. However, there is a second challenge implicit in *friluftsliv* here, which wild pedagogies makes explicit: to locate the wild in whatever place is available. Wild places can be the unforeseen, the messy and complex often with a rich biodiversity, and can be found in the borders, edgelands, brown fields, and between built landscapes and natural areas (Faerley & Roberts, 2012). Moving along a road or a path with children involves more than simply walking from A to B. When they are allowed, children move up and down, and they explore and play. Locating the wild is a mode of seeing and being in place, of having an openness to its wildness.

Because the teacher in our example didn't challenge the imposed rules, the result was that the children did not encounter the wild where ocean and land meet, where crabs live, and where their exploration might have been at its best. The potential for a wild encounter—for discovering something

unexpected, recognizing something wild in oneself, and learning from nature—is likely more present in the edge-lands and areas near the ocean than in the volleyball pit. In addition, when teachers do not challenge the status quo, children also learn the culturally expected ways of being, and their own wildness becomes hidden bit by bit. To be thoughtfully critical of the rules and let go of some control not only makes room for children to discover the wild; it also sanctions their ability to question and resist the assumptions of their culture. The critical wild pedagogies educator is always encouraged to remember those troublesome boundaries of enculturation. The desire to control or tame others and the wild—in natural places and in ourselves—is ever-present, and we would do well to be attentive.

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

This touchstone focuses on two key discussions: process and practice. Both discussions have the ultimate objective of understanding how to build and maintain relationships with the natural world. The first discussion, process, suggests that maintaining relationships with nature is done through spending significant amounts of time in specific places. A new pedagogy would allow the children to be immersed for longer periods in the more-than human-world. But the push goes beyond this; it asks us to reconsider how we conceptualize time. It asks us to find ways to slow down, listen in different ways to our own and others' bodies, and immerse ourselves in what some have called deep time. The second discussion, practice, has a pair of meanings: The first implies the activity of one's pedagogy, that is, the *how* of one's teaching, and the assumptions and habits that motivate that work; the second asks us to take on the work of building a rich relationship with the more-than-human world around us as a kind of discipline, that is, "a practice"—a project that requires commitment, effort, and ongoing attention.

> *For a nature preschool in a rural area, time and practice are central parts of how they engage with nature. On one full-day outing in the early fall, a group of preschool children went to a spruce forest to pick mushrooms, climb, and play. The terrain for that day's excursion was chosen because of its potential for finding mushrooms, its large boulders, and its wild steepness. Although the teachers had devised plans for the day, they left the time schedule open so as to show the ways in which they valued the children's initiative. There was time for repetitive climbing on the boulders and up the trees. Additionally, the children had the opportunity to practise harvesting and cutting mushrooms under adult supervision, and there was lots of play and exploration. The goal for the day was not to reach one specific place but rather to spend time "on the move," seizing opportunities that arose on the way.*

Time is important in so far as children need it to develop connections, even though they often appear able to engage with, and immerse in, natural environments more easily than adults. In the above example, the children

frequently moved between their home environment and the outdoor setting. For both wild pedagogies and *friluftsliv*, time to play, practise, and explore is crucial. And yet, wild pedagogies appears to be pushing time and practice further by challenging the idea of linear time itself. Wild pedagogies is interested in learning to encounter geological, even deep, time (Cohen, 2015). It is also committed to recognizing and living into cyclical time—that is, it is dedicated to encouraging learners to note, for example, the changing seasonal patterns of the feathers on a "common loon," or to immerse themselves in the natural dialogue in such a way that time disappears. For *friluftsliv,* time and practice aim to connect the learners to place and to nature. Recurring encounters build children's relationships with both place and the more-than-human world (Jørgensen, 2014, 2015) and give them opportunities to make discoveries, explore, practise skills, and put work into building their practice of being-in-relationship.

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

This touchstone begins with a radical premise: Much current educational practice, particularly that which rests on the same theoretical footing as modern western culture, is anti-environmental. Relatedly, this touchstone is rooted in the belief that maintaining the status quo or merely tinkering with the edges of current education will not be enough to change human–nature relationships or limit the destruction being wrought by some humans today. Such a touchstone demonstrates that wild pedagogies sees itself as a project of cultural change. Education is thus an explicitly political act that places the teacher in the role of activist—one who recognizes that the choices being made in the classroom have explicit and implicit consequences for how learners understand themselves, their role as humans, and the importance of the natural world. This touchstone also recognizes that the future is no longer easily predictable; children are not growing up into the same world that their grandparents did. The educator needs to prepare them differently, potentially helping them to develop such skills as: the ability to respond to uncertainty; creativity; willingness to engage in community toward shared outcomes; and so on.

> *Each child in a group of kindergarten students was engaged with beetles. They built "housing" for them out of leaves and cones, and they gave each of the beetles pet names. However, they never trapped them, instead following their movements from a distance and actively trying not to disturb their way of life.*

The children in this example seem to have understood that the lives of these creatures, even though they differed significantly from their own lives, was important. The children were allowed to explore over time, and they encountered these small animals (Hallås & Heggen, 2018) regularly, always fascinated by their appearance. When new children entered the group, they learned from the others about how to engage, and they were taught the rules

about respect and care for the beetles. A culture, or even counter-culture, of care was being created—one that honoured the place of the beetles and their rights, and shunned violence as a form of encounter.

> "Do you want to meet Tina?"
>
> I was visiting a student in a kindergarten internship, and this was the question that both the particular student and the children in general asked almost immediately after my arrival. I did not know who Tina was, but I said yes anyway. The children ushered me into the woods near their classroom. We moved carefully through the trees, eventually stopping by a stone. There, they introduced me to Tina: a viper, taking a sunbath. This was their shared place, snake and children and instead of restricting access the human teacher had taught the children how to be respectful and to deal safely with Tina.

Both wild pedagogies and *friluftsliv* can be understood as "counter-cultural" movements with regard to the destruction of nature. Together, they might open new paths for educational practices, working for ecological and social justice while simultaneously empowering children to seek new solutions to myriad challenges facing humanity. Bringing *friluftsliv* and wild pedagogies together may help educators to think more deeply about pushing back against the environmentally troublesome cultural norms in their settings. At the same time, they will participate in developing a new geostory that focuses on the needs and realities of their local places.

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

This touchstone seeks to remember the importance of building strong alliances and flourishing multi-species communities while at the same time reminding us not to forget the potential range of human allies that could be involved. The implicit goal is to push against the challenges of individualization and alienation and to resist the colonial move to separate marginalized groups, be they human or other-than, and place them at odds with each other. Here justice is seen both an ecological and a social movement and much can be gained by working together. To create flourishing equitable communities, we need to listen to and learn from each other. In practising these, we benefit from the support and care of others, the multiple perspectives that become available, the bigger platform that alliances can create, and the art of living differently together. Educators have the opportunity to work with and learn from myriad others, including environmental educators and critical race theorists, community organizers and experiential educators, popular educators and gender theorists, and beyond.

Involvement in the local community and its politics can be an important site of learning for children. In the *friluftsliv* tradition, early childhood has tended to be a time of limiting conflict, of protecting the child from the world's troubles, and of allowing them to love nature. We wonder if such practices indicate that

we are too afraid of conflict and that, no matter the attempted protections, children know and experience more of the violence, inequities, and problems of their local places than we are willing to accept. When we recognize these points, we begin to unleash the potential for careful and conscious work to be done to expand activism and human alliances in Norway. One example might be building more expansive relationships with the Indigenous Sàmi, learning from their cultures and ways of being. Learning about Sàmi culture is already part of the kindergarten curriculum, and most celebrate the national day of the Sàmi people on February 6th. Inspired from what has been learned from the Sàmi culture, the use of *lavvos* (traditional Sàmi tents) or *gamme* (traditional Sàmi dwellings made of wood and turf) is often found in Norwegian early childhood institutions today. Outside of this demonstration of respect and influence, there are few texts that teach non-Indigenous students about the Sàmi. There is also limited access to language and Elders, and there are few active interactions where children might gain significant exposure to the ways and people of the Sàmi. Building alliances could mean making Sàmi culture, language, and ways of being a much more significant part of Norwegian public education (for an example, see: Nutti, 2017). This in turn would create cross-cultural understandings, foster rich relationships, and potentially create a more socially inclusive system while expanding the creative possibilities for all learners.

## By Way of an Ending: Three Key Threads and Some Further Conversations

Knowing that offering a conclusion at this point would be preposterous, we have chosen to return our focus to the three important threads that have drawn our attention: view of children, view of nature, and view of knowledge. There are, admittedly, many more possibilities, but we will leave these until next time.

### *View of Children*

Both wild pedagogies and *friluftsliv* see children's encounters with, and intertwining in, the more-than-human as essential to learning and life. Drawing on the guidelines for ecological and ethical *friluftsliv* (Næss, 1993, Næss & Rothenberg, 1987; Næss, 1995), one of the aims of education is to give children deep, varied, and rich nature-based experiences. Access to nature within walking distance of early childhood institutions is important. Both *friluftsliv* and wild pedagogies highlight doing this without causing undue pain and suffering on more-than-humans. This position has interesting implications for human teachers as they will have to decide when children's learning needs to be tempered because of the impact that learning might have on the places and other beings involved. If the teacher takes the intrinsic rights of all beings, their freedom to self-realize, and the decentring of the human seriously, then there will most certainly be times when children might not be allowed to touch,

turn over, examine, or even play in certain areas. The costs resulting from the damage to the life, lives, and locales of a community of more-than-humans are obviously more significant than the beneficial learnings gained by a few children. However, we see these "restrictions" as an act of teaching different, perhaps humbler, ways of being human in the world.

*Friluftsliv* as early childhood pedagogy starts from the premise that children are different from adults. This suggests that there is the potential to engage more easily in the work of cultural change that wild pedagogies is advocating. If children are seen as not yet fully socialized into the existing norms and values of the adult society, then they are potentially more open to learning from, hearing from, and being influenced by the more-than-human world. Such flexibilities might be seeds for growing a more ecologically just society as the children may contribute to a sociocultural change through their alliances with both nature and various adult communities.

Another interesting difference between children and adults is in the way children perceive time, and in how their perception of it allows them to re-engage more quickly with nature, when given the opportunity. It is apparent that this question of time is important for both *friluftsliv* and wild pedagogies, and yet there are interesting differences in these discussions that might open further pedagogical possibilities for both. If children are indeed able to re-engage more quickly, as proposed by *friluftsliv*, then perhaps they are also able to experience time itself differently from the linear time that afflicts, even oppresses, so many of their parents.

By accepting children as different and worth attending to, and by recognizing childhood as valuable in its own right, the Norwegian early childhood culture—including pedagogies of *friluftsliv*—positions children as empowered individuals, and even citizens. In *friluftsliv*, this includes seeking the experience of a freer, more self-directed childhood (Wold et al., 2020). Viewing children as empowered, acknowledging their influence, and allowing them status in their local context opens the possibility for their agential contribution to an expanded culture (Heggen et al., 2019). In this way, the assumed hierarchy in western society between adult and child is challenged. Yet, change does not happen simply by taking children outdoors. Change involves the thoughtful work of critical teachers who are able to self-reflect and make explicit these new values in their practices with children (Blenkinsop & Ford, 2019). So, while *friluftsliv* opens up space for children as agential and empowered, and while it accepts that nature has intrinsic value, the advantage to adding wild pedagogies to the discussion is that it potentially opens further possibilities for hierarchies to be challenged. Nowhere is this truer than with regard to the politics implied in accepting nature's agency and the potential to actually change culture itself.

### *View of Nature*

Human relations with the natural world vary dramatically across cultures, and

it is apparent that both *friluftsliv* and wild pedagogies take the modernist, neoliberal, scientistic, capitalist, anthropocentric position of the global north as the location of their critiques. But even within that purview, *friluftsliv* has a historical longevity and context that might require updating in light of changing worldviews and perceptions of nature. Part of the challenge too is that the meaning and implications of *friluftsliv* itself are malleable making its positionality in a modernist frame hard to clearly discern.

An example of changing worldviews in relation to the more-than-human might be in order here. As this paper has already mentioned, in environmental activities, nature tends to be posited as having a concrete location within a gradient of "natural" and "cultural" influences. Underlying this positionality there is a duality which sees nature as both part of and separate from humans (Fletcher, 2017). In connecting with nature, wild pedagogies goes further than pedagogies of *friluftsliv* normally do by striving to find the wild where one is, as well as by refusing to simply accept that the wild has been found because a place appears uncultivated. Wild pedagogies goes beyond perspectives of individual children's experiences and connection to the natural world; it argues that nature has an agency of its own and that the natural world is in a colonized position with regard to the modernist human north (Blenkinsop et al., 2016; Blenkinsop & Ford, 2018). These realities have implications for both how we educate and how we are educated. Here, the more-than-human is not simply a resource humans can manipulate as they wish; rather, beings that comprise the more-than-human world are rights-bearing stakeholders and educational partners.

### *View of Knowledge*

At one level, wild pedagogies agrees with the Aristotelian tripartite concept to which some *friluftsliv* theorists subscribe, and it supports a pedagogy that seeks to engage with multiple knowledges. However, at another level, wild pedagogies is trying to move beyond the implicit humanism that perpetuates Aristotle's epistemology. For wild pedagogies, knowledge is a shared endeavour, it is dynamic and changeable, it arises in tangled masses of knowing beings, it is never complete, and no single expert or species can claim sole possession of it. In this posthuman convergent move (Braidotti, 2018), earthworms, vipers, berry bushes, and steep mossy rocks are all knowers. Knowing, incomplete though it may be, is what happens when beings come together in place.

In some ways, the question of knowledge is the most challenging of our three threads. Although there is a form of agreement between our framed proposition of the epistemology of *friluftsliv* and our "reading between the lines" analysis of wild pedagogies, we think the implications for education writ large are potentially dramatic. If educators are to take seriously these positions on knowledge—as being the purview of the many beyond just humans, as being fluid and incomplete, as being surprising and spontaneous, as being interconnectable

and non-linear—then many structures of modern western public education and the epistemological assumptions that sustain them would have to change. Not only is the human teacher decentred from the position of expert and all-knower, but the accepted ways of creating lessons, prioritizing particular learning outcomes, testing and assessing, and developing education (as examples) are also re-examined. This is because all these pedagogical practices rest on epistemological assumptions that *friluftsliv* and wild pedagogies challenge: that knowledge is the exclusive purview of humans and experts within the species; that knowledge is fragmentable and transferable in clearly understood and organizable bit sizes chunks; that meaning is made in a recognizable and generalizable order; that meaning-making is an ever expanding and always improving, yet completely repeatable, process; that the older one is the more one knows; and that anyone's knowing can be accurately tested in quite simple ways. For us, re-conceptualizing these epistemological assumptions is a project that is sorely needed.

Our hope is that the key threads outlined here, and those yet to be explored, might inspire further dialogues about wild pedagogies and *friluftsliv*. These two pedagogical orientations can learn from each other as they bring their particular strengths to bear in theoretically and practically extending their visions of children, nature, and knowledge. Beyond this, our hope is to encourage others to seek out the diversity of pedagogies, educators, and allies that are going to be needed in order to do the imaginative change work (ie. cultural, social, ecological, and human identity) that our current situation appears to demand.

## Notes on Contributors

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# Experiences With Wild Pedagogies in Teacher Education in Botswana

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***Abstract***

*Wild pedagogies is gaining resonance in outdoor education. This paper examines wild pedagogies from the worldview of its practitioners, by reflecting on their experiences, as well as from the encounters of student-teachers with nature, by drawing on their written testimonies. The paper is also influenced by the authors' experience of attending a 2019 colloquium in Finse, Norway. With the objective of adding value to teaching and learning, wild pedagogies is evolving within the framework of experiential learning theory and as an extension of outdoor education. The authors used a literature review, their experiences, and student-teachers' experiences to generate data. The study concludes that wild pedagogies enhances environmental education and adds value to practical experiences through varied learning opportunities. By applying wild pedagogical approaches to education, students have more freedom to observe, feel, experiment, reflect, and connect with nature.*

***Résumé***

*Les pédagogies de la nature gagnent en popularité dans l'enseignement en plein air. Le présent article examine cette approche du point de vue de ceux qui la pratiquent en se penchant sur leurs expériences, et intègre le récit de rencontres avec la nature de groupes d'étudiants en enseignement en s'inspirant de leurs témoignages écrits. L'article rapporte également l'expérience des auteurs, qui ont participé à un colloque en 2019 à Finse, en Norvège. Les pédagogies de la nature constituent un volet de la théorie de l'apprentissage expérientiel et une extension de l'enseignement en plein air; à ce titre, elles évoluent constamment pour bonifier l'enseignement et l'apprentissage. Les données du présent article proviennent d'une revue de la littérature, du vécu des auteurs et des expériences des étudiants en enseignement. L'étude conclut que les pédagogies de la nature améliorent l'éducation à l'environnement et enrichissent les expériences pratiques en créant des occasions d'apprentissage variées. En éducation, elles permettent aux apprenants d'être plus libres d'observer, de ressentir, d'expérimenter, de réfléchir et d'entrer en relation avec la nature.*

*Keywords:* wild pedagogies, outdoor education, teacher education, Botswana

*Mots-clés* : pédagogies de la nature, enseignement en plein air, formation des enseignants, Botswana

## Introduction

A range of global literature identifies wild pedagogies as one approach to helping humans reconnect with the natural environment, as well as to sensitizing people to the value of more ecological ways of being (Jickling et al., 2018; Mawson, 2014; McDuff, 2010; Payne & Wattchow, 2009; Tosio, 1985; Weston, 2004). In Botswana, located in the sub-Saharan region of Africa (Republic of Botswana, 2014–2018; Republic of Botswana, 2017–2023), there is a heightened ecological awareness among the nation's residents. This paper, focused on Botswana, contributes to the field of environmental education by making wild pedagogical practices more familiar, more understood, and more eye-catching. It aims to inspire transformation in the diverse teaching and learning practices established not only in Botswana but also around the globe. To achieve this, it focuses on a practitioner-oriented approaches to wild pedagogies.

Arguing for the importance of wild pedagogies to the progressive transformation of formal education settings and systems, Jickling et al. (2018) observe that dominant pedagogical ideologies, shared belief systems for the dominant classes, must be disrupted. Relatedly, Barrow (2019) advises that more writing in the area of wild pedagogies is urgently needed. Other writers consider the impact of wild pedagogies on students' learning experiences. Straker et al. (2017), for example, underscore the importance of repositioning to wild pedagogies: "moving to places less familiar and less comfortable often helps students of any age to challenge the status quo. … These diverse sites can help to disrupt our ontological position" (p. 110). This repositioning may influence how students perceive the natural environment. It may also prompt them to reflect on their individual role and, consequently, it may facilitate a change in their behaviour toward the environment.

Wild pedagogies is relevant to educators in a wide variety of settings. It is essential that learners are immersed in the natural world, from whom they learn and with whom they are in dialogue. This immersion enables humans to create and maintain real and significant relationships with nature. Despite the cruciality of immersion to experiential learning, countries around the world vary in the ways in which they integrate outdoor learning into the school curriculum (Comishin et al., 2004; Irwin, 2008; Waite & Pratt, 2011).

The authors of this paper have a breadth of teaching experience in various secondary and post-secondary schools in Botswana. Our lived experiences have led us to understand that learners are being increasingly separated from the natural world as a result of pedagogies that are not invested in experiential environmental education. A variety of studies in Botswana and the sub-Saharan Africa region have also noted this human–nature disconnect (Museka & Madondo, 2012; Velempini et al., 2018). Similarly, at the global level, some studies suggest that concerns about children's safety have led to a reduction of the kinds of challenges and opportunities that are promoted through wild pedagogies (Bilton et al., 2005; Little & Eager, 2010; Palmer, 2006). Dependency

on technology, which affects learners around the world (including Botswana), seems to play a role in this severed connection as well (Louv, 2008).

The present study was influenced by insights gleaned from the book entitled *Wild Pedagogies: Touchstones for Re-Negotiating Education and the Environment in the Anthropocene* (Jickling et al., 2018) and a visit to Finse, Norway in 2019 for a wild pedagogies gathering. This colloquium was attended by practitioners and educators (including one of the authors of this paper) from diverse continents and worldwide institutions of learning.

Building on the insights gained from these sources, the present study queries, "What can we learn about wild pedagogies from the experiences of university students in Botswana who are engaged in outdoor learning?" The paper is arranged as follows: First, it reviews the literature on wild pedagogies. Second, it outlines its methodology. Third, it presents the findings of an analysis of the university students' outdoor learning experiences. Last, the paper discusses these findings and makes recommendations that might enable the implementation of wild pedagogies within sub-Saharan Africa education.

## Literature Review

Wild pedagogies is perceived as both a project and a concept. As a project, it represents the ongoing work of a broader cross-section of international scholars who consider education as an agent of change in these times of heightened ecological awareness: "In a wild pedagogy the subject matter includes the subjects themselves" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 3). Therefore, wild pedagogies is designed for far more than passive learning or the transmission of taken-for-granted assumptions and ideas. Indeed, wild pedagogies calls for reclamation, reimagination, and reintroduction of self-responsibility in educational practice.

As a concept, wild pedagogies challenges "dominant cultural ideas about control—of each other, of nature, of education, and of learning" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 3). It disrupts traditional pedagogies by freeing learners from a set of previously determined learning outcomes—particularly during an educational excursion or visit. Teachers who embrace wild pedagogies deploy a learner-centred approach that enables learners to discover themselves and their role in the natural world. A learner-centred approach views students as

> active participants in the learning process rather than meek recipients of ready-made factual knowledge from the teacher. The pedagogy is seen as democratic since it demands a relationship between teachers and students in which dialogue is an important means of learning. (Tabulawa, 2003, p. 9)

It is hoped that through the deployment of learner-centred wild pedagogies, students will become agents of change, that is, social transformers and drivers of positive human agency in environmental and sustainability education. This is because wild pedagogies entails spending more time in outdoors with the

more-than-human world. It requires actively listening, making space for different narratives to emerge, and fostering a sense of what it means to be "entangled with other beings and species" (Blenkinsop et al., 2016, p. 207).

Outdoor educators are concerned with making learning relevant to places in which they live, and doing so in a manner that celebrates action (Straker et al., 2017). Outdoor education and wild pedagogies thus promote critical thinking and reflection "through positive multi-dimensional outdoor experiences whereby [learners] will have the opportunity to engage with and to reflect upon themselves and others as part of the natural world. They will then be encouraged to develop a stronger sustainability consciousness" (Straker et al., 2017, p. 109). Stronger sustainability consciousness entails a sense of human agency among learners and hence inspires them to take action to protect the natural environment. This action is marked by a change in behaviour toward the natural world. What all these points illustrate is the importance of experiential learning, that is, *learning by doing* (Kolb, 1984, 2015; McLeod, 2017).

Experiential learning outdoors entails active learning, which is focused on engaging students in high-level thinking and applying knowledge and skills to their learning in order to deepen their understanding of the natural world. It places greater responsibility on students to develop their personal understanding, as well as to apply and transfer knowledge and skills through an activity. Engagement in an activity in the wild may also promote attitudinal change through reflection. Therefore, wild pedagogies in environmental education provides an ideal opportunity for active learning. Straker et al. (2017) posit that "making the journey through wilder places can be an effective way for developing stronger sustainability consciousness among students" (p. 109). They also point out that the "diversity of experiences that wilder environments can generate is expansive. Positive, fun, active, and even nostalgic experiences can comprise students' journeys of awakening" (p. 109).

Jickling et al. (2018) offer "six touchstones for wild pedagogies in practice." First, the touchstone of *nature as co-teacher* emphasizes learning from the natural world; "it includes learning with and through [nature] as well; and thus, its myriad beings become active, fellow pedagogues" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 81). Both students and teachers have the opportunity to reflect on and understand how natural features and beings play a role in nature as co-teacher. Natural features are active, self-directing, and vibrant pedagogical aids. During this study, time was spent outdoors through excursion to two natural places: the Kgetsi ya Tsie (KyT) organization in Tswapong hills,[1] which are about 325 kilometres from the main campus of the University, and the Mokolodi Nature Reserve, which is closer to the university (about 20 kilometres away). The nature reserve is home to a variety of mammals, including some rare and endangered species, and a diverse array of reptile, amphibian and bird species (Mokolodi, 2020). The reserve is also rich in plant diversity. In both locations, by considering nature as co-teacher, students had the opportunity to learn from a voice other than a human teacher and experience more independent and place-interactive learning.

The second touchstone focuses on *complexity, the unknown, and spontaneity*. In this touchstone, wild pedagogies aims to open up possibilities for enabling intricacy and improvisation in ways that call for renegotiating educational practices. According to Jickling et al. (2018), complexity is understood to be dynamic and unpredictable and is best described in situations that do not have fixed boundaries. There is a need for both educators and learners to reconceptualize their association with nature, embrace complexities in places and practices, and allow for emerging themes that may be unpredictable and unplanned.

The third touchstone focuses on *locating the wild*, whereby learners are engaged in exploring what they have not previously noticed, even in cities or rural settings. This touchstone has at its core a conviction that the wild is everywhere. Some of the questions that educators may ask about this touchstone might include: 1) What might be next steps toward making transformation in pedagogy?; and 2) how does it become possible for learners to have encounters with the wild?

The fourth touchstone focuses on *time and practice*. In this touchstone, time is an essential resource for learning from and with the natural world. Time is important for planning purposes, visiting natural features, and evaluating the learning process. This touchstone upholds that it is essential to have a deeper self-reflexivity about transformative practices, as they do not occur instantly. Self-reflexivity entails having an ongoing conversation with one's whole self about what one is experiencing. And for researchers, it takes time to identify what hidden assumptions may underpin their research practices (Nagata, 2004; Nicholls, 2009). In this touchstone, Jickling et al. (2018) advise teachers to develop practices that deepen rapport with local communities and places. They also call on teachers to be passionate about rethinking, rewriting, and reworking their own pedagogies in order to inspire transformative learning. As Jickling et al. (2018) note, "developing new practices will require reflection, risk taking, experimenting with possibilities, examining successes and failures, and then repeating this process over and over" (p. 96). The fifth touchstone, with its focus on *socio-cultural change,* builds on this notion of transformative learning by promoting the belief that education is a major player in enabling change. Learners need to be prepared for an unclear and unknown future as we all engage in the process of disruption in education (Jickling, 2005).

Last but not least is the sixth touchstone—*building alliance and the human community*. This touchstone suggests that wild pedagogies should seek to enable alliances and build community with others. This should take place not only in the natural environment, but also with people and activist associations across the world.

In this paper, we attempt to draw lessons from these touchstones and use them as a theoretical framework; we believe that they strengthen research methodologies that are grounded in a dedication to transformative change (Waite & Pratt, 2011) by inspiring original analysis and drawing researchers

to novel conclusions. Framed by the six touchstones, this paper documents how post-secondary learners and their instructors engaged in experiences of outdoor learning in Botswana to create a sense of place through wild pedagogies. According to Worster and Abrams (2005), "sense of place" implies having ecological knowledge, social knowledge, and attachment to community (human and non-human) about and in a particular place. Frisch et al. (2010) suggest that sense of place is multifaceted and it is much like environmental education. In order to have a sense of place, one must have acquired knowledge about it, developed a positive affection for it, and honed skills that facilitate being a part of it.

## Methodology

This study followed a qualitative research design (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2010). The method employed was a case study (Stake, 1995). The study presents practical experiences and observations (Creswell, 2013) in conducting outdoor teaching and experiential learning practices in Botswana's natural places. The practical experiences were conducted at Kgetsi ya Tsie (KyT), a community-based organization (CBO) in Lerala village, situated in a remote and hilly area of rural eastern Botswana. Lerala is the main village and headquarters of KyT in Tswapong hills. At KyT, women harness traditional and Indigenous knowledge as they harvest and market a range of natural resource products, such as jam, oil, soap from *marula*[2] fruit, and various herbal remedies (Ketlhoilwe & Jeremiah, 2015). The other practical experience was conducted in the Mokolodi Nature Reserve, home to a variety of mammals, endangered species, reptiles, amphibians, and a variety of plant species (Mokolodi, 2020). Conservation and education are at the core of the reserve's existence (Campbell, 2004.

### *Analysis*

We analyzed all submitted excursion reports from the students' trip to KyT. These students to KyT comprised the 2018 cohort (n = 13) and the 2019 cohort (n = 21). The one-day trip to the Mokolodi Nature Reserve was also conducted in 2018, with a total of 18 students (15 females and 3 males). All reports submitted by the students were analyzed. We engaged in a lengthy process of line-by-line manual analysis (i.e., open coding), reading, and re-reading the data (students' reports). We noted codes and themes that align with prominent practices of wild pedagogies (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Simultaneously, we exercised reflexivity by thinking about how the students' reports contribute to wild pedagogies. The reports were graded as part of continuous assessment.

Prior to our departure from the university campus, students were given guidelines for writing and completing their reports on their practical experiences. Some of the guidelines for the practical experience in KyT were as follows:

1. Assess status of production (quantity of products per season and tools utilized to make the products).
    a. In order to respond to this guideline, students were to make observations on-site (i.e., in the factory), conduct informal semi-structured interviews with rural women, and supplement their results with document analysis about KyT.
2. Discuss challenges and opportunities facing KyT, situated as it was in a remote, rural, and hilly area.
3. Write three recommendations to KyT on how sustainability practices can be effective in natural resources management.

As part of the KyT experience, student-teachers volunteered to take the following leadership roles: 1) passenger overseer in the bus to ensure all registered participants were present; 2) bus conductor to ensure that there was enough fuel in the university shuttle bus and to determine where to stop on the way; 3) on-the-ground fieldwork supervisor to ensure directions are available to the village communal meeting place (*Kgotla*[3]) to meet with the village Chief and directions to the KyT factory; 4) fieldwork report writer; and 5) volunteer to oversee financial payment to KyT.

Some of the guidelines for the practical experience trip in the Mokolodi Nature Reserve were as follows: 1) identify social and environmental changes to the landscape on the way to the Mokolodi Nature Reserve; and 2) write down observed issues, crises, and risks encountered at the Mokolodi Nature Reserve. The analysis of the student-teachers' reports from the practical experience in KyT and the Mokolodi Nature Reserve helped the authors of this paper to induce practices of wild pedagogies and to make inference about the insights made by these practices. The authors, who are lecturers for the student-teachers, acted as adults in this practice. In a related article titled, "Experiencing the Wild Woods: The Impact of Pedagogy on Children's Experience of a Natural Environment," Mawson (2014) remarks on the importance played by adults in outdoor practices through their interaction and collaboration with learners, facilitation, and interpretation within the natural environment. The above collaboration and partnership facilitated the creation of a community of practice that was based on a shared, effective pedagogy for the outdoor environment.

The outdoor practical experiences in KyT and the Mokolodi Nature Reserve were part of the learning activities for all students in the Environmental Conservation Education Strategies course offered at the University of Botswana. Travel fees and entrance fees were paid for by the office of the Dean in the Faculty of Education, who also granted travel permits for the excursion. The coordinator of KyT and the education office in the Mokolodi Nature Reserve also agreed to the visit by the student-teachers and their lecturers.

*Illustrations from practical experiences in KyT*

> As part of our EEL401 class we had to go on a visit to the KyT community-based organization in Lerala. The objective of the visit was to allow us to discover some of the natural resources produced and their purposes. This trip was a chance for us to evaluate what women produce in their factory and what really goes on in the rural parts of the country.

The above statement was written by a student from the Seychelles Islands[4] who is studying at the University of Botswana. The student explained that the objective of the experience in the KyT factory was intended to uncover how wild resources were utilized, to observe what local people do in helping the community, and to evaluate the production process that takes place.

Another statement from one of the students during the same experience read as follows:

> We took an excursion as University of Botswana environmental education students. The purpose of the trip was to look into what KyT women community trust is all about, what they are producing, which strategies they use in order to conserve the environment in which they collect raw materials from and the opportunities of the trust as well as the challenges experienced.

Another student-teacher wrote as follows:

> Our first stop at Lerala village was at the Kgotla. We were ushered into the Chief's office by the founding member of Kgetsi ya Tsie. The Chief was happy to see us. He gave a historical overview of the village. He told us that his people originate from the Bapedi tribe in South Africa and that people in Lerala village used to stay on the other side of the hill. He told us that they moved from where they originally stayed in 1952 due to shortage of land.

Another student teacher reported as follows: "In order to get the discussion started, I learned about the emblem which is 'Pula Kgetsi ya Tsie pula,' which means 'rain, rain,' and the response from the women is 'let it rain.'"

Next is a report about changes to the vegetation on the way to the destination place for practical experience: "Before I could arrive at Kgetsi ya Tsie I noticed that the type of vegetation in that area changes. There were trees like mophane[5], but the area had a lot of the Mokoba[6] tree."

Again, one of the student-teachers from Seychelles wrote as follows in relation to vegetation change:

> It was quite an interesting experience for me since I am an international student. In Seychelles, I do not normally travel such long hours to another community. I was fascinated by how dry the land was; the trees appeared dry but in between, I would see that there was at least one or two that was green. I found myself wondering how that could be. I recall also seeing animals such as donkeys, cattle, chickens as well as goats.

The above reports from student-teachers primarily inform readers about the purpose of the practical experience and the students' arrival at the wild destination. The reports below refer to the experiences of student-teachers at the KyT factory:

> We observed how to operate machines used to process veld products until the release of oil. The machine is called hydraulic compressor. It is hand operated. I had the opportunity see oil produced from the veld product—marula—and they mentioned that the first oil from marula is called virgin oil. They mentioned that the nuts can be processed into cooking oil, soap, and facial oil. We were given the marula oil so that we can taste and experience how it feels.

The report below indicates the experience gained by student-teachers in another village, Sefhare, which is also in the remote part of rural eastern Botswana. Sefhare is also one of the 27 village centres where KyT activities are spearheaded by rural women:

> We went through Sefhare village to visit women who have started a business of moulding pots using different types of soil. There are 3 ladies who are involved in doing this job and amongst them there is an expert who started moulding in 2002. The expert in the job is now teaching the other two ladies how to mould the pots. According to these ladies they collect different types of soils used for making pots. They pound the soils, mix with water and start moulding a pot of any shape they want. When they have finished shaping the pots, they let them dry and heat them again for colour change and strength. One of the challenges they experience is that they get soil from far away. The other challenge is that sometimes when the pot is too heavy it cracks and breaks when they heat it up. Amongst these ladies there was the one who was multitalented. She told us that she was using paper which she gathers from the environment to make ornaments like vases. We had the opportunity to observe some of the products she makes from paper. As a student of Environmental Education I found this to be very impressive. As she collects paper to produce her products she cleans the environment in the process. The same lady was also selling seedlings, something which is also very good for environmental conservation.

The student-teachers made a number of recommendations to KyT. For example, one said, "They need to have proper workshops with teachers as well as students." Another said,

> They need to initiate school-community collaborations so that practices of managing natural resources are passed on. … In that way, teachers will be able to devise lessons whereby they infuse whatever they have learned in their teaching. The students' understanding of sustainability and conservation will be widened in the sense that they get to obtain hands-on information.

Engaging in practical experiences of wild pedagogies has both opportunities and challenges. Below is one of the challenges a student experienced during their practical experience:

> On the way we had a challenge. As we reached Mahalapye[7] there was a traffic police road block. One officer from the immigration department got inside our bus and asked all passengers to produce national identity cards. We all managed to produce them except two students from Seychelles. They were asked to produce their study permits but they did not have them because they had left them in Gaborone. We wasted a lot of time there pleading with the officer to allow us to go but she was reluctant to do so. However she ended up releasing us after giving us a warning. We ended up reaching Lerala village later than the expected time of arrival.

Last, it is important to present the report from the student-teacher who said, "The trip was a learning curve for us as students doing environmental conservation education strategies course. We learned some of the strategies they use to conserve natural resources such as each member planting five marula trees per year."

In the section below we describe the students' practical experience in the Mokolodi Nature Reserve and present excerpts from the students' reports.

### *Practical experiences in the Mokolodi Nature Reserve*

Our first educational excursion following the 2019 Finse colloquium was to the Mokolodi Nature Reserve, located about 20 kilometres outside the University of Botswana's host city. The one-day excursion was taken by a group of students-teachers training to be secondary school educators. Below, we present some of their reports on their experiences, as well as the findings, based on their final excursion reports. From the excursion, we noted that wild pedagogies was both a concept and a project (Jickling et al., 2018) to enhance content in teaching and learning.

The student-teachers who were engaged in the excursion found the activity to be interesting; they also found that it enhanced their classroom learning. One student said:

> I've learnt outdoor teaching and learning methods through our guide. I've learned that when in a field excursion, I as the educator should make sure that my students are in a line so that I am able to keep track and see what everyone is doing or if there is anyone missing. If the class is too big then I can arrange students in two lines. I also learnt not to take frequent stops as most students would get tired. The other thing I've learnt is that a circle should be created around an object of discussion at stops so that no one would be left behind and would all see and hear what is being discussed.

Yet another student-teacher found the excursion to be an amazing outdoor learning experience, remarking that, "As a teacher, I will have an idea on how to teach students and which methods to use. I familiarized myself with a student's perspective on outdoor classes in Environmental Education. I made observations like environmental issues, risks, crises and concerns."

The student-teachers appreciated the excursion program, which included such activities as a nature walk. The goal of the nature walk was to enable

student-teachers discover, identify, and ask questions about anything in the wild environment that they did not understand. It also provided student-teachers with opportunities to share their prior knowledge. During the nature walk, they learnt that they were supposed to minimize noise in order to avoid scaring wild animals, who might think they are being attacked. Student-teachers also learned about different plant species, their properties, and their uses and how they are conserved. The most popular plant they learned about was the buffalo thorn tree. One student said, "the tree is believed to protect us from lighting and is used for medicinal purposes like healing pimples and the small leaves can be prepared like spinach. The seeds can be roasted to make a coffee substitute." The second most popular plant they learned about was the Tambotie (morukuru[8]) tree, which is one of the protected trees in Botswana. One student-teacher described the tree as having

> a toxic substance to plants and animals. One factor that was also astonishing was that the area around the tree was bare except for small plants that grew around the steam. Apparently, when it rains the toxic substance is dissolved from the leaf and falls on the vegetation beneath it killing other plants. … In the olden days, people used to make poles from the tree because of its toxic property. The Tambotie poles are not destroyed by termites and other pests. A piece of heart wood from Tamboties tree was used as a pest repellent in grain and seeds storage to protect them.

The above narrative suggests that the nature walk offered an opportunity for students to learn about a tree that they knew existed but had never paid attention to its properties and uses. They learned through experience. They learned about different plants and their uses, as well as about traditional folklore about the plants. For instance, one student said that buffalo thorn tree leaves

> have three veins. Those veins represent three relationships, between oneself, the environment and people. This means as people we have to have a good relationship with the environment because we depend mostly on the environment to survive. The tree leaves can also be used for medicinal purposes to treat boils and it also provides fruits. It was very interesting to realize that plants are very important besides that they give us food and oxygen. They can also help us to live a better life.

Student-teachers were also engaged in a game-drive visit to the reptile park and sanctuary. This visit brought them closer to wild animals and helped them to appreciate the beauty of the wildlife and the need to conserve biodiversity.

Wild pedagogies facilitated the students' appreciation of nature. This was echoed by a student-teacher during a visit to Mokolodi Nature Reserve, who posited the following:

> Learning in an outdoor environment allows learners to interact with the elements around us and helps them to gain an understanding of the world we live in. They can experience animals in their own surroundings and learn about their habitats.

This statement is evidence that exposing students to a natural environment can deepen their knowledge of and understanding about the world they live in. Student-teachers appreciated that people are part of nature. One student teacher saw the purpose of the excursion as follows:

> Students become aware that man is part and parcel of the environment. Man needs to recognize the importance and role of the environment in order to protect it and to get protection from it, hence the need for environmental education. Nature is beautiful and very essential to our day-to-day activities.

Similarly, wild pedagogies prioritizes individual, subjective learning rather than strictly objective, controlled learning. Students were placed in the wild and given the opportunity to learn through experience. Though all the students were on the same nature excursion, feelings and experiences were different amongst the individual learners. One student said:

> I am very ecstatic for I had the opportunity to visit a beautiful place where I was able to learn about wild animals and plants, some of which are rare and endangered. The outdoor learning was fun and interesting because one has to explore the wild environment and at the same time learn about it.

Another student teacher explained how to prepare for learners for an excursion:

> I learned a lot of things that will assist me on how to handle and control my learners whenever we have an outdoor teaching exposure that is similar to the game reserve trip. I will be able to know that it is important to give out steps on how we are going to carry out the tasks before we can do that, not to make too much noise as that disturbs the animals, that is, it may scare them.

The wild pedagogies approach to these excursions placed the responsibility for learning on the students themselves. They had to observe, feel, appreciate, and reflect—and make their own conclusions (that is, learn) based on their experiences (Kolb, 1984, 2015). This was brought up by one of the student-teachers:

> My observation about the place of Mokolodi Nature Reserve is that the place is recovering from environmental stress caused by human activities. The most environmental issue that is visible there is soil erosion because the nature reserve was a farming field. The farming activities performed before are the ones that elevated the level of soil erosion. I also saw some people cutting down trees inside the nature reserve. This practice also contributes to soil erosion. To try and combat the level of soil erosion, the nature reserve is fenced to restrict movement of wild animals, domestic animals and to avoid unmonitored movement of people in and out of the reserve. The nature reserve operators saw it fit to grow vegetation in areas that were heavily eroded. This process had its flaws. First, bird species would eat the seeds before they germinate. Second, varieties of animals graze on the seedlings

> before they can mature. Besides these setbacks I think the initiative is necessary to eradicate soil erosion as trees provide ground cover. I also observed that the nature reserve provides rehabilitation and medical care to animals that are endangered as I saw some vultures that were under medical attention and later would be released to the wild after successful treatment.

The excursion to the nature reserve provided an opportunity for an active learning approach, and this was appreciated by one student-teacher who said, "I believe that if ever the government of Botswana could adopt this kind of experiential learning most of students will pass and it is not easy to forget as compared to the classroom." The student-teachers found that the wild pedagogies approach accommodated their learning goals and helped them to feel comfortable to ask any questions about these wild spaces. Student-teachers also felt that if people knew more about the environment, they would find ways to protect natural resources and avoid pollution and erosion. One student noted, "Learning by experience should be practised in schools and we as people should keep moderate domestic animals because they cause over grazing hence soil erosion. Let's learn and save for the future."

Student-teachers also noted that wild pedagogies enhances active learning. Student-teachers were actively engaged during both a nature walk and a drive around the reserve, viewing wild animals and plants. Both the nature walk and the game drive were administered in the form of a mobile mini-lecture. One student described this as

> very interactive. We had discussions about nature such as erosion and the natural process of it and conservative measures of the reserve. This gave me a lot of knowledge and awareness about the environment and how as a future teacher I can employ different ways of teaching outdoor by learning how to conduct field work as well.

Active learning can lead to self-discovery. One student-teacher said the excursion made her realize the beauty of nature and "at the same time [understand] how difficult it is to recover the environment from the human impacts (e.g., overgrazing). All of these made me realize all the efforts that the reserve makes to maintain the place." The student-teacher described the activity as "very enlightening and inspiring."

Wild pedagogies can also help educators offer learners an opportunity to appreciate the natural world. One student noted the following:

> During the nature walk we had to make various stops in order to enjoy the walk and to learn about the place. Many times during the walk, I would find myself listening to the sounds of birds which made me develop a strong relationship with nature. The first stop that we made was by the tree called a buffalo thorn.

One student teacher showed appreciation for the environment when they said, "the tour was very interesting. I enjoyed the view and it was amazing to see beautiful vegetation without litter around. I like the simplicity of the reserve

and I wish to work there someday." The above sections presented findings from the practical experiences in KyT in rural eastern Botswana and the Mokolodi Nature Reserve. The next section discusses the findings in relation to student-teachers' experiences.

## Discussion

Wild pedagogies offers opportunities for a variety of innovations in teaching and learning. The importance of wild pedagogies for educators cannot be overemphasized. Educators are always on the lookout for opportunities to improve and transform teaching and learning (Jickling et al., 2018; Straker et al., 2017). In this paper, we emphasized how wild pedagogies can enhance the following: content knowledge and understanding; appreciation of the natural world; and diversity in pedagogical approaches to environmental education. Synchronously, we employed the six touchstones of wild pedagogies as our theoretical framework.

### *Enhancing content knowledge and understanding*

The wild experience enhances content knowledge and understanding of nature in a relaxed environment (Jickling et al., 2018; Kolb, 2015; McLeod, 2017; Straker et al., 2017). Student-teachers learned about diverse vegetation (on the way to KyT and in the Mokolodi Nature Reserve) that they had always seen but to which they had never paid close attention. They also appreciated the presence of animals and their conservation. When referring to what they had witnessed as a way of rehabilitating unproductive land, one student-teacher expressed a positive feeling towards nature: "the excursion taught me … how to handle our natural environment so that it become more valuable to our nations."

### *Appreciation of the natural world*

Wild pedagogies encourages educators to seek opportunities where learners can appreciate the natural world (Mawson, 2014; McDuff, 2010). One student said they, "enjoyed and learnt about nature" during the walk; another noted, "Many times during the walk I would find myself listening to the sounds of birds, which made me develop a strong relationship with nature"; yet another commented, "I enjoyed the view and it was amazing to see beautiful vegetation without litter around."

These statements demonstrate that wild pedagogies is a viable and enriching approach to outdoor education (Jickling et al., 2018). The students appreciated being given the opportunity to spend more time with other "beings" in the natural world. During the students' excursion to the Mokolodi Nature Reserve, they were able to locate the wild and employ nature as co-teacher by learning with and through the park's natural surroundings.

*Diversity in pedagogical approaches to environmental education*

With its critical emphasis on immersion in the natural world, wild pedagogies can enhance experiential and active learning. Wild pedagogies entails a disruption of passive learning and the transmission of unchallenged assumptions (Jickling et al., 2018). Wild pedagogies is a way of freeing learners by deploying learner-centred approaches to understanding about and from the natural world. Interestingly, wild pedagogies entails being "entangled with other beings and species" (Blenkinsop et al., 2016, p. 207). This was demonstrated in our study by engaging student-teachers in active experiential learning through their observations in the KyT factory and their nature walks. On this subject, one student-teacher noted the following in their report: "I've learnt outdoor teaching and learning methods through our guide."

Student-teachers also described how they would organize and manage learners during a field excursion in their own role as educators. Interestingly, they mentioned that learners would be given more time to discover things and ask questions based on their practical discovery in the natural world, rather than always expecting questions from the teacher. We take this as one of the six touchstones of wild pedagogies in practice, in which a free learning environment is promoted and in which building a relationship with nature demands adequate time and practice. One student-teacher claimed that active learning in the natural world "made me realize the beauty of nature." This demonstrates the value of wild pedagogies as a transformative approach to teaching and learning. Furthermore, environmental relationships and engaging experiences outside appear to develop more positive attachment.

The experiences of these student-teachers also confirmed the touchstone of *complexity and the unknown* when excursion members to KyT were stopped by immigration and police authorities. The touchstone of *socio-cultural change* emerged as well, illustrated when student-teachers stated that they now have ideas about how to teach students through outdoor practices, while taking into consideration environmental risks, crises, and concerns.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

There is a need to rethink and revamp practices of teaching and learning in Botswana and other sub-Saharan Africa nations. Wild pedagogies is gaining prominence in environmental and sustainability education. This paper has reflected on the practices and experiences of a group of practitioners and has testified to the viability of wild pedagogies in teacher education.

Drawing from student-teachers' experiences, the authors conclude that wild pedagogies can enhance experiential learning in practice and add value to teaching and learning. In so doing, wild pedagogies can improve environmental education. Learning through experiences, as demonstrated in KyT and the

Mokolodi Nature Reserve, may be more valued by learners as they are not constrained by predetermined learning outcomes. In the study described above, the students were allowed the space to observe, feel, experiment, reflect, and connect with nature on their own. These experiences allowed them to discover, re-connect with nature, and form opinions about the environment, without being controlled by the teacher. Some students were also able to confirm their prior knowledge about different components of the environment.

Based on these findings, we strongly recommend that wild pedagogies should be an integral part of teacher education. In particular, and based on the student-teachers' experiences as well as our own, we strongly regard wild pedagogies as an integral part of disruptive pedagogical transformation that can add value to learner-centred teaching and learning. As Straker et al. (2017) posit, exposure to different sites can help to challenge the status quo and disrupt our ontological positions. Environmental and sustainability education could adopt wild pedagogies to promote effective learning and influence a change in attitude toward the environment. Extended field trips to nature-based sites, such as forests and game reserves, may enable both students and teachers to draw on wild pedagogies in order to enhance their practice-based experiential learning.

## Limitations of the Study

As this was a qualitative case study, the findings are not generalizable to either all cohorts of student-teachers at the university or every natural resources management site and nature reserve. The study was limited to one natural resource management site in the eastern part of Botswana and one nature reserve in the southern part of Botswana. The study may not have provided an adequate basis for making inferences about wild pedagogies in other wild sites of Botswana; however, this study does have credibility. Transferability should rest with the reader.

## Notes

1 Tswapong Hills Cultural Landscape, is located in the eastern part of the Central District near the town of Palapye in Botswana. The landscape stretches over a 70km magnificent range of the Tswapong Hills. The Tswapong Hills are about 15km wide and rise 400m above their surroundings. The rocks of Tswapong Hills were formed some million years ago within a sedimentary basin (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 1992-2021).

2 Marula, is a medium-sized deciduous tree, Indigenous to the miombo woodlands of Southern Africa, the Sudano-Sahelian range of West Africa, and Madagascar (Wikipedia, 2021).

3 Kgotla is a word in Botswana meaning a public meeting or traditional law

court of a Botswana village. It is usually headed by the village chief or headman, and community decisions are always arrived at by consensus. Anyone is allowed to speak (Ngwenya and Kgathi, 2011).

4 The island nation of the Seychelles, in the western Indian Ocean, comprises about 115 islands, with lush tropical vegetation, beautiful beaches, and a wide variety of marine life. Situated between latitudes 4° and 11° S and longitudes 46° and 56° E, the major islands of Seychelles are located about 1,000 miles (1,600 km) east of Kenya and about 700 miles (1,100 km) northeast of Madagascar (Britannica, undated).

5 Colophospermum Mopane, commonly called mopane, mopani, balsam tree, butterfly tree, or turpentine tree, is a tree in the legume family (Fabaceae), that grows in hot, dry, low-lying areas, 200 to 1,150 metres (660 to 3,770 ft) in elevation in Africa (SA National Biodiversity Institute, undated) .

6 Mokoba, the knobthorn (Senegalia nigrescens), is a deciduous African tree, growing up to 18 m tall, that is found in savanna regions from West Africa to South Africa. The tree is resistant to drought, not resistant to frost and its hard wood is resistant to termites (SA National Biodiversity Institute, undated).

7 Mahalapye, is located in the Central District of Botswana. It is positioned along the main road between Botswana's capital city, Gaborone, and the city of Francistown (Botswana Tourism Organisation, 2021).

8 Tambotie or Morukuru, is a medium-sized, semi-deciduous tree with a round crown, which is especially renowned for its wood. The tree is also known for its toxic milky latex that exudes from all parts of it. Common throughout Southern Africa region and it can grow up to 18 m high (Random Harvest, undated).

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# Nature Conservation and Music Sustainability: Fields With Shared Concerns

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***Abstract***

*This essay advances the argument that the fields of nature conservation and music sustainability are unified by shared concerns. Namely, commodification and "economic development" engender approaches to the exploitation of culture that are often identical to the strategies for corporate profiteering of natural resources. Philosophical views of relationships between music and nature are traced, followed by a synthesis of research that demonstrates the music industry's simplification of commercialized popular music for profitability, and the tendency for its products to distract from local arts and cultural heritage. Noise pollution is also identified as an important shared concern for which music education can play a role in enhancing public awareness. Wild Pedagogies, World Music Pedagogy and Soundscape activities are shown to be promising approaches for educators that potentially unite these fields.*

***Résumé***

*Le présent essai soutient que la conservation de la nature et la durabilité de la musique sont unies par les mêmes préoccupations : le fait que la marchandisation et le « développement économique » engendrent des pratiques d'exploitation de la culture souvent identiques aux stratégies de mercantilisme des entreprises qui extraient les ressources naturelles. L'article retrace les vues philosophiques des liens entre musique et nature, le tout suivi d'une synthèse de la recherche, qui montre que l'industrie simplifie à des fins de profitabilité la musique populaire commercialisée, et prouve en outre la tendance des produits de cette industrie à évincer les arts locaux et le patrimoine culturel. On ajoute que l'éducation musicale peut sensibiliser le public à la pollution sonore, une préoccupation commune aux activités de conservation de la nature et de durabilité de la musique. Les pédagogies de la nature, la pédagogie de la musique du monde et les activités d'éveil au paysage sonore sont présentées des approches d'enseignement prometteuses qui unifient nature et musique.*

*Keywords:* conservation, music, nature, sustainability, noise pollution, Soundscape, Wild Pedagogy, World Music Pedagogy, commodification, cultural heritage

*Mots-clés* : conservation, musique, nature, durabilité, pollution par le bruit, paysage sonore, pédagogies de la nature, pédagogie de la musique du monde, marchandisation, patrimoine

## Introduction

In spring of 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly spread across the world, an unusual article titled "Why Do We Turn to Music in Times of Crisis?" appeared on the World Economic Forum website. It declared that, instead of financial concerns, we should shift some of our attention to music: "communities around the world have turned to music during the coronavirus crisis … it can help maintain a sense of community … we are feeling a loss of control not experienced since the second world war … But making music provides a means to regain control" (Langley & Coutts, 2020). Indeed, music participation is far more powerful than most people realize—particularly during disruptive events—but what the World Economic Forum authors did not mention is the view shared by many musicologists worldwide that music itself is becoming weakened and disappearing,[1] and the very survival of many notable genres and practices is threatened much like endangered species (Cooley, 2019; Schippers & Bendrups, 2015).

To some, it might seem bizarre to suggest that those concerned with environmental protection share much in common with those concerned about the sustainability of participation in traditional music. After all, the natural environment would exist in the complete absence of humans, while music is regarded as a uniquely human activity. Why would the survival of any endangered species or wild habitat have anything to do with whether or not people continue to actively sing and dance in any traditional genre? What I seek to demonstrate in this article is that not only do the agendas of nature conservation and music sustainability have much in common in terms of metaphor and rhetoric (e.g., *biodiversity* and *cultural diversity*), but there are also some shared underlying behavioural processes and mechanisms that unify the global challenges and existential threats to which these movements respond. Specifically, I will describe how traditional music-making and natural habitats are similarly threatened under the conditions of modernity by the forces of unregulated commercialization and profiteering, which evoke ideologies promoted through marketing that commodify and exploit both *culture* and *nature* in the name of "economic development" (Stiglitz, 2019). At the same time, I seek to point out how much could be gained from synergistic cooperation between these two fields in education, thereby forging a "greener" musicology as well as a more artistic approach to environmental studies, particularly in terms of how these fields are brought into schools. We would do well to keep in mind Nicola Dibben's observation that "music, as with other cultural practices and products, has a role in environmentalism as a means by which people experience the natural world vicariously, and through which alternative meanings and valuations of nature are asserted" (Dibben, 2015, p. 163). We must also conversely recognize the profound inspiration that musicians have obtained, all across history, from pristine natural environments.

## Background: *Music and Nature* in Intellectual History

Since ancient times, and throughout the world, philosophers have noted how traditional music promotes reflection on nature. Confucius—a renowned teacher of the Chinese musical instrument *qin*, as well as the most influential East Asian philosopher of all time—frequently taught about how music represents the natural world. At nearly the same time, on the other side of the world, Greek philosopher Plato argued that music represented movement of "the heavens," since at that time both astronomy and astrology were intertwined. Indeed, music has been connected to imaginative cosmology and ritual since the earliest known evidence of musical practices. Specifically, Enheduanna (ca. 2300 BCE) an Akkadian princess credited as the "first named author in the history of the world," was especially known for composing songs and leading rituals in the ancient Sumerian language, and is the world's earliest known songwriter.[2]

European intellectual history[3] saw many influential philosophers who were also music composers, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (who offered a romantic vision of mankind in a "State of Nature") and Fredrich Nietzsche (who warned in *Beyond Good and Evil* that the power of nature merits respect). Until the end of the Industrial Age, historians can trace a long line of European development with only scant questioning of the assumption that humans are predestined to conquer nature. By the time the United States was fully established, the leaders of its first philosophical school, Transcendentalism, became widely known as naturalist writers who finally responded to the Industrial Age with some skepticism. These included Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), who observed that "the sounds of men and birds are musical," and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), whose poem, "Music," declares:

> I hear a sky-born music still:
> It sounds from all things old,
> It sounds from all things young,
> From all that's fair, from all that's foul,
> Peals out a cheerful song.
>
> (Emerson, 1904, p.366, lines 2-6)

A century later, among the most respected poets from the United States were figures such as Robinson Jeffers (1887–1962) and Gary Snyder (b.1930), both of whom produced influential works that are replete with images of nature (and subtle musical references). Meanwhile, Suzanne Langer (1895–1985), the first woman to receive "both professional and popular recognition as an American philosopher" (Dryden, 2003, p. 190), had grown up with a love of nature attributed to frequent stays in a forest cottage on Lake George; along with her contemporaries, Langer (1957) made new contributions to the

understanding of how music evokes embodied feelings. Connections between music and nature in the works of such great thinkers should be clear, but how can it be that nature and traditional culture may be understood as facing similar threats in the present day?

## Interdisciplinary Views

An array of different fields of study from across the Humanities and Social Sciences illuminate the ways in which exploitation of nature and culture are impacted by similar forces of commodification under current conditions in industrialized societies, dominated as they are by corporate interests. These fields of study include the following: "Frankfurt School" sociology, development anthropology, "Capabilities Approach" economics, and environmental philosophy.[4] What each of these fields demonstrates, from its own unique perspective, is how concern for profit margins has led the corporations dominating most industries to constantly press for ever greater exploitation of resources. A relentless drive for profits, at most any cost, is essentially built into the DNA of corporations with contemporary capitalistic economies; indeed, it is their *raison d'etre* (Stiglitz, 2019). In the case of *nature*, the impact of such movements can be traced back to such examples as the 19th-century whaling industry, while it is perhaps most obvious today in the petroleum industry and among corporations that specialize in military equipment or market unnecessary products to the most vulnerable consumers. In the case of *culture*, on the other hand, antecedents are generally less obvious, but for *music* they are strongly connected to the development and popularization of mass media technologies, including sound and video recordings and the Internet.

## Mass Commodification: A Threat to Music Survival

During the 1940s, as big bands led by jazz pioneers Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Glenn Miller, and Benny Goodman unexpectedly became wildly popular, business-savvy elites began recognizing opportunities for music recordings to become a commercial product, bought and sold on a massive scale. The subsequent rise of the pop music industry in the 1950s resulted in formulaic procedures for mass production of songs, designed to be popular among adolescents—a model which continued to evolve across decades, along with new technologies ultimately spreading across the world (Hebert, 2018). While there have been plenty of popular music stars over the years with talent and substance to their work, much popular music lacks the relatively complex forms designed to sustain heritage and transform audiences through reflection; instead, it arguably resembles candy in the sense that it is designed for instant gratification and mass appeal.[5]

Some readers might be tempted to assume that concern for the sustainability of traditional music is somehow connected to cultural elitism, but this is a global issue relevant to many cultures, including ethnic minorities and Indigenous peoples worldwide, thus transcending any particular identity (Leung, 2018; Schippers & Grant, 2016). There are strong indications that traditional music genres of most communities are now threatened by the tendencies of the popular music industry to divert attention away from traditional practices and the artistry of local musicians in order to celebrate simple and mass-commodified forms.

An array of research studies has demonstrated that across recent decades, in order to attract mass sales, pop music has, as a whole, become harmonically simpler (Jensen & Hebert, 2016), less dynamic, and structurally more repetitive (Serra et al., 2012), with increasingly self-centred and repetitive lyrics (DeWall et. al, 2011).[6] Like formulaic television shows, producers have steered popular music toward maximum popularity, and as the most popular forms of music have become increasingly simpler in terms of both their sound structure and lyrical content, a demographic divide has subsequently developed between different kinds of listeners. Studies have even shown that, in the 21st century, *less commercialized* forms of instrumental music and classical genres tend to attract individuals with relatively higher IQ scores[7] (Kanazawa & Perina, 2012; Račevska & Tadinac, 2019). Relatedly, the personality trait *openness to experience*—a characteristic also strongly associated with outdoor adventuring—is correlated with a broadening of musical preferences toward diverse styles outside of the most commercialized forms of popular music (Bonetti & Costa, 2016; Vella & Mills, 2017). Indeed, as early as the 1970s, a publication noted, "It has never been adequately explained why environmentalists and research scientists tend to an interest in music … wildly surpassing probability" (Berger, 1978, p. 64); however, today this tendency of *openness to experience* generally extends far beyond "classical music"[8] to other less commercialized genres, consistent with attitudes associated with "cultural omnivorousness": jazz, folk music, and traditions commonly categorized as "world music." Folk music, in particular, with its strong connection to specific geographic locations, naturally includes many themes of enduring interest to environmentalists (Ingram, 2008). While many would argue that it is not a problem to have convenient access to the latest crop of easily approachable popular culture products, there are also reasonable concerns about the extent to which thoroughly commercialized forms may distract the citizenry from more substantive arts which aim to provoke reflection or connection to cultural heritage.

This is not to say that the corporate industrialists who profoundly impact both culture and nature through profiteering, commodification, and standardization necessarily have bad intentions, nor is much of what they have developed inherently wrong. To the contrary, just as convenient *tangible* products are useful, the *intangible* products of popular culture also serve their purpose of providing engaging entertainment. Transportation is necessary, and petroleum has, for some generations, been seen as essential as fuel. Entertainment is

useful, and formulaic pop music and movies have conveniently filled a void for people who crave something light as a temporary relief from life's challenges.[9] Convenient and entertaining products certainly deserve some place in society, and it is unlikely humanity can completely eliminate the use of fossil fuels, which make life convenient. But at what cost, and to what end?

There are other considerations that arguably matter as much as convenience and profitability. Too often, what effective marketing firms convince the public to buy are unnecessary products that, while temporarily seductive, are actually of little long-term value in terms of personal growth and quality of life. Fast food and sugary soft drinks are obvious examples of this phenomenon, but there are many others. Similarly, popular music is pleasant and easy to understand, but it also increasingly distracts the public from rich forms of cultural heritage, leading to a devaluation of local folk music traditions and art music. This is how destruction of nature and destruction of traditional culture share much in common, through mechanisms advanced under the banner of exploiting new markets that otherwise might *tragically* remain "undeveloped."[10] Failure to recognize the seriousness of these developments is largely an educational problem, with similar causes that detrimentally impact both nature and culture.

## Implications for Education: New Approaches

In many schools, actual practices subtly imply that the purpose of education is to churn out "useful profit-makers" for growth of national economies, rather than produce critically-thinking, creative, and globally conscientious individuals.[11] Instead of an education that promotes preoccupation with profit-margins, what protection of *both the environment and cultural heritage* requires is a larger proportion of students committed to questioning assumptions and actively promoting ways to transform society—to improve human rights, promote social justice, protect the environment, and support artistic and cultural expression. But where might we look for examples that show how these concerns may be effectively addressed in education?

From the side of environmental education, Wild Pedagogy is a recent movement that is potentially open to artistic concerns. Wild Pedagogues promote educational experiences in the wild that provoke learners to rethink contemporary urban lifestyles. The rationale for their work includes such claims as the following:

> Cities are, by and large, colonized places. The ongoing process of colonization absolutely includes silencing, dehistoricizing, and violently dislocating indigenous and other marginalized populations over the course of its historical development, but it also includes a similar kind of suppression of the more-than-human world. We have, in a modern urban setting, violently altered, subdued, and mastered the natural world such that it is forced to conform to our anthropocentric, and we maintain neoliberal, visions and needs. (Derby et al., 2015, p. 2)

The authors of *Wild Pedagogies* (Jickling et al., 2018) argue that, while ideologies of industrialization indoctrinate us into acceptance of "domestication, colonization and destruction" (p. 40) as "normal" activities, what is most sorely needed is a "more humble humanity" (p. 35) that rejects such disruptive efforts to dominate nature. Wild Pedagogy emphasizes bringing students into nature to directly experience forests, mountains, deserts, and the ocean.[12]

In their discussion of "post-sustainability," Jickling and Sterling (2017) berate the "music of salesmanship" as a device by which the notion of "sustainability" has been reinvented for misuse as a fashionable marketing concept (p. 18). Indeed, both music and rhetorical strategies can be used for either good or ill, but I would argue there are potential synergies for Wild Pedagogy with music education, pursued in ways that are compatible with the visions of both fields. Wild approaches can be useful for *music* learners, particularly those struggling with "burnout" due to an ultra-competitive milieu of obsessive "drilling" for technical mastery, while music can also support environmental lessons by evoking emotional and social engagement.

Transportation to "The Wild" can be a challenge for many common musical instruments. For this reason, voices, portable instruments, or creative instruments constructed from "found objects" can be ideal ways of developing a Wild Music Pedagogy connected to a local milieu. Such approaches naturally prompt reflection on the remarkable similarities between human singing and the instinctive behaviours of birds and fellow mammals, such as wolves and whales.[13] Wild Pedagogues note that human relationships with the earth are unsustainable due to poorly regulated industrialization, but that "Those who have been privileged within industrialized, capitalist societies likely will have different work to do than those who have been disenfranchised, marginalized, and colonized" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 24). Additionally, its proponents assert that "wild pedagogies are relevant to educators in a wide variety of settings" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 110), which arguably includes such arts as music.

Wild Pedagogy represents an approach to teaching from environmental education that is potentially open to arts. From the side of arts, Soundscape is a notable approach to music learning that embraces environmental concerns in that it may be used to both systematically document and artistically celebrate the audible features of any natural environment. Many articles, in such journals as *Noise & Health*, compellingly demonstrate the impact of excessive urban noise on human health, but Soundscape projects encourage students to consider its destructive impact on birds, fish, and other wildlife, drowning out their beautiful sonic environment. Music studies and Soundscape activities can contribute to environmental awareness by promoting recognition of the growing threat of noise pollution, as identified in several Canadian studies (Davies et al., 2009; Michaud et al., 2005).

Canadian composer Murray Schafer was a notable pioneer in the field of Soundscape, which now has a legacy of more than 40 years (Schafer, 1977).

Schafer's work culminated in the production of many recordings of natural environments and original works based on collected sounds, a curriculum for guiding learners toward deeper listening, and the international World Soundscape Project (Barry, 2019; Shafer, 1992). Soundscape recordings, as a component of fieldwork, are an effective way of studying nature. The data they gather can also be modified by composers into new works of music, often merely through selective sampling to minimize spaces of silence. In doing so, they highlight the most notable sonic events in any environment: sounds of birds, animals, weather, or water movement. While production of Soundscape recordings seems an ideal fit with Wild Pedagogy in natural settings, its products also enable all kinds of listeners to vicariously experience and appreciate nature—even listeners who are unable to escape an enormous city. Ecological sound art (Gilmurray, 2017) and Indigenous sound studies (Robinson, 2020) are additional related approaches that merit attention as extensions of the notion of acoustic ecology that emerged from the Soundscape movement (Westercamp, 2002).

Beyond Soundscape, there are other convincing indications that environmental awareness and recognition of concerns associated with Indigenous cultural sustainability have broadened among musicians and music educators. For example, even by the mid-20th century, many musicians had rejected the use of ivory and exotic woods in musical instrument manufacturing despite what had previously been ingrained perceptions of their centrality to the tradition of authentic instrument construction. Music production also gradually shifted to an all-digital format of streaming distribution, which was refreshing after so many generations of birds and mammals being suffocated or dismembered by long strands of tape from cassettes or vicious shards from compact disc cases and vinyl records that ended up in the ocean or landfills.[14] In many parts of the world, there has also been increasing concern regarding the decline of minority languages and growing recognition that the sustainability of language also has important implications for song repertoire.[15]

World Music Pedagogy (WMP) also supports an ecological perspective through its advocacy of interdisciplinary connections (with geography and sciences, for instance) and promotion of participatory activities in local communities (Coppola et al., 2020). Its aims are consistent with a growing realization among music educators that there is potential harm in replicating a "curriculum and pedagogy that is both elitist in approach and ethnocentric in content" (Hebert, 2010, p. 108), and that what is needed are balanced programs designed with an awareness of diverse music traditions, including local folk music associated with minorities and Indigenous peoples (Hebert & Saether, 2014; Sagar & Hebert, 2015).

The WMP approach begins with listening, but systematically guides students toward active and creative musical participation as well as interdisciplinary knowledge of musical heritage. Creative educational technologies are also increasingly developed for such purposes as integrated learning of music and

environmental concepts (e.g., "biophilia"),[16] and interactive digital mapping of both natural soundscapes and endangered traditional music practices.[17] Such educational initiatives promise to inspire direct exploratory learning experiences which give rise to "*transformative learning*, a learning that leads to abilities to go beyond what is taken for granted. Such learning is vital in times when changes in life conditions require social adjustments" (Saether, 2018, p. 104).

## Concluding Remarks

The power of music can be used to effectively represent environmental concerns through song, and this is not the first study to note the natural synergies between music and sustainability education.[18] Indeed, survival of the environment, of endangered species, and even of humanity and our most cherished cultural practices all require similar changes to society. In this essay, Wild Pedagogies, World Music Pedagogy and Soundscapes were identified as especially promising approaches to fruitful collaboration between the fields of nature conservation and music sustainability. Additionally, the potential role of music studies to enhance public awareness of the impact of noise pollution—not only on human health but also on the natural environment—was also demonstrated. It is a basic responsibility of educators to recognize and effectively promote those forms of social change that are fully endorsed by scientific research, thereby bridging the gaps between theories, policies, and practices. The use of environmental studies to bolster music and the use of music to bolster environmental studies are approaches to learning that promise to strengthen these respective fields, which share many of the same threats and aspirations for survival.

## Endnotes

1 An example of an ongoing research intervention with the objective of strengthening the sustainability of a threatened traditional genre is the Musical Transformations project in Vietnam, managed by Stefan Östersjö. I have been collaborating in Saigon as a member of this project in recent years with the Vietnamese-Swedish intercultural ensemble, The Six Tones, which seeks to document the lives and musicianship of master performers of Vong Co in the Mekong Delta, while also stimulating traditional artists to consider new possibilities for expanding their audience. See Östersjö (2020) for some of the early outcomes from this project.

2 For detailed discussion, see Holmes (2018).

3 I will limit this very brief survey to "Western" examples, but it is worth noting that other profoundly influential philosophers who were also active in music include the Central Asian scholars Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, as well as the great Indian polymath Rabindranath Tagore.

4 Suggested resources include the following: Brightman & Lewis (2020); Buscher et al. (2014); Fletcher (2016); Gordon et al. (2018); and Nussbaum (2013).

5 While the division between "high art" and "popular art" forms should not be seen as a universal and objective dichotomy, social conventions arguably produce different traditions that are generally understood as fitting within these broad categories, with each specific genre emphasizing slightly different aesthetic features (Novitz, 2003). See Hebert et al. (2017) for discussion of popular music and its changing role in education, and note that Rick Beato's YouTube channel merits recognition as an especially valuable audiovisual resource for identifying characteristics of quality song recordings (https://www.youtube.com/RickBeato).

6 There are strong indications that this tendency has continued to the present day. For example, the song "WAP" by Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B was recently recognized by the world's leading institutions of popular music as the most important song of 2020 (e.g., *Rolling Stone*'s "Best Song of 2020," Billboard Global 200's "Number One Song of 2020," and Grammy Award for "Best New Artist"). Musically, WAP features five components: (1) an endlessly repeated 3-note bass motif; (2) a male voice repeatedly singing, "There's some whores in this house" on one pitch; (3) predictable percussion sounds programmed into a digital sequencer; (4) truck horn and bell sounds (each appearing once); and (5) rapping of lyrics widely perceived as provocative and connected to the marketing of brothels. Its lyrics thereby explicitly celebrate how nature (sexuality) has been colonized by commercialization, and they are accompanied by a soundtrack that almost any listener anywhere in the world—whatever their identity or cultural background—could acknowledge as unusually simple music if the words are removed (e.g., *karaoke* version, available online). Especially when juxtaposed against the rich legacy of music-making among African-American women artists—from Aretha Franklin and Nina Simone in previous generations, to Esperanza Spalding and Alicia Keys today—WAP seems extremely over-rated. Indeed, in most medium-sized towns, on each inhabited continent worldwide, one can find local musicians producing sounds that are arguably more interesting than WAP, with a deeper level of musicianship, a stronger connection to cultural heritage, and lyrics that prompt socially valuable reflections rather than unhealthy behaviours, yet such local musicians too often financially struggle while WAP and its ilk generate millions of dollars. Celebration of WAP is very much the same phenomenon as consumers habitually choosing to eat at McDonald's, rather than a local restaurant, for the instant gratification of a cheap, well-marketed, and unhealthy product, since the popularity of WAP is based far more on marketing and shock value than on heritage and creative artistry.

7 Readers should note that IQ scores are widely known to only assess a very specific form of "intelligence" with limited validity, and are also considered

to suffer from a cultural bias. Nevertheless, the replicability of such findings raises important questions about confounding variables and conceivable causality.

8 We should also note here that "classical music" (or Western art music) is now more enthusiastically embraced among communities in East Asia and Latin America than anywhere else in the world (Baker, 2014; Hebert, 2012). Although much of this genre was produced generations ago by European men with aristocratic patronage, across time its connections to identity have become increasingly ambiguous in terms of ethnicity.

9 This way of thinking about such problems can be traced to Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, and others associated with the Frankfurt School, but arguably continues to be relevant today in many countries worldwide (Kang, 2013; Morelock, 2021). Within popular music idioms, innovative bands such as Postmodern Jukebox, and Jack Conte's projects Pomplamoose and Scary Pockets embody a promising alternative approach to popularist commodification, by developing creatively ahistorical arrangements of melodic hit songs which are freely offered as videos online.

10 I have written about this development elsewhere as part of my general argument that music is increasingly subservient to other media in contemporary life—as encapsulated by the phrase "content in a selfie-stick society"—due to a "glocalimbodied" lifestyle in which individuals frequently "brand" themselves via virtually disembodied social media (Hebert, 2018). To be fair, it is also worth noting here that traditional music (especially classical art music) and environmentalism itself (especially the "green" label) have sometimes also been destructively commercialized, particularly when it comes to branding and competitive pedigree.

11 See Hebert (2021) for a discussion of these educational issues from non-European and Indigenous perspectives. See Coppola et al. (2020) for a discussion of how diverse forms of global music heritage can be taught in higher education with interdisciplinary approaches that instill critical thinking and both cultural and environmental awareness.

12 For an overview of the philosophical bases for this approach, see Humphreys and Blenkinsop (2017).

13 For a fascinating account of how whale sounds entered the music industry, see Ritts (2017).

14 Upon reviewing the pre-publication proofs for this article, I learned of a new book that indicates how music streaming can have an underrecognized negative impact on the environment as well, especially when it comes to the "carbon footprint" associated with repeated listening of sound recordings (Devine, 2019).

15 Educational implications of the relationships between music sustainability and preservation of minority and Indigenous languages are explored in an early article by Heimonen et al. (2010). Later, the theme was examined to considerable depth in Grant (2014). Several additional studies appeared in

Schippers and Grant (2016). As oral languages are reduced for transcription and digital transliteration, they meet many of the same kinds of distortions encountered when traditional music is reduced for arrangement in a western tonal system and standardized rhythmic patterns.

16 See Husby and Hebert (2019).

17 See *Sounds of the Forest* (n.d.) and *Music Vitality and Endangerment Map* (n.d.).

18 For additional examples, see Kagan and Kirchberg (2016), Titon (2009), and Østergaard (2019).

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# Rewilding the Imagination: Teaching Ecocriticism in the Change Times

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***Abstract***

*Uncertainty about the future is a defining feature of our times due to ongoing and global environmental emergencies. This reality prompts a re-evaluation of the traditional role, purpose, and ethics of post-secondary courses such as English literature. The present moment calls for pedagogical practices that support holistic learning, community building, ecological awareness, and adaptation skills. Ecocritical instruction guided by wild pedagogy concepts supports students' emotional, social, and ecological selves, and moves ecocritical curriculum beyond unperceived anthropocentric values. The unique neurobiological impacts of reading fiction make ecofiction a valuable resource for fostering social imagining and community building. Wild pedagogy principles are evident in Delia Owen's 2018 ecofiction novel,* Where the Crawdads Sing*, and can be explored through three suggested activities.*

***Résumé***

*Les urgences environnementales mondiales actuelles font de l'incertitude face à l'avenir l'une des caractéristiques dominantes de notre époque. Cette réalité appelle la réévaluation du rôle, de l'objectif et de l'éthique traditionnels des cours postsecondaires (ex. la littérature anglaise). L'heure est venue d'adopter des pratiques pédagogiques qui favorisent l'apprentissage holistique, le développement du sentiment d'appartenance, la conscience écologique et la capacité d'adaptation. L'instruction écocritique guidée par les concepts des pédagogies de la nature soutient le soi affectif, social et écologique des apprenants et permet au programme d'enseignement écocritique d'aller au-delà des valeurs anthropocentriques inconscientes. La lecture d'œuvres de fiction entraîne des répercussions neurobiologiques particulières; ainsi, l'écofiction est une ressource précieuse pour nourrir l'imagination sociale et le sentiment d'appartenance. Les principes des pédagogies de la nature sont évidents dans le roman d'écofiction* Where the Crawdads Sing *de Delia Owen (v.f. :* Là où chantent les écrevisses*), publié en 2018, et ces principes peuvent être explorés à travers les trois activités suggérées.*

*Keywords:* ecocriticism, wild pedagogies, ecofiction, Delia Owens, ecopedagogy, post-secondary education, literature, environment, neurobiology of reading

*Mots-clés* : écocritique, pédagogies de la nature, écofiction, Delia Owens, écopédagogie, éducation postsecondaire, littérature, environnement, neurobiologie de la lecture

## Introduction: Teaching in the Change Times

We are living in the Change Times. Unprecedented and ongoing environmental alterations caused by climate change and biodiversity loss make even the most routine assumptions about the ongoingness of human lives and lifestyles uncertain. These environmental instabilities throw the economic, technological, social, and familial lives of every human on the planet into uncertainty (Bendell, 2018; Bringhurst & Zwicky, 2018). We cannot take for granted that any human culture anywhere on the planet will be able to maintain their current lifestyle into the next few decades. These "disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times," as Haraway (2016, p. 1) describes them, call for a radical reassessment of the way we conceive of post-secondary pedagogical practice.

Growing numbers of young adults arrive for their first semester at post-secondary institutions knowing or sensing these deep uncertainties. Indeed, skyrocketing diagnoses of North American youth anxiety and depression (Twenge, 2000; Gabor Maté, 2015, personal communication) and alarming increases in youth suicide (Twenge et al., 2018) may be fuelled in part by this "knowing," whether it is conscious and located in the brain or somatic and sensed in the nervous system. Acknowledged or not, instability and uncertainty are discomforting facts of the present moment. Here in North America, we experience them in unpredictable weather patterns and the rising costs of unpredictable food crops. We sense them in teetering political systems, such as the rise of nationalism, the cults of personality-politicians, and the corporate corruption of democracy. As I write this, news sources are livestreaming simultaneous updates on China's coronavirus epidemic, Trump's impeachment, Brexit, and the unprecedented Australian bushfire season. But by the time you read this, we'll be barrelling headlong toward the next global shocks.

Of course, upheaval and change have always been features of life. Certainly, generations of Indigenous and Black people living in North America have faced catastrophic change and upheaval as whole communities, cultures, and ways of life have been obliterated by the forces of genocide, slavery, and systemic racism. The changes threatening the world today threaten to wipe out the fragile gains made by these and other groups. Environmental degradation exacerbates inequalities and affects every human, every ecosystem, every plant, every animal, every ocean, the earth's air, and more.

As an English instructor, I've taught a few thousand, culturally-diverse students at several post-secondary institutions in British Columbia. We've examined news articles and written essays about current events in high-level ESL and first-year composition and research classes. We've studied environmentally oriented novels, short stories, plays, and poems in first and second-year literature classes. Many of my first-year English students tell me they cannot stomach the news, including climate change news, and deliberately avoid it. They may be consumed with their own personal disasters, already literally twitching with

anxiety or else morose with depression that doctors chalk up to brain chemistry. Therapists Atkins and Snyder (2018) rightly suggest that we must understand "the messages of these symptoms as a call for a shift in values and world views" (p. 90). One of my recent students, a self-described "climate refugee," lost their home and community in a typhoon of anomalous strength. Another is grieving his childhood beaches in the Mauritian Islands as the rising sea eats up the shore. A number of domestic students have confided to me that they don't expect to reach old age because of the emerging climate catastrophe. One of these students announced to the class that she felt "hopeless" about the state of the environment and, therefore, didn't see the point in discussing it or reading about it. Those sitting next to her nodded in agreement.

At the other end of the spectrum, many of my students are brand new to the concept of global environmental concerns. Like most North American college instructors, I teach a large percentage of international students, the majority of whom are new arrivals to Canada and are full of hope about their bright futures. Educational systems in their home countries tend not to prioritize environmental learning. When asked to write about the best ways to address environmental problems in my composition classes, quite a few of these students recommend stopping the practice of throwing garbage out the car window—because it makes the streets "unattractive." Some have never been introduced to the concept of "the environment" as a topic, and most do not understand our species' complete interdependency on nature's systems and processes. Nonetheless, having grown up on countryside farms, many of them have rich ecological knowledges that can exceed that of domestic, urban students. For example, one of these students spent her entire childhood sleeping outdoors with her grandmother, listening to her tell stories about the stars. For her, childhood, storytelling, sleep, and familial love were deeply intwined with starlight.

These diverse student knowledges and uncertain life trajectories raise serious questions for me about the role, purpose, and ethics of leading post-secondary classes. How can I prepare young people for an unknowable future? What is the appropriate starting point? How do I weigh the need for hope against the need for honesty and adjustment to new realities? Abundant climate change and biodiversity loss data show that humanity's continued efforts to ameliorate and reduce environmental harms amount to far too little, far too late. In light of this reality, how can we prompt a radical shift in worldview so that the environmental harms of anthropocentrism are not accidentally replicated over and over? Might a reorientation toward social resilience, expressive communication, meaning making, social connection, and adaptation skills take precedence over the teaching of thesis statements, comma use, and citation style?

Some of these questions are too large to answer in a paper of this size. Nonetheless, post-secondary educators need some direction without delay. This paper argues that the literary field of ecocriticism, paired with wild pedagogies touchstones, supports diverse student groups in more holistic, joyful, creative,

adaptive, and socially imaginative educational practices that better prepare them for ongoing ecological uncertainties. While this effort originates in pedagogical concerns for the discipline of English, suggestions here may benefit a variety of disciplines.

I assert that the Change Times call for pedagogical practices that promote holistic learning, community building, ecological awareness, and adaptation skills. To start, post-secondary education must shift its focus from brain to whole being (Sean Blenkinsop, personal conversation, 2017). Students are navigating complex emotional responses to our changing world—denial, grief, anxiety, anger, hope, determination. They need learning environments that acknowledge this range of emotion. As much as we might wish it, we cannot resolve or completely allevieate their grief and anxiety; the facts of the climate emergency are real and increasingly evident in student experiences of wildfires, storms, floods, food shortages, and displaced peoples. Thus, a more compassionate, albeit emotionally challenging, path involves acknowledging difficult emotion, holding space for it, and working to build collective resilience.

Most Western post-secondary education is disconnected from the wisdom of the body. How—one might wonder—can somatic experience inform learning in a first-year English classroom? Typically, it rarely does. In the average English course, for example, students are expected to do little more than think and speak. Their bodily experience is largely considered irrelevant. However, the activities described later in this article show how somatic experiences can expand creativity, critical thinking, and literary comprehension.

Despite the gravity of the moment, numerous scholars and activists suggest paths forward that offer more personal authenticity, deeper meaning, stronger bonds, and greater joy (e.g., Akomolafe, 2020; Bendell, 2018; Jickling, 2018). Thus, while grief defines the present condition for many of us, the upending of our education system might nevertheless be undertaken with righteous satisfaction, healthy rebelliousness, and even playful defiance. Haraway (2016) urges us to "to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places" (p. 1). Harney and Moten (2013) call for wildness as a relief from and active resistance to unjust and irreparable systems of injustice. In following Bendell's lead (2018), our confrontation with personal and societal denial and grief may allow us to refocus "on truth, love and joy in the now" (p. 19). Akomolafe (2020) suggests we need the trickster now, and we need to allow "ourselves to do pleasurable things in the face of the storm."

Greater joy and more holistic selfhood are foundational for the Change Times' greatest pedagogical necessity: Students need help to imagine new ways of *being* in the world (Jickling et al., 2018). To truly address the anthropocentric fallacies of our post-secondary institutions, we must rethink all aspects of teaching from an ecocentric perspective. That is, we must rethink an earth-centred approach to education that prompts us to ask how the purpose, content,

and form of our classes and institutions support *all* life rather than just human life. This radical shift in our dominant pedagogical model would include valuing relationship over individuality and actively making room for the voices of the more-than-human in our pedagogical practices. Wherever possible, those new ways of being should also involve more joy, more freedom, and greater flourishing than standard education has allowed (Jickling et al., 2018). Because literature and storytelling launch us into an imaginative state and *illustrate* new ways of being, they can benefit many disciplines at this time.

### *Ecocriticism to the Rescue, Sort Of*

The field of literary ecocriticism offers one potential pathway for expanding pedagogical practice in the Change Times, but it is embedded within the standard Western education system, which contains many unchecked assumptions and habits. Western education rewards competition over cooperation, individuality over interdependency, rights over responsibility, categorization over holism, and thinking over feeling. Like most university students, many ecocriticism students sit at solitary desks, competing for grades on individual assignments, emphasizing cognition rather than emotion or intuition. The unspoken values imparted through these Western-style lessons work well at supporting the culture of capitalism, consumerism, patriarchy, and anthropocentrism. Yet, in many of these classes, little or no attention is given to the colonization of wild nature required to build the post-secondary institutions within which to hold these ecocritical discussions (Sean Blenkinsop, personal conversation, 2016).

Ecocriticism emerged in the 1990s to examine the relationship between humans and non-human nature in literature, art, architecture, and related fields. The prominent ecocritic Greg Garrard (2012) suggests, "Ecocriticism has been preoccupied with pedagogy since its inception" (p. 1). The statement may be broadly true, particularly in the comparative, that is, compared to other literary subfields which hardly consider pedagogy at all. Yet, this pedagogical reflection in ecocriticism often doesn't go far enough in addressing the anthropocentric and individualistic foundations that give rise to unecological ways of being in the world. The field tends to orient from the Western ontology of individualism and still positions humans as the ultimate authorities, as the "knowledge holders," while more-than-humans are assumed to be passive objects to be studied.

Indeed, a great many ecocritics and ecocritical journals have little or no focus on teaching practices. Even those that do (e.g., Fassbinder et al., 2012; Garrard, 2012) largely make adjustments to current pedagogical practice rather than questioning foundational assumptions embedded within those practices. Yet unchecked foundational biases and modes of operation hamper the field's potential to truly transform education and offer young people new and better ways of being in the world. Jickling (2018) elucidates this point: "Education, as it is most often encountered—that is, inside, seated, standardized, and more-or-less still—is a work of abstraction and heavily, perhaps even oppressively,

mediated experiences" (p. x). Ecocriticism that is taught within the enclosure of a typical classroom, with traditional composition assignments, under the assumption of the isolation of the individual, and without requiring students to consider their own ecological position may unwittingly replicate harmful ideologies of the status quo.

Although scholars like Garrard (2012) have meaningfully interrogated the pedagogical possibilities of ecocriticism, the wild pedagogies conceptions carry the discussion farther and clarify a helpful theoretical framework from which to develop course-specific practices. In general, the field of ecocriticism contains scant discussion of the pedagogical *practices* that might decentre the human and attend to the voices of the more-than-human.

The authors of *Wild Pedagogies* (Jickling et al., 2018) articulate that in light of our current ecological emergency, "educators need to trouble the dominant versions of education that are enacted in powerful ways and that bend outcomes towards a human-centred and unecological *status quo*" (p. 1). This effort should involve all levels of education and all disciplines. While the discussion on the ecopedagogy of English is limited both in quantity and scope, environmental education has a long history of ecopedagogical development. However, as Garrard (2010) points out, the fields of literary ecocriticism and environmental education do not talk to each other. Garrard rightly acknowledges, "teachers of ecocriticism and environmental education researchers largely seem to work in mutual unawareness" of each other's work (p. 233). In addition to its other benefits, the wild pedagogies touchstones offer a helpful point of convergence.

Instructors of ecocriticism may spend enormous energy planning lesson content but overlook subtle messaging occurring through lesson *form*. In many ecocriticism classrooms, the physical separation of students from more-than-humans goes unacknowledged. For example, while land acknowledgement to Indigenous Nations is frequently offered, acknowledgement of the displaced animals, plants, water ways, and ecosystems likely isn't. Additionally, in the classroom, nuanced messages about compartmentalization, the isolation of the self, and social hierarchies may be imparted (Sean Blenkinsop, 2016, personal communication) along with the notion that *real* learning takes place in human-made spaces. Consequently, students are neither shaken from the institution's anthropocentric focus nor asked to consider their own participation in the colonization of the more-than-human realm. Even from a literary analysis perspective, entirely indoor ecocritical curriculum may be of reduced benefit because it inadvertently fosters overly-simplified conceptions of more-than-humans.

Researchers suggest the voices of the more-than-human world are actively oppressed by Western, industrial, and capitalistic cultural tendencies (e.g., Derby et al., 2015). Just as the anti-colonial movement has sought to listen to the voices of oppressed, marginalized, and overlooked peoples, so too has the wild pedagogies movement sought to listen to the oppressed, marginalized,

and overlooked voices of more-than-humans. What does the red maple tree on the campus lawn want? How does it manage its needs? How does it enact its agency? What messages might it bring to the ongoing ecocritical conversation?

Some scholars may dismiss the notion that trees and other more-than-humans have the capacity and right to communicate on their own behalf. To them, this claim veers close to "magical thinking" and resides outside acceptable scholarly practice. As Randy Laist (2013) explains, the typical urbanite sees plants as "a category of things that are alive like we are, but alive in a way that is utterly different, closed off from our capacity for empathy, omnipresent but unknown, seductive but unresponsive" (p. 14). The right and capacity of women, Blacks, and children with disabilities to communicate on their own behalf was once widely challenged too. It's fallacious to ignore more-than-human voices on the grounds that one feels odd or uncomfortable doing so—or that we should continue to treat more-than-humans as techno-industrial cultures have been, without risking re-evaluation. Protections for marginalized groups will always require discomforting reassessment of the world and humbling recognition of mistakes. Furthermore, individuals and cultures who have developed relationships with maple trees, alligator lizards, and glacial rivers attest that the more-than-human world can and does communicate and act on behalf of self and others in highly complex and compelling ways.

## A Marriage of Ecocriticism and Wild Pedagogies Conceptions

Ecocritical courses guided by wild pedagogies conceptions shift students outside the classroom and its literal, yet invisible, anthropocentric framing. Wild pedagogies offers a pathway for: 1) decentring the human instructor, 2) relationship-building with the natural world, 3) holistic learning, 4) attending to cultural and experiential diversities, and 5) joyful and wild flourishing. These pedagogical practices are only "new" by dominant, Western educational standards; for example, Indigenous educational practices are innately holistic, experiential, relational, supportive of diversity, and born from the land (Ahenakew, 2017; Sheridan & Longboat, 2006; Marsden, 2019). Perhaps, as Sheridan and Longboat imply (2006), the immature relationship between settler culture and Turtle Island is slowly maturing into conceptions made available through the land itself. When ecocriticism is guided by wild pedagogies principles, post-secondary students benefit through enhanced capacity for creative thought, greater ecological self-awareness, and experiential ecocentric learning practices. Additionally, these principles support the "old growth" knowledges (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006, p. 366) inherent in the cultures of First Nations students, and, thus, work toward honouring these students and undoing white epistemological racism.

Fiction engages readers in important ways non-fiction cannot. Reading fiction triggers the imagination, allowing us to conceptualize simulations of the real world

and thus neurobiologically *experience* alternate realities. Reading fiction *is* a form of experiential and holistic learning. It stimulates new ideas, emotions, and bodily sensations, such as hormonal, blood pressure, and heart rate changes. The neural pathways and connections involved in imagining closely mirror actual experience (Lillard, 2013), thus providing a kind of "practice run" for future actions and experiences. Functional MRI scans of readers show that both fiction and non-fiction reading prompt neurological behaviour associated with observation of real-time events; however, fiction reading also prompts neurological activity associated with imagining future possibilities (Altmann et al., 2014).

Thus, ecocentric fiction enables students to both imagine *and* pseudo-experience new ways of being in the world. Mar and Oatley (2008) underscore this claim with their observations of the basic purpose of storytelling. They conclude that fiction functions like a kind of math, but whereas mathematical equations enable greater understanding of material reality, fictional narratives enable greater understanding of social realities. By extension, carefully chosen ecofiction also promotes greater understanding of ecological realities and students' ecological selves. That is, ecofiction prompts greater cosmological and environmental self-awareness.

When students read as a cohort and are guided by wild pedagogical principles, they also participate in communal imagination processes, which can be managed to promote cooperation, interdependency, and holism. Cognitively, readers tap into their own unique personal experiences when *mentalizing* a narrative—that is, when visualizing the sensory, social, and contextual aspects of a story. In a post-secondary context, student readers then share insights, questions, and observations with each other, thereby reassessing and refining their own mentalization of the narrative. They can then be encouraged to see themselves as collaborators in group imagination processes and to co-create a shared experience of the story. Benefiting from their own diverse backgrounds, participants co-imagine literary locales. Sharing neurocognitive experience and shaping group imagination builds community.

Of course, student discussions of fiction have as much potential to destroy peer communities as support them. Briefly, skillful guided discussion requires instructor honesty, as well as upfront and open discussion about 1) respectful listening, 2) the advantages of sharing diverse perspectives, 3) the right to err or change one's mind, and 4) the courage to be a "voice in the wild." Openly discussing these agreements builds trust and a feeling of mutual support before the first fiction discussion even arrives.

Collaborative discussions enable students to observe what *is* and collectively imagine what *could be*. Gosling and Case (2013) note that we need "social dreams" to confront and adapt to unthinkable environmental realities and possibilities (p. 705). They argue:

> Assuming the direst predictions of climate science are correct and the planet is, indeed, facing climate catastrophe, it becomes imperative for modern Western

> societies—and those peoples who aspire to emulate their lifestyles—to *imagine* this prospect. Such imaginings must be a prelude to any form of action taken to avert or prepare for the consequences ahead as humanity sits precariously on the edge of the abyss. (p. 706)

This assessment would seem to support the use of dystopian and apocalyptic fiction, which may 1) awaken students to discussions about the current realities and possible trajectories of environmental crisis, 2) allow stressed student readers an opportunity to experience and release pent-up emotion within the safety of make-believe realities, and 3) reassure students that the world is not currently in an apocalyptic state.

However, dystopian fiction, although popular with students and instructors of ecocriticism, poses a complicated starting point for diverse audiences and may heighten some students' anxieties and denials. Also, dystopian fiction may actually undermine efforts to mobilize students to protect environments. Schneider-Mayerson's survey of readers (2018) found that readers of dystopian fiction focused on "prepping" for apocalypse rather than being responsible ecological citizens or activists (p. 495). Schneider-Mayerson adds, "For many of these readers, we see evidence of the continuing individualization of environmental action and the emphasis on 'small and easy' actions" (p. 495).

For these reasons, I prefer to start with literature that is set in the recognizable world of *now*. Greater eco-awareness begins with students understanding how humans might relate differently to nature *now*. While the English literary canon is replete with examples of marginalized, misunderstood, and abused more-than-humans, some Indigenous novels, along with some newer settler literatures, immerse readers in rich and complex relationships with more-than-human characters. An abbreviated list of eco-novels might include the following: *Ceremony* (Silko, 1977); *Overstory* (Powers, 2018); and translated texts such as *The Blue Fox* (Sjón, 2003) and *Wolf Totem* (Rong, 2004).

Fiction's unique capacity to carry readers to similar emotional and cognitive spaces makes it an excellent starting point for classes with diverse student groups. As researchers note (Bal & Veltcamp, 2013; Mar et al., 2006), reading fiction activates empathy in ways that non-fiction does not. Empathetic engagement is key for shifting students out of the head-centred, hyper-individualized patterns of traditional Western thought and into relational orientations to the world. Together as a class and with the assistance of more-than-humans, they can create a shared community of ideas that is enhanced by divergent backgrounds in student populations and grounded in shared locale.

### *Listening to Crawdads Sing*

An excellent ecocentric novel for these diverse student groups is Delia Owen's *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2018), which illustrates the possibilities inherent in a deep relationship with nature, ecocentric ways of learning, and more-than-human

sovereignty. With skilled discussion facilitation and wild pedagogies-inspired activities, the novel can be used to invite readers to reconsider, deepen, and appreciate their own ecological relationships. At a time when so many students are lonely, homesick, and/or friendless, the novel acknowledges the emotional pain of social isolation while carrying readers into a realm of rich and rewarding ecological relationships. In other words, its emotional starting point is one that even culturally diverse student groups relate to and appreciate.

Owen's novel illustrates ways of relating to animals, plants, and water that are likely both new and familiar to students. The novel's protagonist is a girl and young woman through most of the novel. [Spoiler Alert.] Like any human, she has certain social needs, yet she is unable to meet them after being abandoned by her family and shunned by the local community. She lives alone from the age of 13 in a shack by a saltwater marsh in North Carolina. The novel shows readers a multitude of deep and enduring relationships the protagonist, Kya, maintains with the more-than-humans around her. Aching from being abandoned by her mother, young Kya finds a maternal bond from the marsh itself. Owens writes:

> Sometimes [Kya] heard night-sounds she didn't know or jumped from lightning too close, but whenever she stumbled, it was the land who caught her. Until at last, at some unclaimed moment, the heart-pain seeped away like water into sand. Still there, but deep. Kya laid her hand upon the breathing, wet earth, and the marsh became her mother. (p. 34)

The marsh takes on the role of her comforting protector while, later on, waves and mayflies offer more playful encounters. In her late teens, her sexuality blooms. When she has no human to explore this budding side of herself, she plays with the small, foaming waves rolling into the marsh; she lies on the sand and waits for the cool, delicious tickle of the waves to reach her bare legs. As gentle as a young lover, the waves flirt against her legs and thighs, helping her discover the edges of her developing body. Later, she dances in the moonlight with the mayflies, indulging in the romantic beauty of night.

In a life of abandonment and lost loved ones, seagulls, stars, and marsh water become her family, her most reliable friends, her confidantes, her closest allies, and her saviours in varied, complex, spontaneous, and abiding ways. The local flock of seagulls and a curious red hawk pull her from a profound depression by reminding her she is not alone, she is not forgotten, she is connected to others, and she belongs. Students reading this novel can pseudo-experience these relationships too, perhaps relating them to their own experiences of nature or else imagining possible relationships. They can also share their real-life experiences in class and further expand the field of possible relationships for other students.

Additionally, the novel illustrates the wild pedagogies concept of nature as educator. Since the protagonist only attends school for a single—unsatisfying—day, the book viscerally decentres human educators. Nearly all of Kya's key

life lessons are grounded in her observations and interactions with more-than-humans. For example, the protagonist watches a flock of turkeys attack one of their own after it becomes "different" (p. 90). She comprehends that group survival and conformity motivate this action. Later that day, when the local boys taunt her with the name "Marsh Girl," she readily recognizes the psychological underpinnings of their actions. Like the turkey flock, they too are fearful of "difference" and imagine it might taint them. Kya understands that the boys are functioning on instinct; their animosity is far less personal than it appears.

Readers also witness how a lesson from fireflies eventually saves Kya's life—if not her literal life, certainly the sanctity of her lifestyle. The female firefly uses deceptive courtship signals—flashing light—for self-preservation by luring a male firefly of different species into becoming her dinner. Later on, Kya enacts this knowledge at a human level when she sends false signals of availability to the man who intends to beat and rape her. Only through sacrificing his life in self-defence is she able to preserve her own.

The novel bears witness to the agency of many more-than-humans and gives them space on the page for voice, thus indirectly decentring the human. For example, through Kya's observations, readers understand how the sycamore tree assesses the seasons and subsequently adjusts itself to oncoming winter. Similarly, tides, seagulls, and others act on their own behalf in a far more active manner than more-than-humans in most other English language novels. The author, a zoologist by training, actively works to decolonize the more-than-human realm by giving space and voice to the more-than-humans, as well as by illustrating the intelligence, creativity, and agency of their cultures.

Furthermore, the novel shows readers how human knowledge can be mediated through and positively synthesized with more-than-human knowledges, creating robust, holistic knowledges. When some students first encounter the concept of ecocentrism, they mistakenly believe it to be anti-human. Owen's novel helpfully illustrates how human knowledges can positively support and are inexorably entwined with more-than-human knowledges. Kya's existence, unlike many of ours, does not reside on a binary of human and more-than-human. She lives an ecocentric lifestyle in which the human realm is simply part of a greater whole. Rather late in childhood, she learns how to read human words—long after she learns the tides, the patterns of clouds, and the flight paths of seabirds. She perceives words and sentences as "seeds" that are both "exposed" and "secret," and which have great power to grow (p. 113). Her newfound discovery of reading—and eventually, poetry writing—allows her greater depth of understanding about plants, animals, and air and their processes. In this way, a symbiosis of knowledges takes place since increased human knowledge eventually allows her to articulate, to other humans, needed protections for the marsh. Thus, the novel suggests the possibility of a positive interdependency between human writing skills and more-than-human ecologies—a provocative concept for literature students to explore.

Lastly, the novel embraces the wild pedagogies concept of the sensual, flourishing freedom of wildness. The title, *Where the Crawdads Sing*, hints that somewhere beyond the confines of the contemporary human world, the more-than-humans and even the humans can be truly free—and that this freedom may unleash hidden potentials, talents, and joys. This too is the message of the wild pedagogies movement: A movement toward wildness is a movement toward greater capacity to be one's full self instead of the partial-selves the "civilized world" sometimes demands (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 104). In essence, it is a call to protect and seek out inner (self) and outer (Nature) wilderness and wildness and recognize their intertwining.

Kya appreciates these nuances between confinement and freedom. The pretty girls from town are admired by the boys, unlike her, but they must also conform to outer standards of beauty and femininity. Under these constraints, they become slightly less beautiful, less capable, less talented, less authentic, and much less free. Boys are similarly shackled with conventions of manhood and normativity. One young man temporarily severs his love for Kya in order to fit in, causing himself enormous emotional pain. Even from a distance, Kya suffers from the human world. Yet, surrounded by the wild marshland, she has enviable freedom to simply *be* and to unfold into *becoming*.

### *Wild Pedagogy Activities for Sensory and Somatic English Lessons*

Wild pedagogy experiences enable students to develop meaningful relationships with the more-than-humans. They also create spaces for more-than-humans to be active co-teachers within the field of ecocriticism. This shift occurs when the human instructor actively steps back to allow more-than-humans to communicate directly with students. In first and second-year English classes, students need not be told of the nature-as-co-teacher concept. In fact, it may be better not to raise confusing expectations and instead let experience lead the way. Happily, the richness of engaging with nature in this way cannot be predicted in advance. One day recently, I took an ecocritical class outside to the city college lawn, and—remarkably—twenty-two bald eagles circled over our heads.

When students have the opportunity to listen to the voices of the more-than-human world, they not only deepen their own ecological awareness, they are better positioned to engage in meaningful ecocritical analysis as well. The student who has learned to listen, who recognizes the agency, complexity, and fascination of the more-than-human realm, is better poised to discuss, for example, the way water stores memory in *Where the Crawdads Sing*. Conversely, a student who has remained indoors during their study may retain flat, two-dimensional notions of "tree," "fox," and "marsh."

What follows are three wild pedagogies activities that provide sensory and somatic engagement: sensory engagement; deep listening; and cosmology diary.

*Sensory Engagement*

This is a good starting point activity for students with diverse needs and ecological experiences. Students are asked to find some space of wildness to carefully observe each day for a week. Initially, students can just observe, without recording, for 20 minutes—a doable amount of time for typically overworked students. Given that most post-secondary institutions are established in cities, the "wild" space may be as simple as a patch of sky, a local community of crows, or the weeds at the edge of a park. This seemingly simple exercise might be enhanced by students' own ecological awareness, but it is specifically inclusive of students who may have had exceedingly little contact with wild nature. The primary goal of this initial activity is simply to turn toward the more-than-human world and away from the human one. Garrard (2012) notes that students "are less able to detect and assess misrepresentations" of the more-than-human world "without direct experience of their originals" (p. 5).

Beyond enhancing critical reading capacity, this exercise also supports somatic learning—which is so often overlooked in English classrooms. We think differently and arrive at different ideas when the wind is blowing through our hair, the sunlight is patterning through the leaves, and parades of clouds are crossing overhead. Summarizing the work of multiple researchers, Atkins and Snyder (2018) explain that beauty, such as the natural beauty of the outdoors, offers "nourishment for the soul," inspires "serenity and exhilaration," and promotes "self-organization" through mathematical harmonies (p. 69). Thinking in the outdoors also promotes creativity by offering more complex visual stimuli (Sean Blenkinsop, 2019, personal communication) and allowing for the whole body, and not just the brain, to register and initiate ideas. Furthermore, because exposure to nature spaces—especially wild ones—can also enhance the immune system, reduce anxiety, and alleviate depression (Kuo, 2015), students may have greater access to cognitive resources.

*Deep Listening*

Building on the sensory engagement activity, students might be invited to partake in deep listening (Piersol, 2014). Students are asked to listen to a more-than-human—who is calling them?—to turn toward that entity with mindful listening. They might, for example, turn to the night stars, a tree on their street, a spider on the windowsill. This activity begins similarly to sensory engagement but with a progression that fosters relationship. Day 1— only listen. Listen to the communications occurring, for example, between stars and space, light and dark, solid matter and gas/dark matter. Consider dialogue and listening as multisensory processes. That is, dialogue can be auditory, tactile, chemical, visual, etc. Day 2 — listen and write down detailed observations, without judgements or anthropocentric characterizations. Day 3 — listen and try to answer the question, *What does this being want? Try to truly listen with empathy but without tainting with human projections*.

*Cosmology Diary*

A final step or activity to try with a more advanced ecocritical group is the development of a cosmology diary. Students are asked to keep a journal of their personal reflections on cosmology, ecophilosophy, and developing ecological awareness. As much as possible, students should write outdoors; however, in extreme weather, they can witness the outdoors from an interior space.

They may be asked to address questions such as the following: *What is connected? What is disconnected? Does your life have meaning? How so? Or, why not? Does the life of the dandelion/bottle fly/snow next to you have meaning? How so? Or, why not? In what ways are you connected to the dandelion/bottle fly/snow? How do your purposes or existences intersect, intertwine, influence one another? Who is responsible for whom? Why?* Additional questions might include: *In what ways have you been domesticated or constrained? What is the wildness inside you that might "sing" if you were beyond the boundaries of the human realm? Describe the nature of your relationships with trees, animals, and weather. Who, in the more-than-human world, has taught you and what was the lesson?* This is a fluid list of ideas and certainly each instructor can tailor their questions to specific locales, cultural contexts, and student needs. Students can then be asked to share their answers in groups.

## Conclusion: Preparing for the Unknown

Bringing wild pedagogies concepts to ecocriticism can offer a holistic, ecocentric alternative to status quo models of learning that inadvertently reinforce toxic anthropocentric behaviour. This pedagogical pairing also supports vastly divergent student experiences of the environment. Indigenous students may feel an increased sense of belonging and support for their traditional ways of knowing. The student who has felt "hopeless" may find joy and renewal, while the environmentally-unaware student may be gently turned toward the more-than-human realm. The students experiencing solastalgia (longing for lost environments) develop new relationships with new locales, while many students become aware of the colonization of nature's spaces. These activities develop ecological self-awareness and a shift away from institutionalized anthropocentrism, and they normalize the sovereignty of the more-than-human realm.

Ecofiction launches students into imaginative experience—with one eye on the observable realities of our world and one on possible futures. With well-chosen ecofiction, this imaginative pseudo-experience can enable students to adapt to a rapidly shifting world. To understand, better prepare for, and hopefully slow down destructive changes in the environment, young adults need to learn how to listen deeply and value more-than-human agency.

The activities outlined above also allow students to turn more toward each other and, thereby, build communities of new knowledge and shared vision. With

skilled facilitation, they can recognize that differences—whether in ecosystems or groups of students—can be mutually supportive and strengthening. Through their shared and co-created experience of story, students become more relationally oriented, and foster individual and group resilience. Although the wild pedagogy-ecocriticism pairing is guided by environmental priorities, research suggests student mental health and physical well-being will likely benefit from increased outdoor time too (e.g., Kuo, 2015; Narvaez, 2014; Roszak, 1992).

Future research might question how the structure, organization, and design of writing can be guided by "ecological principles" (Englehardt & Schraffenberger, 2015, p. 473). Traditional English essays are largely structured for reader efficiency, to allow for skimming and quick consumption. But, from an ecological perspective, efficiency and consumption are problematic features. Investigations into new compositional styles might look to Tsing's book chapters, blooming like "flushes of mushrooms" (Tsing, 2015, p. viii), Kimmerer's stories, woven like sweetgrass (Kimmerer, 2013), and Powers's old growth interdependencies (*Overstory*, 2018).

## Notes on Contributor

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# Transforming Existing Perceptions: Language as a Tool for Accessing the Ecological Self

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***Abstract***

*The way we story our lives shapes the way we understand and experience the world. This paper draws on concepts from narrative therapy and examples of traditional wisdom to argue that an important step in recognizing our interdependence and co-extensive relationships with the more-than-human world is to introduce language that acknowledges non-human beings as subjects rather than objects. To frame experiential learning pathways that enter into wild pedagogies of nature, this paper will focus on two reflective touchstones: 1) agency and role of nature as co-teacher; and 2) locating the wild. By exploring the possibility of narratives that are co-created with the wild, we may expand our identification with the more-than-human world, opening us up to experiences of our own, more inclusive, ecological self.*

***Résumé***

*La manière dont nous concevons la trame de notre vie modèle notre compréhension et notre expérience du monde. Le présent article, s'inspirant des concepts de la thérapie narrative et d'exemples de sagesse traditionnelle, soutient que l'une des étapes importantes de la reconnaissance de notre interdépendance et de nos relations d'égal à égal avec le monde extrahumain est justement de faire appel à un langage qui considère les êtres non humains comme des sujets plutôt que des objets. Pour bien situer les voies d'apprentissage expérientiel qui cadrent avec les pédagogies de la nature, le présent article aborde principalement deux de ses pierres d'assise : 1) la capacité d'agir et le rôle de la nature comme co-enseignant; 2) la rencontre avec la nature. En explorant la possibilité de cocréer nos trames narratives avec la nature, nous nous sentirons plus proche du monde extrahumain, ce qui nous ouvrira à faire l'expérience de notre soi inclusif et écologique.*

*Keywords:* ecological self, wild pedagogies, language, narrative, nature

*Mots-clés* : soi écologique, pédagogies de la nature, langage, trame narrative, nature

"Each of us knows in our bones that the world is not a machine"
(Drengson, 1995, p. 85).

## The Need for Wild Pedagogies

The profound level of interconnectedness of humans with each other and with the more-than-human world has been brought into stark relief since the early months of 2020. Addressing complex problems such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, racism, mental health, overpopulation, sustainability, economic disparity, and the loss of biodiversity has often been undertaken through the highly specialized channels that characterize traditional education and research. However, the abovementioned problems are closely interconnected. Indeed, these issues may be understood as different aspects of one crisis, which is largely a crisis of how we have come to view the world and the narratives that ensue from this (Macy & Brown, 2014). Within this current milieu, my work as a clinical counsellor has made me increasingly aware of the need for a more integrative and experiential approach to psychological health.

As a psychotherapist, I have been brought into conversation with many young people who are able to speak candidly and with considerable insight about the problems they and their generation must address. Those faced with the task of tackling the converging and increasingly urgent crises in our society experience, understandably, a wide range of emotional responses. Many voice a sense of loss of hope for a predictable future and express frustration at systemic injustices that perpetuate oppression and environmental destruction. It is my sense that the modern Western perception of humans as lone actors who are surrounded by a world of objects has both contributed to, and continues to reinforce, many people's growing experiences of isolation and hopelessness. How might a renewed sense of interconnectedness, fostered by the recognition that we are part of the larger, conscious Earth community, shift our sense of self and transform the way we live our lives? As Macy and Brown (2014) maintain, a shift to a more unifying, life-sustaining story is ultimately necessary for human and planetary thriving.

One of the paths toward rediscovering a sense of interconnectedness with the more-than-human world is through wild pedagogies. Wild pedagogies is a practice that offers ways of envisioning relationships and ecological identity that appear new to many people; however, they are actually "old" modes of relationality that many of us in industrialized Western society must (re)discover (Morse et al., 2018). Entering into wild pedagogies requires a shift in habitual ways of thinking, including an invitation to be open to what the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss (1995) refers to as the ecological self. This sense of self expands beyond a narrow anthropocentric vision of the isolated ego, and beyond my identification with human relationships, to encompass all of life. Nurturing an ecological self facilitates the recognition that my own self-realization is dependent on the integrity and well-being of the living Earth (Devall, 1995; Seed

et al., 1988). Through wild pedagogies, I may begin to see myself as constituted by a web of relationships and to recognize myself as intimately connected and co-extensive with the world around me (Devall, 1995).

In fostering this sense of self, I increasingly see myself as "in, and of, nature from the very beginning of [myself]" (Næss , 1995, p. 82). This awareness of interconnectedness undermines the dominant expansionist worldview and colonial thinking that have operated to exploit people and the environment based on a subject–object relationships (Taylor & Segal, 2015). Indeed, I have begun to discover that a rejection of the human-in-environment framework that has dominated industrialized society has allowed me to begin to enter into what is sometimes referred to as a kincentric worldview (Turner, 2005). Internationally renowned ethnobotanist, Nancy Turner explains that a kincentric worldview can be understood as a way of seeing all of Earth's beings as family in a variety of forms, where there is no sharp divide between people, plants, animals, water, and land (2014). In turn, all natural systems are seen as having a level of sentience, and are related to each other—like humans within a family (Turner, 2014). Connecting with my ecological self and embracing a kincentric worldview may be antithetical to current mainstream society's concept of selfhood, but it has deep roots in many Indigenous cosmologies and spiritual traditions around the world (Turner, 2014). Wild pedagogies is a promising tool to apply to the work of rediscovering the interdependence of, and sense of kinship with, the more-than-human world.

## Exploring Reflective Touchstones

An international community of scholars has been working to establish six touchstones for engaging with wild pedagogies (Jickling, 2018). While the overlap between these touchstones is substantial, this paper will focus on two of them to provide a framework and rationale for introducing concepts from narrative therapy into this conversation. These two touchstones are: 1) agency and role of nature as co-teacher; and 2) locating the wild (Jickling et al., 2018). By exploring the powerful potential of narratives, as well as their practical applications, I will highlight how these touchstones can be deepened through creating and sharing different uses of language and stories.

### *Agency and Role of Nature as Co-Teacher*

The touchstone of "agency and role of nature as co-teacher" shifts learning from the prescriptive to the relational. Nature is no longer a passive backdrop, acted upon by humans; instead, nature also acts upon and through us (Morse et al., 2018). Wild pedagogies seeks to resist the domestication of education, instead drawing us back into the spontaneous, creative, and untamed life forces that characterize wildness (Jickling, 2018). In such a framework, the typical

subject–object and self–other divides become more permeable. When I begin to see this quality of wildness in all life forms, I move away from experiencing myself as the subject acting in a world of objects and toward a world of interactions with other conscious beings (Abram, 1996). I feel a deep respect, even reverence, for the more-than-human world, that is inherent in such an approach. Suddenly I am not alone, with only my fellow humans, to figure out what life is about. Instead, I am engaged in a world of agency and meaning, and I am open to the possibility of interspecies communication (Tarnas, 2016).

Such a shift in perspective requires the fostering of imagination and new stories to help us perceive the bridge that spans the divide between rational mind and physical world (Macy, 2007). Zen master and writer, Thich Nhat Hanh (1993), captures this idea beautifully when he explains the Buddhist principle of inter-being, which reveals that I am "already inside" (p. 138). This concept maintains that the individual manifestations of consciousness, made visible in time and space, point to a deeper implicit unity from which they have arisen and to which they will return. In presenting such an argument, Nhat Hanh challenges the dominant Western view of the self as contained within physical bodies, urging instead the recognition that I am co-extensive with the rest of the cosmos. When I start to recognize and speak about nature as kin and a source of wisdom, I can begin to hear the more-than-human world and co-create stories that are informed by all our knowledges (Abram, 1996; Kimmerer, 2013). Moreover, by adopting the humble stance of a student, I can begin to allow nature to guide me, change me, and give new language to my stories.

### *Locating the Wild*

The "locating the wild" touchstone challenges Western notions of nature as a commodity, instead offering a lens that helps me re-centre my ideas of "wilderness" and "wild." This shift in thinking requires me to cultivate the continual recognition that my connection with the more-than-human world has the potential to develop anywhere (Jickling et al., 2018). In other words, the wild that I am speaking of is not to be confused with narrow conceptions of wilderness that are often shaped, at least in part, by political histories, and which can too easily be dismissed as some distant, untouched place (Jickling, 2018). While immersive remote wilderness experiences can be powerfully transformative, the availability and accessibility of such experiences are becoming increasingly small (Louv, 2005). However, wild pedagogies is not confined to the wilderness; Arne Næss identifies the limitless potential for wild pedagogical approaches to deep ecology when he states, "[w]e can do it in cities. ... Everywhere there is something that is essentially nature" (as cited in Jickling & Næss , 2000, p. 54). Or as Henry David Thoreau expresses it, "in Wildness is the preservation of the world ... [l]ife consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest" (1991, pp. 94-96). The wild is the undomesticated life force, what Plotkin (2013) describes as one's "original wholeness," which is

not dominated or controlled by current societal norms or human intervention (p. 2). These statements call me forth, not just to some unexplored landscape, but to a reconnection with an unfettered freedom and vitality that lie within all living biophysical systems. In this sense, I am not separate from nature and wildness: I am *part* of nature. This is a vastly different story than the one I have long been told.

I also see the "locating the wild" touchstone as an invitation to examine existing colonial ideas about wilderness by carefully listening to landscapes and Indigenous peoples. The dominant Western view of what is wild has often failed to recognize the many Indigenous peoples who have lived on and stewarded the land that was considered "empty" wilderness by settlers. Further, the Judeo-Christian concept of "dominion over" nature has created a separation of people from their surrounding ecology and can feed the industrialized Western view of the wild as a resource to be extracted (Harper et al., 2019). These destructive understandings of wild can seep into the way I see and engage with the more-than-human world if I am not conscious of them. By noticing the wild beings and spaces around me at every moment and engaging with narratives that acknowledge the depth of these relationships, I may begin to transform my daily experiences of myself in relation to the world around me. However, bringing these touchstones into practice is no simple task, especially within mainstream education's focus on theory, abstraction, and efficiency often comes at the expense of empathy and relationships (Orr, 1994). It is at this learning edge that narrative therapeutic concepts can open new spaces for exploring the ecological self and can provide opportunities for transformative learning with the more-than-human world.

## My Own Narrative

As a psychotherapist who loves to explore and connect with the ecosystems of southern Vancouver Island, it has become increasingly clear to me through these explorations that education is not confined to formal Westernized educational systems. Rather, most of my learning occurs in informal, relational, and exploratory sites. Indeed, the type of education that may lead to transformative change and deeper levels of self-realization rarely happens when seated in neat rows of desks, memorizing information that is detached from experience and presented in a way that often serves to further sever our connection with the more-than-human world (O'Neil, 2018; Sheridan, 2002). Instead, engaging with the surrounding ecology and applying narrative therapy tools to the learning can be part of a wild pedagogy that facilitates a kincentric worldview and helps to develop the ecological self. These alternative narratives have the potential to transform both the individual and the world around us.

My journey into deeper intimacy with the more-than-human world has been catalyzed by uncovering my own layers of anxiety and grief about our world.

Yet, by opening myself to new narratives and ways of speaking, I have found a path to a more balanced and larger ecological self. Countless hours of walking and biking around my coastal city of Victoria, BC has offered a daily opportunity for dialogue with my non-human family, which is sometimes internal and sometimes spoken aloud. Seeing the plants, animals, water, and soil who share my home as other sentient beings with their own interiority and with whom I am interdependent has profoundly changed the way I move through the world. This process has been rewarding and painful, and continues to be painful, as I allow myself to feel how the suffering and destruction of our world is also my own suffering and my broader family's suffering.

That said, I do not only experience pain. By contrast, this growing realization about interconnectedness feels like a coming home to a deeper sense of self that I had once known but had forgotten. I am reminded here of Rachel Carson's (1965) statement that, "[t]hose who dwell ... among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life" (p. 88). And so, in my journey, I have found a new depth of community and belonging and an enlivened sense of activism, knowing that conservation is also self-defence (Devall, 1995). When one takes seriously the realization that the world is completely interdependent, one comes to the conclusion that our own well-being depends on the well-being of our more-than-human family. That is, we cannot heal ourselves without also healing our planet (Plotkin, 2013). It is from this place that I humbly take on the role of fellow learner as I strive to reintroduce nature as our teacher to those who are disconnected from wildness.

## A Narrative Approach

> "It's all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story"
>
> (Berry, 1988, p. 123).

### *An "Old" Story*

Storytelling has always been essential to every culture. It is a way of shaping and understanding identities and making sense of the world (Blackie, 2018). In ecological storytelling, we are offered a rich history of languages and practices that offer alternative perspectives to the current English grammar and vocabulary, both of which tend to separate, divide, and objectify (Roszak, 1995). Though English has not always described the natural world in such a mechanistic way, the meanings and uses of many words that emphasized our connection to the more-than-human world have either shifted from their earlier meanings or been erased from our lexicon. Additionally, our access to a vocabulary that facilitates an articulation of a deeply interdependent ecological worldview has been compromised (Barfield, 1967). However, languages and cosmologies that take a kincentric worldview can still be found within many traditions and people groups across the world (Turner, 2014)

For example, the Rarámuri people of Northern Mexico and the Nuu-Chah-Nulth of the west coast of Vancouver Island both use language to describe a worldview that encompasses a kincentric ecology (Turner, 2005). Influential spiritual figures who hold this perspective can also be found within major world religions, such as Thich Nhat Hanh and Saint Francis of Assisi, as well as in the traditions and practices of many Indigenous peoples (Berry, 1988; Nhat Hanh, 1993). Drawing on these perspectives, we can find an alternative way of speaking about and engaging with the more-than-human world (Scofield & Margulis, 2012).

It is all too easy to make the mistake of appropriating Indigenous cultural practices. I recognize the dangers of doing so and, at the same time, feel grateful for the profound wisdom and guidance in relational ontologies that come from many traditional teachings (Fisher, 2012). As I navigate this complex terrain, I am inspired by Indigenous law scholar and member of the Chippewas of the Nawash First Nation in Ontario, John Borrows (2018), who notes that accessing a different way of relating to Earth does not come from any single tradition or group of people but rather from the Earth herself. While Indigenous peoples have lived sustainably for thousands of years and their knowledges are critical, an ethic of care is not solely Indigenous, nor is it an inheritance; rather, it must be cultivated (Borrows, 2018). In this sense, ecologically-based languages and the peoples who generously share their knowledges can help to reawaken in us a deeper reality. But ultimately this journey is one's own. When we engage in ways of speaking and practices that open us up to different impressions and deeper connections to the more-than-human world, we may begin to experience ourselves as members of a kincentric and profoundly interconnected community.

### *Challenging the Narrative*

Though storytelling can take many non-verbal forms, new language is one way in which we can shift out of our habitual view of the world (Conn & Conn, 2009). Narrative therapists often point to the importance of the words we choose in making sense of our experiences, accessing meaning, imagining, and re-imagining our perceived role in a particular situation (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). A narrative approach to therapy sees humans as storytellers, whose identities are formed out of the creation and sharing of these stories (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Like other therapeutic approaches, it challenges individuals to reframe existing perceptions and biases, as well as to examine conceptual assumptions that may narrow our vision of ourselves and others (Payne, 2006). Our experiences can be limited by our vocabulary, the categorizations available to us through the language or languages we know, and how we are taught to use words (Hammack, 2008). In recognizing that we are often rehearsing one story among many possibilities, and not just seeing a situation "the way it is," we may soften ourselves to alternative narratives. However, the influence of stories on the storytellers and the listeners is not always immediately apparent. Often words carry with them both implied and explicit meanings, evaluative elements, and

repetitive patterns that can deeply ingrain a particular narrative (Andrews, 2018; Larson, 2011). Language is full of culturally and historically shaped meanings, many of which we are unaware (Payne, 2006). In the dominant Western culture, the narrative about the place humans hold in the world has been shaped by language that often reduces the non-human world to a collection of inanimate objects, thereby indicating that humans are the sole conscious inhabitants and the sources of meaning (Abram, 1996; Blackie, 2018). Through this lens, the world around us—including living creatures—remains devoid of its own personal experiences, emotions, and consciousness. Despite a growing body of research pointing to the sentience and complex communication abilities of plants and animals, our language and actions have not caught up with the research and have also failed to acknowledge what many Indigenous peoples across the world have attested to for thousands of years (Boyd, 2017; Simard, 2015). And yet, this language of domination and separation from nature, reinforced as it is in our mainstream religious, educational, and cultural contexts, is all that many of us have ever known (Scofield & Margulis, 2012). Because of this, our early childhood intuitions about the aliveness of the world must be reawakened if we are to free ourselves from these limiting stories, both for our personal integration and for the well-being of the larger social and biophysical world in which we live.

### *Subtle Shifts Create Big Changes*

I am honoured to witness the radical transformations that can come through subtle shifts in language. By expanding our lexicon and stepping outside familiar language patterns, we can begin to see the world differently. We have a powerful ability to change our perception of an experience by changing the stories we tell ourselves. This was illustrated in my clinical work by an individual who was grappling with questions of spirituality and identity. A seemingly simple shift from addressing her image of the transcendent as "He" to experimenting with speaking to the divine as "She" opened up her awareness of a larger ecological self. The image in her mind transformed from an angry, distant male figure left over from the religious tradition of her youth, to a mother from whom all of life emanates and who continuously nurtures all her children. Though such profound change would certainly not occur for every person in this situation, this example aims to illustrate how words may keep us trapped in painful narratives, memories, and beliefs that no longer serve our growing sense of wholeness and integration with the larger web of life.

Another client described how she deepened an already powerful experience of what she described as a "rebirth" in nature, partly by adopting kincentric language and recognizing more-than-human beings as intimately and personally connected to her. She described feeling protection from the eagles that circled overhead during a recent wilderness retreat, and receiving nurturing love from a deer she encountered while hiking. These shifts in perception were more than symbolic; the deer and eagle became, in her eyes, part of her wider community,

with their own subjectivity, conscious awareness, and relationships to her. This powerful sense of unity with other beings has had lasting effects on her level of connection and communion with the world around her.

Indigenous ethnobotanist and writer, Robin Wall Kimmerer (2017), offers an inspiring example of connecting with the more-than-human world through the kincentric Potowatomi language. She explains how her traditional language is made up primarily of verbs and therefore reveals an ever-changing world of living interactions and relationships (Kimmerer, 2017). The world through this lens is characterized as being alive, aware, and autonomous and therefore made up of beings worthy of respect (Kimmerer, 2017; Borrows, 2018). Non-human beings, such as wolves, trees, and rivers, are spoken of with the same grammar used for speaking about people (Kimmerer, 2018). In the third-person pronouns of English, applying these ideas would likely translate to speaking about the more-than-human world as "he," "she," or "they." This is different than current English grammar, which refers to rocks, plants, water, ecosystems, and even animals as objects using "it," or "they." Kimmerer points out how objectifying language sets up a barrier and a hierarchy of value between us and the rest of the world (2013).

Robert Macfarlane (2015) documents a similar loss of intimacy with nature that had previously been apparent in early Anglo-Saxon languages and dialects, as words that arose from experiences with particular landscapes fell out of use. David Abram (1996) also traces the increasing abstraction and codification of language, from words/phrases that signify an animate world to the Westernized language of today which indicates that humans are separate from, and superior to, nature. These changes and differences in languages result in shifts in worldview and reveal changes and differences in our relationships with the more-than-human world (Barfield, 1967).

Learning what Kimmerer (2013) calls the "grammar of animacy" would likely change not only the way we speak about the world but also the way we see, feel, and relate with the world (p. 48). She notes that we would be more inclined to protect the rights of nature, and that we might also begin to recognize our other-than-human neighbours as wise teachers and collaborators in the construction of a harmonious future (Kimmerer, 2013). Imagine speaking to and about other species, mountains, water, and soil with the same language we use to talk about our friends and families. Our concept of community and our moral responsibilities would likely grow to be much more inclusive (Abram, 1996). It is important to note that the relationship between language and cultural practices is not a directly causal one, yet philosophers of language have recognized a connection between descriptive and normative statements (Merchant, 1980). As a language changes, the culture and its values often change too (Abram, 1996). Finally, there are exceptions; as examples, not every Indigenous language reflects a kincentric worldview, and some languages that contain more animistic elements do not necessarily result in drastically different behaviour in those speakers compared to speakers of modern English

(Kimmerer, 2017). Despite the exceptions, there is evidence of overwhelming cross-cultural similarities that reflect an ancient wisdom and a deep sense of interconnectedness experienced by people around the world, which the current scientific, mechanistic understanding of the universe has, in many regions, only relatively recently replaced (Merchant, 1980; Turner, 2014).

While grammar alone is not some panacea, the significance of a change in the pronouns from "it" to "he" or "she" must not be underestimated, for it can shine a light into the wild corners of our imaginations, helping to re-awaken parts of our psyches that have long been asleep. As Kimmerer (2017) states, "[g]rammar, especially our use of pronouns, is the way we chart relationships in language and, as it happens, how we relate to each other and to the natural world."

### *Stories are Co-Created in Relationship*

Every day, whether we are consciously aware of it or not, we are all engaged in the work of listening to, shaping, and sharing stories. When it comes to applying narrative tools to help us understand our place within the complex web of life, our interactions with the more-than-human world depend on the language we bring to these interactions and our openness to re-authoring in response to these interactions (Abram, 1996; Harper et al., 2019; Kimmerer, 2018). Stories are so often about identity. Indeed, developing and understanding identities through narratives is an interactional process, as we learn to tell stories within the context of different groups and environmental settings (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Moreover, when we are open to it, ecology can begin to inform language (Borrows, 2018). An example of this can be found in Borrows's traditional language of Anishinaabe, which reflects an understanding of the world that is deeply relational. Some Anishinaabe language speakers describe a "langscape" (language and landscape), where physical space interacts with human observation to shape language (Borrows, 2018, p. 51). This is an example of a language of reconnection that both Kimmerer and Borrows argue can help to heal a world where so many of our problems are related to separation and dislocation from the more-than-human world.

## Possible Tools and Pathways

The following practices, drawn from narrative therapy concepts, may offer practical starting points for reconnecting with our ecological selves and reimagining our relationship with the more-than-human world.

*Experiment with grammar*: Setting aside a period of time to intentionally recognize, address, and dialogue with the more-than-human world, using non-objectifying language can help us improve our feeling of interconnectedness. Though the gendered language of English can be problematic, the effort to address other species as members of our family can shake our habitual level of

consciousness and challenge the current vocabulary and grammar that divide us from the more-than-human world. As Borrows (2018) suggests, if we begin to speak and think about the more-than-human world as fellow beings with agency, then our sense of responsibility and ethical stance toward the natural world is more likely to shift to encompass these beings.

*Adopt participatory language*: Rediscovering what Morris Berman (1981) calls "participating consciousness" requires us to challenge our sense of separation between internal subjectivity and external phenomena. Ecotherapists Lane Conn and Sarah Conn (2009) encourage a stance of curiosity and a willingness to experience the unfamiliar by adopting a beginner's mind. Part of this practice is to use language that puts us into a different relational frame, moving from a stance of controlling nature to participating with it. Rather than acting upon nature, we adopt a receptive stance, priming ourselves to "be touched" rather than "to touch," or "to be chosen" rather than "to choose" our interactions with non-human beings (Conn & Conn, 2009). Australian philosopher and panpsychist, Freya Mathews (2003), describes such an approach to the more-than-human world as one that anticipates encounters with other responsive beings who also have intrinsic value and their own interiority. In this practice, we are relinquishing our sense of control, instead allowing for beings in the world to meet and communicate with us on their own terms.

*Write a letter, engage in conversation*: Writing a love letter to Mother Earth or a letter to any being in the more-than-human world can be the foundation for an intimate conversation with nature, no matter where you are or how urban your setting is (Nhat Hanh, 2013). By engaging with a form of writing that is *for* and *with* nature, rather than just being *about* nature, we enter into a more relational ontology (Burns, 2018). Further, we can begin to take language from a largely intellectual space to a somatic one by bringing audible voice and movement to our words (Morrison, 2009). There is a resonance between our bodies and words when we engage our diaphragm, lungs, vocal cords, tongue, and lips to bring sensory awareness to our stories. In her book entitled *The Enchantment of Everyday Life*, psychotherapist Sharon Blackie encourages us to, "[t]ell stories to stones, sing to trees, start conversations with birds. Build relationships" (2018, p.303).

*Explore nature metaphors:* Transferring meaning from one thing to another, in this case sharing meaning making elements with the more-than-human world, can help us begin to identify with it more readily. In their work on nature-based therapy, Harper et al. (2019) identify nature metaphors as a powerful way to connect individuals with nature as a non-judgemental co-teacher. Through their work, they have discovered that metaphors may provide words for experiences that are often hard to explain directly. By slowing down and observing the natural world, we may begin to notice how nature reflects aspects of our own life and what that could mean for us. For example, a tangle of branches may be seen to represent a period of turmoil in one's life, and a young spring bud may be reflective of hope for growth and new life that comes out of struggle.

*Participate in The Council of All Beings:* Spending time, either imaginatively or literally, with a non-human being such as a rock, tree, or pond, fosters empathy and a deeper identification with the biophysical world (Schultz, 2000). This practice was developed by John Seed, Joanna Macy, Arne Næss , and Pat Fleming to help people "become" a part of nature and give voice to the experience of another being (Seed et al., 1988). Participants, speaking on behalf of a non-human being, can explore what is happening for this being, what they may feel like, what their daily life experiences are like, what their longings are, and what wisdom this council member has to offer. Shared with a group in the form of a council, this practice is both imaginative and experiential, as we are offered the space to expand our moral imaginations as well as the dignifying experience of being heard and respected by others in the council (Macy, 2007).

## Conclusion

The idea of opening ourselves up to new narratives and new language is both simple and complex. On the one hand, such a practice can be as straightforward as changing our grammar and vocabulary. On the other hand, if we look below the surface of these changes, we recognize this idea also means changing our worldview. Such a transformation may impact the status quo because it challenges the current dominant perception of humans as separate from nature—a view which too often leads to justifying the commodification and exploitation of nature and which serves to prop up our existing lifestyle (Larson, 2011).

Macy (2007) draws on Buddhist teachings and her own extensive body of work to show how reframing our narratives can present a challenge to the narrow, egotistical view of the self by opening us to emotional realities and levels of consciousness we may not have previously experienced. When we embrace these ideas, dualisms are replaced by mutually interacting relationships, identification, and compassion. Changing our narratives to acknowledge and express the ecological self is a counter-cultural shift in power dynamics from "power over" to "communion with." Engaging with wild pedagogies is about recognizing and enacting ideas and intuitions that are both "old" and new. By bringing timeless wisdom into our modern context, we are seeking pathways to "rewild" the psyche (Andrews, 2018). It is by listening to Earth's guidance that we begin to experience a different depth of relationality. What is more, it is in the language we bring to our interactions that we reshape our perceptions of the more-than-human world. As storytelling creatures, at every moment we have the opportunity to imagine and share a different story: a story that reconnects.

## Note on Contributor

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# Is the Theory of Wild Pedagogies Precisely the Utopian Philosophy the Anthropocene Needs?

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***Abstract***

*This paper uses six common aspects of utopias to evaluate the theory of Wild Pedagogies. Individuals—and especially writers—generate utopian ideas in times of upheaval and change. The climate crisis has created a need for exactly this kind of radical thinking. In an education system that is designed to uphold the neoliberal consensus, the development of the theory of Wild Pedagogies challenges the domestication of current pedagogies. Wild Pedagogies attempt to privilege the planet's more-than-human presence, whose voices desperately need to be heard, by emphasizing the role of nature as co-teacher. This paper finds that the theory of Wild Pedagogies performs as an abstraction, rather than an iteration, of outdoor learning. It provides an overarching philosophical framework that challenges the status quo, and its tenets fulfill the criteria needed to achieve a utopia for the Anthropocene.*

***Résumé***

*Le présent article utilise six caractéristiques courantes de l'utopie pour évaluer la théorie des pédagogies de la nature. Les individus, et particulièrement les écrivains, génèrent des idées utopiques en temps de bouleversements. La crise climatique rend nécessaire ce type de pensée radicale. Dans un système d'éducation conçu pour maintenir le consensus néolibéral, le développement de la théorie des pédagogies de la nature remet en question la domestication qui caractérise les approches pédagogiques actuelles. Les pédagogies de la nature tentent de privilégier la présence extrahumaine, dont les voix ont désespérément besoin d'être entendues, en mettant l'accent sur le rôle de la nature comme co-enseignant. Le présent article conclut que la théorie des pédagogies de la nature fonctionne comme une abstraction plutôt que comme une itération de l'apprentissage en plein air. Elle constitue un cadre philosophique global qui ébranle le statu quo, et ses principes satisfont aux critères de réalisation d'une utopie à l'ère de l'anthropocène.*

*Keywords:* Wild Pedagogies, utopia, outdoor education, Anthropocene, education, pedagogy, wild, more-than-human

*Mots-clés* : pédagogies de la nature, utopie, enseignement en plein air, anthropocène, éducation, pédagogie, nature, extrahumain

## Introduction

The theory of Wild Pedagogies has developed through a series of colloquiums held in remote settings on wilderness trips to the Yukon in 2014, the West Coast of Scotland in May 2017 and the Franklin River in Tasmania in late 2017. Emerging from experiences and discussions on these trips, the possibilities inherent in the theory of Wild Pedagogies have been set out in a number of academic publications, and worth particular mention is the book *Wild Pedagogies: Touchstones for Re-Negotiating Education and the Environment in the Anthropocene* (Jickling et al., 2018). My first thought on coming across this work was that aspects of the theory and practice of Wild Pedagogies were utopian. This is not a criticism. Understanding the historical and political context of utopian ideas points to the validity of Wild Pedagogies as a response to times of upheaval, and our current period of climate emergency demands creative and provocative solutions to the crisis (Purdy, 2015). Purdy writes that 'there is no more nature that stands apart from human beings' because human existence has blanched every aspect of every ecosystem on the planet (Purdy 2015). The renaming of this epoch as the Anthropocene in place of the Holocene, an idea first suggested in the 1980s and popularised by Paul J Crutzen and Eugene F Stoermer, has yet to gain official recognition from the International Union of Geological Sciences, but is intended to highlight amongst other aspects the link between human activity and climate change (Crutzen 2002). Whilst Wild Pedagogies is still an evolving theory—a point which, for example, Morse et al. (2018) make clear—it has formalized six "key touchstones," which are listed here as they were laid out in *Wild Pedagogies* (Jickling et al., 2018):

1. Nature as co-teacher
2. Complexity, the unknown and spontaneity
3. Locating the wild
4. Time and practice
5. Socio-cultural change
6. Building alliances and the human community

The creation of the theory of Wild Pedagogies provides a potential solution to a challenge with mainstream outdoor education, which is that it has failed to deliver education about the outdoors *for* the outdoors, instead more simply and too often revolving around education *in* the outdoors (Loynes, 2019). In their seminal book, Jickling et al. (2018) recognize that they are not developing a theory in a vacuum. Instead, the theory of Wild Pedagogies draws on a deep history of pedagogical movements, including *friluftsliv* from Scandinavia. Certainly, the *friluftsliv* philosophy of a "seeping of nature into one's bones" (Henderson & Vikander, 2007, p. 5) has much in common with the Wild Pedagogical aspect of "becoming aware of the wildness … in ourselves" (Morse et al., 2018, p. 250).

Equally, the desire to "renegotiate humankind's relationship with the earth" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 6) and the references throughout the publications on Wild Pedagogies to more-than-human presences connect to works using the political ideas of intersectionality. With reference to environmental education and in particular the currently strangled voice of Indigenous communities it recognises but is not overwhelmed by the complexity of the issues it addresses (Maina-Okori et al., 2018). The goal of educing the hierarchical master–slave relationship of culture–nature by privileging more-than-human voices over human ones also ties in with the idea of rhizomatic relations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1995) which would give more equal footing to all sides in the relationship between consumers, producers and resources.

As the above makes clear, the theory of Wild Pedagogies is unapologetically a collection of still-fluid concepts which specifically aim to be inclusive of different approaches to education. This paper aims to question whether the theory of Wild Pedagogies is, perhaps above all, a utopian philosophy. It sets out to answer this question by interrogating the construct and context of the theory against utopian concepts.

### *The Theory of Wild Pedagogies*

To begin, the term "wild" has many different connotations (Griffiths, 2006). The progenitors of the Wild Pedagogies theory are clear that they see the term "wild" performing in three different ways. First, the term "wild" means "self-willed" land. It is not necessarily exclusively a place that is pristine or devoid of human touch; it can also be a place where nature has (or appears to have) control over the environment. Therefore, practically applying the theory of Wild Pedagogies to education does not need to have geographical restrictions; rather, education espousing these pedagogies can be performed anywhere nature asserts itself over the humanmade environment. A good example of nature's control in such an environment is a weed pushing its way through concrete flagstones (Naess & Jickling, 2000). Second, the term wild reflects the central place and agency "more-than-human" factors have within the theory, with spontaneous connections to the more-than-human world as the starting place for the pedagogy. Third, the sense of "wilding" pedagogies reflects a desire to disrupt the domestication of the current education system and to start to think about how best to educate in an era of new uncertainty (Morse et al., 2018). In many respects, which will be developed below, the theory of Wild Pedagogies' quiet raging against the domestication of education and its increasing irrelevance to the challenges of the modern age is its most provocative and radical aspect.

The clear context in which the theory of Wild Pedagogies has emerged is outlined above. The attempts to rename this geological age as the Anthropocene are designed to energize debate and create a recognition of the (adverse) effects humans are having on the planet they inhabit (Crutzen, 2002). The theory of Wild Pedagogies proposes a repositioning of nature, one in which nature

is a comrade, or a partner with equal rights, in an ongoing relationship with humans. The theory proposes that a rebalanced relationship, in which human over-exploitation of the environment is reduced and, ultimately, removed, would enable greater social and environmental justice (Jickling et al., 2018).

Those who advocate for Wild Pedagogies argue that such a rebalancing is vital, given what they see as the negative impact of human behaviour on the environment. Actions towards such a repositioning of nature in the nature–human relationship include the recognition within some legal systems that nature has legal rights. This movement was catalyzed by Sir Christopher Stone's 1972 essay, "Should Trees Have Standing? Towards Legal Rights for Natural Objects" in response to a case in the United States of America involving the development of a ski resort by Walt Disney (Pecharroman, 2018). The theory of Wild Pedagogies sees a renegotiation of the relationships between humans and more-than-humans as critical to a viable future and maintains that a closer personal connection to the natural world is the foundation of a more equitable partnership (Morse et al., 2018).

### *Wild Pedagogies in Practice*

The individuals who began developing the Wild Pedagogies theory were influenced by other schools of thought, with the result that many of its practical applications are familiar. In particular, the authors note the influence of the Norwegian practice of *friluftsliv* and the work of the Forest School movement as inspirations (Morse et al., 2018). Thus, rather than considering Wild Pedagogies as another iteration of a specific pedagogy of outdoor learning, it is perhaps more fruitful to consider Wild Pedagogies as an abstraction that enables more practical and placed-based schools to operate under its central tenets. Rather than setting out specific "Wild Pedagogical" exercises, practitioners are instead asked to hold the six key touchstones in mind whilst designing and engaging in activities that subvert the domestication of education. A key principle underlining the six key touchstones listed above is the democratization of learning, which puts the learners and their experiences at the centre of the engagement, that is, as a participant in, rather than the recipient of, learning (Green & Dyment, 2018; Socha et al., 2016).

The theory of Wild Pedagogies was developed during Jickling et al.'s three progressively more involved colloquium trips: a canoe journey on the Yukon River in 2014; a sailing expedition off the coast of North West Scotland, along with visits to the surrounding coastal islands in May 2017; and a camping trip, including journeys in small river craft, on the Franklin River in Tasmania in late 2017. The first of these trips, whilst praised by attendees for its unusual setting for a conference, was felt by them to resemble normal academic work in scheduling (Jickling et al., 2018). With respect to the second trip, the authors reported that the more communal atmosphere of the Scottish coastal/sailing trip and more frequent human exposure to interruptions by more-than-human

presences created a more spontaneous learning community and increased the opportunities for nature to act as a co-teacher (Jickling et al., 2018). The third trip stripped back the separation of human from more-than-human presences even more, with participants travelling in small river craft and camping en route (Quay & Jensen, 2018).

The iteration of these colloquia in a short space of time shows the authors' increasing conviction that time and location are important in facilitating nature's agency as co-teacher. It is interesting that the authors took their research into ever more remote and inaccessible (in terms of the required physical and technical skills) areas in order to keep developing their theory even though it has been asserted that "wild places are present close to home in urban and suburban areas, and in industrial zones" (Morse et al., 2018, p. 245). Their approach to developing the theory has potentially serious implications for the practice of Wild Pedagogies, given such environments require more time and money to access (the Franklin River trip took 11 days) and demand considerable levels of skill.

Wild Pedagogical moments on these trips were captured, in subsequent publications, in vignettes that described encounters that startled or moved the authors. Vignettes from the Scottish trip included a description of watching fulmars circle in the sunshine and listening to seals in the sunset (Jickling et al., 2018). Daniel Ford reported his encounter with a wallaby on the Tasmanian trip:

> I feel petrified in the creature's gaze. The sensation of joy, the sensation of the traveller in a foreign land seeing something new gives way sharply to a deep sadness, almost a sense of shame. I "hear" the Franklin River's vulnerability, despite currently being protected, politically, from human interests. Again, I fall silent. (Blenkinsop & Ford, 2018b, p. 309).

Ford's vignette encapsulates an important component of the theory of Wild Pedagogies: that exposure to more-than-human presences will result in a greater empathy with those presences and the areas in which they dwell. Whilst such a finding might not have been the intention of the author who wrote it, the way the account is framed authenticates the validity of such an empathetic interaction.

By contrast, Jickling et al.'s (2018) description of experiences on the Scottish coastal trip by tourists who were seemingly engaged in the same activities potentially positions those as less authentic. On this trip, both the author of the vignette on fulmars and the tourists are engaged in bird watching; however, the author perceives his experience to be more authentic. He describes the "mirror neurons" which allow him to deduce that a bird is not threatened by him, whilst he portrays the tourist experience as intrusive and superficial: a "tourist boat chugged far too loudly. … The tourists checked out a bird colony on a nearby rock and chugged away … Not exactly background noise like the tourist boat" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 57). This positioning of tourists vis-à-vis

theorists has important practical implications as it suggests that the experience of and exposure to the more-than-human presence is not sufficient to establish pedagogical value. Both author and tourist saw the same birds, but the author's framing of the experiences demonstrated different value for different humans.

If it is the framing of the experience that is important for producing a learning moment, then perhaps the second implication of mindset goes some way to offsetting the first implication of location. If the six key touchstones are kept in mind, then there is greater potential for wild learning experience to occur because they provide a framework from which to draw meaning and resonance.

### *Utopia in Theory and Practice*

Utopias are characterized as an alternative vision of reality. Utopias can be imagined as actual physical places, just as they often are in fiction—and particularly in science fiction of the 20th century. However, although utopias are often presented as positive alternative realities, they can also be represented as a "not-here" philosophical or political position. In the latter context, utopian thinking aims to challenge the societal status quo. In the context of Wild Pedagogies, such a challenge is offered to education, and particularly to the encroaching domestication of the western system (Jickling et al., 2018).

Over time, the description of an idea or practice as utopian has become negatively loaded. Utopian writing, particularly the English fictional writing of the 18th and 19th centuries, has been used to comment on and criticize the status quo rather than to revise it (Eagleton, 2000). Critics have asked the question, how can utopian writing advance philosophical and political thinking when utopian theories have traditionally been expressed in the form of punning (e.g., *Utopia* by Thomas More, written in1516) or ridiculous exaggeration to induce ribaldry (e.g., *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift, written in 1726)? Eagleton challenges this negative perception of the value of utopian thinking: "Authentic utopian thought concerns itself with that which is encoded within the logic of a system which, extrapolated in a certain direction, has the power to undo it" (Eagleton, 2000, p. 34).

Building on Eagleton's defence, it can be argued that the idea that seismic change to a political or philosophical system cannot be realized because of the existing constraints of language and the anchor weight of the current historical position is defeatist. Criticism of works such as More's and Swift's notwithstanding, utopian works emerged when their authors were experiencing seismic political and intellectual challenge. For example, More's *Utopia* was influenced by Erasmus and the humanist movement, which was reinvigorating intellectual debate about religion and politics across Europe at the start of the 16th century (Lotherington, 1988). More's work draws on the beginnings of the "Golden Age" of global exploration, when European imaginations were being fired by the "discovery" of the New World. Another example can be found in

Alexander Bogdanov, one of the founding members of the Bolshevik Party, who published the science fiction novel, *Red Star*, in 1908, in the aftermath of the 1905 revolution in Russia (Sebag Montefiore, 2008). The Bolsheviks sought to overturn 300 years of rule by the Romanov family, a rule which had diminished Russia's economic, military, and political standing in Europe (Service, 2009).

It could be argued that the current environmental crisis places us in a similarly challenged position now and that the creation of a utopian vision is therefore a legitimate and useful response. As the Martian host, Netti, says in *Red Star*, "Blood is being shed for the sake of a better future. … But in order to wage the struggle one must *know* that future" (Bogdanov et al., 1984, p. 47). From fiction to a philosophical truism; it doesn't matter if the vision appears unachievable: by creating and publishing a utopia, the discussion is broadened and the potential for change is enabled. Whilst utopian writing such as those referenced above may seem to be more creative than critical, they nevertheless reflect broader social, political, and religious (or irreligious) movements that led to wide-ranging and historically significant change.

### *Utopia's Relationship with Wild Pedagogies*

Utopian theory primarily aims to achieve "constructive criticism of the present via an ideal alternative" (Goodwin & Taylor, 2009, p. 15). Such a concept has an important role to play in our understanding of Wild Pedagogies. Without using the specific word "utopia," the theory of Wild Pedagogies appear to have a utopian vision at their heart, as evidenced by the statement: "We wonder what the world would look like if humans, afflicted with such relationships within their place on earth, enacted different ways of being in the world" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 3). In considering the theory and practice of Wild Pedagogies vis-à-vis utopian concepts, we will attempt to explore precisely how central utopian theory is to the theory of Wild Pedagogies and consider the potential and pitfalls of connecting the two.

Before we proceed, it is necessary to clarify that we are not comparing Wild Pedagogies with a specific utopia such as that found in Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975), More's *Utopia* (1516), or Bogdanov's *Red Star* (1908). Instead, we are considering the concept of utopia more broadly. That said, the concepts of utopia at the heart of these works contains core principles, and it is these that will be used to interrogate the theory of Wild Pedagogies.

The first concept of utopia is its representation of radical otherness with respect to at least one of the following: social constructs, geographical location, population, and flora and fauna (Bagchi, 2012; Dutton, 2016). Second, utopias expose the imperfections in the status quo by clearly portraying an achievable alternative. This concept is not dissimilar from the first: Utopias inherently critique the existing societal norms by presenting a contrasting "other" (Nozick, 1974). Third, utopias offer "an accessible replacement, the ideal future" (Goodwin & Taylor, 2009, p. 16). Fourth, this ideal future is underpinned by a

different philosophy to that of the prevailing establishment, thus enabling the expression of lateral possibilities (Goodwin & Taylor, 2009, p. 23). Fifth, utopias present an optimistic position. The presence of optimism distinguishes a utopia from a dystopia (Greene, 2011). Sixth, utopias have pedagogical effects on their protagonists and participants, whether physical or philosophical, unlocking potential futures and therefore shaping the way protagonists act in their worlds (Wegner, 2002).

It should also be noted that a more accurate rendition of the word "utopia" as it has come to be widely understood would be "eutopia." In 1516, Thomas More made this distinction between "Utopia," meaning "no place," and "Eutopia," meaning "good place" (More et al., 1999). Popular usage has conflated these two words, and this paper uses the positive and modern meaning of utopia as a "good place."

### *Does the Theory of Wild Pedagogies Represent Radical Otherness?*

Superficially, the idea that Wild Pedagogies might represent the kind of radical otherness appearing in utopian writing is undermined by the authors themselves, who recognize the debt their theory owes to existing philosophies (Morse et al., 2018, p.246). The authors' desire for deeper immersion in an ecosystem in order to re-wild recalls more explicitly such writing as the environmental science book, *Silent Spring* (Carson, 1962). However, the value of experiential learning in the presence of nature that Carson promotes also emerges in utopian writing. In *Red Star*, the narrator notes that the Martians "never begin studying from books. … The child draws his information from first hand observations of nature" (Bogdanov et al., 1984, p. 51).

And yet, whilst the theory of Wild Pedagogies may not in itself be explicitly radical in the way utopias are, and its central tenets are already being practised in some regards in educational establishments such as Forest Schools (O'Brien, 2009), they are indeed radical when they are set against current educational practice in most mainstream schools operating in the western tradition—particularly at secondary or high school level (Dawson, 2010). The demands of the theory of Wild Pedagogies that "critique must be paired with a vision—and corresponding educational tools that embrace the possibility of enacting a new relationship [with earth]" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 2) are both utopian and radical in their desire to undermine the status quo.

It is also interesting that Wild Pedagogies' critique of education, which is that its domestication has robbed learners of opportunities for creative and fruitful discovery, was also applied to late-20$^{th}$-century utopian writing. The victory of liberal democracy after the collapse of communism, prematurely labelled the "end of history" (Fukuyama, 2015), led to "a domestication of the utopian imagination" (Mendieta, 2002, p. 239). Given the failure of this historical endgame (a failure that Fukuyama has since acknowledged), it is perhaps unsurprising that after a moment to gather breath, utopian imaginations are

being fired up again. In this vein, whilst the theory of Wild Pedagogies does not perhaps represent radical otherness in terms of the novelty of the vision it espouses, it is radical otherness when compared to current approaches and systems.

### *Does the Theory of Wild Pedagogies Critique Existing Societal Norms?*

The theory of Wild Pedagogies is critical of an education system that it views as both a product and perpetuator of existing societal norms. By extension, it is critical of the societal norms themselves, as the first sentence of *Wild Pedagogies* makes clear: "Given the sense of ecological urgency that increasingly defines our times, this chapter seeks to look beyond current norms and world-views that are environmentally problematic" (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 1). In particular, the theory of Wild Pedagogies reinforces the idea that a separation between humans and more-than-humans has unbalanced their relationship, impacting more-than-humans' agency and creating inequities between the two. There is an important potential consequence in redressing this imbalance, the need for which is articulated by works such as *Last Child in the Woods* (Louv, 2005): Reconnecting with the more-than-human world will ignite a human desire for preservation that is so strong that the individual will be able to overcome the cultural dominance of societal norms; they will alter their behaviour in such a way as to act for the preservation, rather than exploitation, of the planet. Here, the Norwegian model of *friluftsliv* again becomes relevant in so far as it is an example of nature-based education that inculcates positive environmental behaviour (Henderson & Vikander, 2007; Jickling et al., 2018). Despite this model's origin in Norway, that country is the third largest exporter of natural gas in the world, a trade which generated $27.7bn in 2017(OEC Norway Data, 2017). The infrastructure that provides Norwegians with enviable access to the outdoors is funded by the exploitation of natural resources which will hasten environmental change (Allen et al., 2009). Clearly, future pedagogy will need careful research and implementation if it is going to achieve a more equitable relationship between humans and more-than-humans.

### *Does the Theory of Wild Pedagogies Represent an Accessible Ideal Future?*

The theory of Wild Pedagogies represents an ideal future as those developing it are aiming for a renegotiation of the human and more-than-human relations in a world on the cusp of environmental destruction. These individuals are convinced that their theory, practically applied, will achieve change through education (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 3). However, for this practical application to be achieved on an impactful scale two questions relating to its accessibility need to be addressed. First, how accessible is the vision of disrupting an apparently abusive and inequitable relationship between humans and more-than-humans? Second, is the theory of Wild Pedagogies a useful educational tool to realize this

vision? With respect to the first question, much work has already been done to establish the need for the more-than-human world to have a greater voice. There is potential for wide popular engagement, which has been indicated in the UK, for example, by the increasing popularity of television documentaries on the natural world. One of these documentaries, *Blue Planet II*, was the most watched TV show in the UK in 2017, with over 14-million viewers (BBC News, 2018). Recycling in the UK is also supported and encouraged by local and national government: In England in 2017, nearly double the weight of waste was recycled or repurposed (104 million tonnes) than was sent to landfill (52.3 million tonnes) (DEFRA, 2019). Popular engagement with improving relations with the more-than-human world in an effort to respond to the environmental crisis is not restricted to the UK, of course. For example, in Canada, research conducted as far back as 2014 suggested that 81 % of Canadians believed climate change was happening (Lachapelle et al., 2014).

Given the prevalence of knowledge about the current environmental predicament, it seems that the vision of a more equitable relationship between humans and more-than-humans is conceptually accessible. In other countries, more-than-humans' rights have received even greater recognition that they have in Canada and the UK. As examples, in 2008, Ecuador approved a new constitution which dedicated a whole chapter to the rights of nature, and in 2010 Bolivia approved the Law of the Rights of Mother Earth (Pecharroman, 2018).

Alongside improved legal rights, the concept of wilderness is evolving in academia and public perception from a moral and theological abstract to a concrete ecological perception (Purdy, 2015). That said, the accessibility of the theory of Wild Pedagogies as a way of realizing this relationship between human and more-than-human presences is problematic because, given the very recent publication of works about the theory, it is not yet widespread. There are also physical accessibility issues, outlined above, about access to suitable environments; success rests on the balance between the importance of the theoretical framework and the utopics of the location (Hetherington, 2005). Because of these limitations, we must currently take the authors of the theory at their word that Wild Pedagogies can be practised in urban and industrial environments (Morse et al., 2018); however, it would be helpful if this could be supported by practical experience, perhaps in the location of their next colloquium.

### *Does the Theory of Wild Pedagogies Express the Lateral Possibilities of Utopias?*

The theory of Wild Pedagogies expresses the lateral possibilities that are also presented in utopias by trying to establish a different way of thinking and by seeking to create a more equitable balance in the agency of humans and more-than-humans. These are partly established by the language that the theory deploys. It is interesting, for example, that the theory of Wild Pedagogies utilizes the phrase more-than-human in an effort to challenge anthropocentrism. This phrase is also a tidy way of side-stepping the problematic dualisms of

nature–culture and natural–humanmade that are capable of tying philosophers in Gordian knots. But why "more-than-human" rather than "other-than-human"? (Boddice, 2011). One answer may be that this is the authors' way of redressing the current imbalance of agency, in which humans dominate, by implying that the more-than-human presence is greater than the human presence. This is only an attempt to balance out the scales, given that the aim is for nature to act as co-teacher, not teacher. The idea of the co-teacher relationship is further developed by the modelling of the seminal research as "colloquia" rather than "conferences" or "seminars." The format of a colloquium, derived from the Latin "loqui" (to talk), is more collaborative than the expert–audience dynamic of lectures and conference addresses (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 114). These linguistic decisions are entirely in keeping with the attempts of the developers of the theory of Wild Pedagogies to collaborate with both each other and nature, as co-teachers.

In this co-teacher relationship, the definition of "wild" as "self-willed" becomes, once again, significant, performing interestingly across a number of the key touchstones (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 26). It suggests not only the self-will of the environment in acting as co-teacher but also the self-will of the learner as being integral to the education process rather than subordinate to the self-will of the teacher (Quay & Jensen, 2018).

### *Does the Theory of Wild Pedagogies Promote the Optimism of Utopias?*

The theory of Wild Pedagogies is optimistic because it proposes answers to difficult and important questions, such as "how do humans best prepare to deal with uncertainty?" and "how do humans address the challenges of climate change?" (Blenkinsop & Ford, 2018; Jickling et al., 2018). There is a desire inherent within work on the theory to critique current educational provision and try and find a new way forward (Green & Dyment, 2018). The positive experiences reported after the three colloquiums also demonstrates the theory's optimism. Of the Yukon River colloquium, Victor Elderton reported that, "To-date, the experience informs and inspires me, personally and professionally" (as cited in Jickling et al., 2018, p.115). Of the Franklin River trip, Sean Blenkinsop reflected that, "I have enjoyed being part of a project that attempts to enact that which is being advocated for" (as cited in Blenkinsop & Ford , 2018b, p. 310). It is clear from their writings that the theory of Wild Pedagogies helps the authors critique their current practices and inspires and motivates them to continually revisit the key touchstones on successive trips. By the simple offering of a pedagogic heuristic, the theory of Wild Pedagogies presents an optimistic outlook.

### *Do Wild Pedagogies Have a Pedagogical Effect?*

The term "Wild Pedagogies" suggests that it should have a pedagogical effect and implies its ability to affect and change pedagogical practice. That said, this

is the most challenging utopian pillar to fulfill because of the many questions that need to be answered to ensure the pedagogy is effective. The dominant question that must be considered is, for whom are these pedagogies intended? After all, Wild Pedagogies have little to no relevance for cultures which already demonstrate an equitable relationship with their environment (Brody, 2002; Griffiths, 2006), instead perhaps only being relevant to cultures that need to address inequities between humans and more-than-humans (Griffiths, 2013). This point has not been overlooked by the theory's progenitors, most of whom hail from a traditional Western academic background. Thus, it is understandable that they are critiquing what they know and responding to UNESCO's call in 2016 to consider the role of education in creating sustainable futures (Bokova, 2016, p4). Their lived experience informs the theory and makes it useful to surroundings such as their own.

In addition to the question explored above, there are currently two key barriers to realizing the pedagogical efficacy of the theory of Wild Pedagogies. First, dissemination of the key learning points is still small-scale. It is useful in this regard that the colloquia, which intentionally involved a small number of people, have generated widely accessible written work. This includes journals such as the December 2018 edition of the *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, which presents the research pieces generated by the Franklin River colloquium and indeed the special issue in which this article is published. It also includes the book *Wild Pedagogies* (2018), which details the research of the West Coast of Scotland colloquium.

The second key barrier, one raised by Daniel Ford in the wake of the Franklin River colloquium, is that education "means working directly with children and young people, yet where was the child in all this?" (Blenkinsop & Ford, 2018b, p. 310). The theory of Wild Pedagogies is developing coherently as a heuristic for educators; however, there is little contiguous work on its practice with young people, despite the innovative learning opportunities that are currently being enacted that fulfill the key touchstones (Socha et al., 2016).

If, as discussed above, the theory of Wild Pedagogies is seen as an abstraction, rather than an iteration, of outdoor learning, then the pedagogical effect becomes more dynamic and more utopian. By presenting a philosophical framework for the wilding of domesticated pedagogies, the theory of Wild Pedagogies provides an inspiring framework on which to build more place and culture-specific programs. In terms of influencing educational policy, a philosophical position may have more impact and be more inspiring than individual organizations have been to date in changing the status quo of education.

## Conclusions: What are the Implications of Wild Pedagogies?

The theory of Wild Pedagogies does, to a large extent, align with a utopian philosophy. It has a vision of radical otherness and presents an accessible,

ideal future by expressing lateral possibilities. It critiques existing societal norms by questioning the current domestication of the education system and is inherently optimistic in putting forward an alternative path for education. Whilst its pedagogical effect is currently being experienced more by educators than students, it does aim to produce learners that are equipped with the tools to deal with an increasingly uncertain future (Blenkinsop & Ford, 2018a).

The authors of the theory of Wild Pedagogies are quite insistent in their belief that their heuristic is *a* (not *the*) potential response to the disconnect between the human and natural worlds (Jickling et al., 2018). However, by reframing the theory as an abstraction rather than an iteration, it becomes possible to understand it as a philosophical framework rather than a practical pedagogy. It is clear that a substantial change to education will be a vital aspect of the response to the challenge posed by climate change. Historically held worldviews, such as slavery, empire, and female suffrage, have had to be shattered by epochal events, and anthropocentrism is arguably even more deeply structural than these (Purdy, 2015). By creating a map for reaching a future that might avoid the pitfalls of maintaining the status quo, the theory of Wild Pedagogies has set out a challenging vision. Whilst questions remain about its accessibility and ability to scale within the education sector, it joins a bold tradition of theories that query what education is for and how it can serve the learner, the educator, and the community in a more responsive and equitable way.

## Notes on Contributor

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Thank you to Jason Zou at Lakehead University for his work on the website: http://cjee.lakeheadu.ca

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