

From teacher doings to human beings: Ethical awakening in a wild pedagogies gathering

Angelos Konstantinidis, University of Groningen; Zoe Theodosaki, Netherlands; Stelios Pantazidis, University of Thessaly; & Georgia Tsismalidou, University of Ioannina, Greece.

Abstract

This article explores a Wild Pedagogies (WP) gathering in Greece as a site of transformative professional and personal learning for educators. Against a culture of institutional alienation, the seven-day camp, informed by the touchstones of WP, operated as an embodied critique of standardized, control-oriented education. Using a “wilding” qualitative approach grounded in relational accountability, the inquiry emerged organically to trace the ways in which learning unfolded through deep time, communal living and more-than-human relations. Framed ethico-onto-epistemologically, the study shows how the gathering fostered shifts in relationality, temporal experience, identity, and pedagogical understanding. Ultimately, the gathering functioned as a site of “ethical awakening,” allowing educators to reclaim agency and reimagine educational futures rooted in care and reciprocity.

Résumé

Cet article étudie un rassemblement sur les pédagogies par la nature qui a eu lieu en Grèce en tant qu'espace de perfectionnement professionnel et de transformation personnelle pour les éducateurs et les éducatrices. En réaction à une culture institutionnelle aliénante, le camp de sept jours, conçu selon les principes des pédagogies par la nature, incarnait une critique de l'éducation normalisée et contrôlante. En mobilisant une approche qualitative inspirée de la nature et soucieuse de la responsabilité relationnelle, la recherche s'est déployée organiquement, de manière à s'arrimer au mode d'apprentissage inscrit dans un temps qui s'étire, la vie collective et les relations plus-qu'humaines. Selon un cadre éthico-onto-épistémologique, l'étude montre comment le rassemblement a favorisé des transformations dans les formes de relationnalité, l'expérience du temps, l'identité et la compréhension pédagogique. En définitive, le rassemblement a offert un lieu « d'éveil éthique », permettant aux éducateurs et éducatrices de retrouver leur agentivité et d'imaginer un avenir de l'enseignement ancré dans le soin et la réciprocité.

Keywords: Wild Pedagogies, Wild inquiry, Deep time, Teacher learning, Relationality, Identity transformation

Introduction

In contemporary societies shaped by acceleration, individualism and bureaucratic control, many educators inhabit a quiet paradox of being constantly connected, yet increasingly detached (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhhahmadi, 2016). Digital communication multiplies messages, platforms and interactions, while meaningful encounters become rarer and more fragile. Although digital infrastructures and accountability systems promise collaboration and efficiency, they often deepen forms of alienation that pull teachers away from the relational and communal dimensions of their work (Biesta, 2020). Within highly standardized institutions, teaching risks being reduced to a technical task, losing its relational, ethical, and situated character.

This shift carries consequences that extend beyond professional practice and reach into educators' sense of self and purpose (Pantazidis & Moisiadou, 2025). For many educators, alienation is not only professional but existential. Teachers increasingly describe a distance from what initially drew them to the profession: care, dialogue, shared growth and the slow cultivation of relationships. Managerialism, performativity and constant measurement fragment collegial ties and erode trust, transforming schools into spaces of endurance rather than communities of learning (Apple, 2009). Within this context, professional learning is often reduced to state- and market-driven training models that position educators as passive implementers of externally imposed curricula, prioritizing credentials and pre-packaged tools over experimentation, collective reflection, and professional agency (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019).

It is within this landscape of fatigue and disconnection that movements such as Wild Pedagogies (WP) become significant, not through offering transferable solutions, but by creating openings for educators to reconnect with place, with one another, and with forms of learning that unfold through presence rather than performance (Theodosaki et al., 2025; Winks & Warwick, 2021).

WP challenge dominant regimes of governance that position humans primarily as producers, governed by efficiency and control. They resist the "taming" of pedagogy in the Anthropocene, where schooling often reproduces extractive and anthropocentric worldviews (Kahn, 2010) and instead foreground pedagogical engagements rooted in relationality, uncertainty, spontaneity and care for the more-than-human world.

This study examines how a gathering among educators for a WP Symposium functioned as a form of professional learning grounded in relationality, lived experience, and deep time (Jickling et al., 2018), opening space for alternative educational orientations and new becomings to emerge through encounters with others, both human and more-than-human. We intentionally resisted framing the study through a predefined research question. Instead, we allowed the inquiry to unfold as a process of emergence, where not-knowing becomes a productive force, a generative opening that creates the possibility to escape the habitual and the

schoolized. Here, experience is not a static object but a living motion, an interplay of relations and affects from which new understandings and ways of being can emerge. The implications of this stance are explored further in the sections that follow, where we analyse the ethico-onto-epistemological commitments of WP and how they shape both the research process and its outcomes.

Ethico-Onto-Epistemology of Wild Pedagogies

This study is situated within the relational philosophical orientation of WP, which shaped both the gathering and the inquiry as they unfolded. What follows clarifies the conceptual foundations of this orientation.

The philosophical orientation of WP dissolves the traditional boundaries between being, knowing, and acting (Jickling et al., 2018; Jickling & Blenkinsop, 2020). Ontology, epistemology, and ethics are not separate domains of inquiry but mutually entangled processes of living and learning within a dynamic world (Barad, 2007; Wilson, 2008). To be is to know, and to know is to care. Within this framework, education is reimagined not as a means of mastering the world but as a practice of participating responsibly within it, an invitation to dwell with humility, creativity, and attentiveness in a more-than-human world that is, at every moment teaching us how to live.

This relational orientation is inseparable from WP's explicit recognition of ecological crisis and planetary precarity (Jickling et al., 2018; Jickling & Blenkinsop, 2020). WP arise from the understanding that we live amid mass species extinction, intensifying extreme weather events, and accelerating climate change (IPCC, 2023). Within WP, these conditions are not external contexts but ontological realities that call for a reconfiguration of education itself. They reveal the limitations of anthropocentric, mechanistic, and techno-capitalistic worldviews and demand not merely new policies or technologies, but a radical re-examination of how we understand, inhabit, and relate to the world (Konstantinidis, 2025).

Within WP, the conditions of planetary crisis and interdependence call forth a mode of ethical responsibility that exceeds individual moral accountability and instead emphasizes response-ability (Barad, 2007): the cultivated capacity and obligation to respond attentively and relationally within the entangled conditions of life. This framing recognizes the complex webs of complicity, interdependence, and vulnerability that characterize the Anthropocene. Ethical action, from this perspective, is not primarily about assigning blame, but about cultivating the ability to respond, to "nurture healers and restorers of the Earth" and to participate in the co-creation of "a decent, durable, and beautiful future" (Orr, 2011, p. 242).

WP articulate a critique of domesticated, institutionally confined forms of learning and of the systemic drive for control that underpins dominant social and educational systems, along with the logics of efficiency, standardization, and predictability that they perpetuate (Jickling et al., 2018).

In place of these logics, WP invite the cultivation of alternative ways of being, knowing, and relating. These orientations are articulated through a set of touchstones, “points of departure and places to return to” (Jickling et al., 2018, p. 77), that serve not as prescriptions but as ethical and pedagogical guides. The eight touchstones developed thus far emphasize: (1) that nature—rather than being the place where education occurs—can in fact be an entity one can learn from, aka a co-teacher, (2) provided one allows for ample and qualitative (i.e. deep) time and patience for observation, participation in natural/cyclical events; (3) teachers ought to welcome unexpected, spontaneous, emerging themes and regard them as opportunities for learning encounters with the “wild”; (4) such encounters can happen anywhere and ought to encourage a re-consideration of the way we relate to the wild, repositioning our human species amidst the web of life rather than elevating ourselves from non-human beings; (5) teachers need to be aware that they perform a political act, in which there is no neutral position; (6) as part of their work, they need to invest in the building of communities of collaboration, respect, solidarity; (7) they need to broaden their imagination as to how and to what extent education can change, because we can only achieve as much as we have imagined; (8) finally, learning processes need to be guided by and have as their main goal the cultivation of caring, compassion and love toward all beings.

In this sense, wildness is not a metaphor for chaos, but a mode of re-relating—to oneself, to others, and to the more-than-human world (Jickling et al., 2018). Wildness unsettles the binaries that separate mind from body, knowledge from emotion, human from non-human, and individual from community (Smallwood, 2025). It invites encounters with animals, plants, landscapes, and so-called “inanimate” beings such as mountains, rivers and campfires as active participants in educational life—each carrying histories, agencies, and forms of knowing that call for ethical attentiveness and reciprocity (Beavington et al., 2022; MacEachren, 2022; Schmidt, 2022; Urquhart, 2024).

For educators, this entails a profound ethico-onto-epistemological reorientation: from the self as an autonomous professional subject toward the self as a participant in a living web of relationships (Smallwood, 2025; Theodosaki et al., 2025). Within this orientation, relations are understood as primary, and knowledge is not only socially constructed but co-emergent with place. Learning is recognized as deeply embodied and affective, arising through sensuous, adaptive, and often uncertain encounters with changing environmental conditions. Risk, unpredictability, and not-knowing are not failures of preparation, but integral dimensions of becoming attentive to the world as it is unfolding. Teaching, within this frame, is not the transmission or management of knowledge but a situated ethical practice of attentiveness, responsiveness, and care toward the relational conditions that make learning possible.

Methodology

Context

In the summer of 2025, eleven humans (pre- and in-service teachers) and one cat came together for the 4th Greek WP Symposium. The gathering took the form of a seven-day camp, with the possibility of extension (for further information on this and previous Symposia, see www.wildpedagogies.gr and Theodosaki et al., 2024). All participants had attended previous gatherings and were already acquainted with the theories and practices of WP. The call was intentionally open: there was no theme, no predefined schedule, and no promised outcomes. It was an invitation simply to be together—in nature.

Our “venue” was a secret spot on a mountain in Drama, Greece: a hidden clearing nestled within an oak forest, beside a small creek and a cascading waterfall that formed a natural pond. Surrounded by the ruins of old terraces from a long-abandoned village, the landscape carried traces of forgotten habitation, while the absence of mobile reception and internet allowed the gathering to unfold without digital interruption.

Although the week was not initially conceived as a formal research study, the intensity of the relational and affective dynamics that unfolded generated a clear need for collective reflection. This recognition, emerging from the experience itself, became the starting point of our inquiry.

A Wild Pedagogies Inquiry Approach

The possibility of conducting an inquiry was shared with the whole group during and after the Symposium; the four members of the inquiry team were those who expressed interest in engaging in this. As four co-researchers who were full participants in the gathering, we embraced this genesis as the foundation of our methodology. Our research did not begin with predefined questions, but with a shared desire to document our gathering and make its knowledges available. This mode of beginning is not incidental; it reflects the core epistemological and ethical commitments of WP, which position knowledge as co-created through lived, relational and place-responsive entanglements (Jickling et al., 2018; Jickling & Blenkinsop, 2020).

This epistemological perspective led us to question dominant, normative approaches to research and how we learn. We turned to the ethico-onto-epistemology of WP as a methodological compass for our work. This inquiry stance is a deliberate ecological and political choice. It guides us away from methodologies that seek to “capture” data and toward practices grounded in listening, responsiveness, and relational accountability.

We understood the inquiry as an extension of the gathering itself, a scholarly effort to remain “wild” by recognizing the land, forest, and waterfall

not as a passive setting, but as active participants in knowledge production. Consequently, we sought to think *with* the land and our community, rather than *about* them.

Given the emergent nature of our study, we drew methodological guidance from allied paradigms: Indigenous Research Methodologies, which center relational accountability and the land as teacher (Wilson, 2008), and Participatory Inquiry, which frames research as a collaborative, transformative practice (Reason & Bradbury, 2013).

These frameworks supported us in crafting an approach that is relational and entangled (positioning ourselves as co-participants, not detached observers), emergent and non-prescriptive (allowing conversations to unfold from an open prompt), and more-than-human centered (analyzing transcripts for the agency of the land as co-teacher).

It also became a practice of “wilding” scholarship—embracing iterative, dialogic analysis and resisting standardized outcomes—and one of relational accountability. Here, ethics extended beyond procedural protocols to ongoing responsibility toward all participants, human and otherwise. This commitment is reflected in our use of the “names given by the wild”—bestowed in a creek-side ceremony—which we employ, with consent, not as pseudonyms but as an epistemic and ethical practice. These names honour the land and water as co-constitutive agents, resist abstraction, and keep the more-than-human world present within the very representation of our knowledge.

Inquiry Process

Guided by these principles, our inquiry unfolded through three online focus groups conducted one month after the gathering. All eleven participants took part in these sessions, which were facilitated by two members of the inquiry team and functioned as reflective extensions of the symposium, prioritizing exploration over conclusion (Winks & Warwick, 2021). The focus groups were designed as dialogic spaces, with facilitators participating as co-inquirers who shared familiarity with the experience and equally offered their own reflections.

The interviews were organized around five thematic questions, identified by the inquiry team as central to our experience:

- How relations and dynamics within the community developed (e.g. trust building, equality)
- How we related to time
- How we connected to more-than-humans
- What were important learnings and effects
- If there were “peak experiences” (e.g. moments of connection or significant realizations)

Our analysis was a reflexive and engaged process of thematic meaning-making, aligned with calls for a more philosophically committed qualitative practice (Wolgemuth et al., 2024), and informed by the iterative and emergent logic of Grounded Theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2011; Charmaz, 2014). We approached the data not as a sequence of procedural steps to be completed, but as a collaborative dialogue: with participants' words, with one another, and with the touchstones of WP that guided our inquiry. In this way, themes were allowed to develop inductively from participants' accounts rather than being imposed through a predetermined framework.

Our analysis began with three members of the inquiry team independently listening to the audio recordings of the focus groups to familiarize themselves with the data and identify prominent themes. Following this, we reviewed the transcripts of the audio recordings to locate experiences and quotes that highlighted a striking contrast between “everyday life” and the relational, immersive lifestyle experienced during the gathering. Through iterative discussion, we found that these moments clustered around four major themes, which structure the analysis presented below.

The analysis aims to highlight alternative ways of doing and being—illuminating how the gathering's relational commitments opened possibilities for reimagining life, learning, and ecological belonging.

Findings

What is presented below has emerged from the participants' own words, either as direct quotations or descriptive summaries of their statements. The analytical framing and connections to the literature are developed in the Discussion. The most prominent themes, which will be presented below revolve around issues of community building and communal living, the altered time perception as well as matters of identity.

Theme 1: Emergent Community

Analysis of participants' accounts highlights the emergence of a community characterized by fluid coordination, affective trust, and authenticity. Instead of being organized through formal structures or predefined roles, the group operated through relational processes that evolved organically over time.

Informal Consensus and Collective Flow

Participants widely acknowledged that informal hierarchies emerged during the gathering. These hierarchies, however, were not perceived as oppressive or exclusionary. Instead, they were understood as situational and relational, grounded in participants' willingness to offer specific work, skills or experience

when needed. Leadership was described as temporary, task-specific, and collectively recognized, rather than as a position of authority.

“Someone wants to be the leader in the group and the group accepts it. I would say it’s a relationship, an interaction.” (Pan)

Importantly, following another person in a given moment was not associated with generalized power:

“Following a person, at a specific time for a specific thing, does not give them generalized power. It is a dynamic state of coordination.” (WildAmulet)

Decision-making processes were similarly non-formalized. The gathering did not follow a predefined schedule; instead, activities emerged through participants’ expressed needs and desires. What participants found striking was the extent to which coordination often occurred without explicit discussion or formal consensus mechanisms. Decisions were described as intuitive, non-verbal, and marked by a sense of collective flow.

“So somehow the activities came organically out of our living there and organically in relation to nature.” (Earthangel)

“Everything we experienced there was completely spontaneous. There was a natural flow to everything.” (WildSoulCat)

Trust, Safety, and the Emergence of a “We”

Participants consistently emphasized the rapid development of trust and emotional safety within the group. The feeling of being heard, accepted, and supported was described as both surprising and deeply meaningful. Everyday collective practices, such as cooking, bathing in the creek, caring for one another, and openly discussing cohabitation issues, played a central role in cultivating this sense of togetherness.

“The dominant feeling of those days is togetherness.” (Pan)

“These are habits in everyday life that very strongly demonstrate that we are a team here.” (OwlFairy)

“If I have an issue, the team embraces me. It’s not my personal problem; it’s everyone’s.” (BlossomingAmazon)

Participants highlighted that this sense of community did not require uniform participation in all activities. Instead, smaller groups formed spontaneously around expressed desires or emerging needs, such as fetching water or preparing food, reinforcing a flexible and responsive social structure.

This was partly attributed to the demanding mountain conditions as a catalyst for relational bonding, making mutual care a practical necessity:

“Community building is both a desire to be together and a response to being out of our comfort zone, being outdoors requires taking care of each other.”
(MossGoddess)

Authenticity, Desire, and Following One’s Needs

A central theme across participants’ narratives was the role of desire as an organizing principle of communal life. Desire structured not only the initial decision to participate, but also the daily unfolding of activities. Expressing desire openly was experienced as both a challenge and a learning process, requiring honesty and vulnerability.

“I am driven by desire. I want to feel the community, to trust people, to connect with people—human and non-human. Desire is basic, and then the whole group accompanies it.” (BlossomingAmazon)

Practices such as nudity emerged as collective expressions of authenticity and trust, arising through informal, consensual processes. Participants described these moments as deeply liberating, affecting both individual self-perception and group dynamics.

“A freedom, an opening of the soul.” (SereneLightning)

“Getting naked and talking honestly about myself felt relaxing and liberating—it’s the same decision to trust.” (CrystalUnicorn)

“At first nudity felt awkward, but after a while it felt completely reasonable.”
(BarleyField)

Several participants reflected that everyday life normalizes disconnection and alienation, whereas shared living in the forest revealed alternative values grounded in presence and authenticity. Being in nature, away from social norms and institutional expectations, appeared to enable expressions of both authentic doing and authentic being.

“There were no external norms to dictate what we should do.” (Earthangel)

“I’m in nature, different things are allowed here, the rules are different.”
(CrystalUnicorn)

The above-described aspects of social organization—participants’ experiences of trust and safety, together with the authenticity of expressing

and acting in alternative ways—interwove to create a community of authentic relations and collective self-organization, in contrast to formal social structures based on externally imposed rules and regulations.

Theme 2: Perceptions of Time and Shifts in Temporal Experience

The differentiated perceptions of time presented below, emerging from participants' personal experiences, unfold across multiple dimensions: a social critique of capitalist temporalities, the role of time in communal organizing, and experiences of deep time. Together, these perspectives invite a reconsideration of the taken-for-granted conceptualization of time in modern Western culture.

Restructuring of Time in Communal Organizing

As noted in the methodology, the gathering was not designed as a learning space in the conventional sense; its intention was simply to live together in nature. Yet, precisely by stepping outside expectations to learn, perform, or “use time well,” participants encountered a different temporal reality.

The absence of clocks or timekeeping devices led to a reorganization of time around lived events and collective rhythms. Participants described time being marked by moments such as cutting a watermelon or gathering for yoga, giving rise to expressions like “half past watermelon” or “a quarter to yoga.” These expressions signaled a shift toward a time structured by meaning and relational importance.

“We arranged time through our own rituals. A ritual is an arrangement of time. This arrangement gave me space inside me to connect, to exist more authentically.” (BlossomingAmazon)

“Time was for us; we were not trying to squeeze ourselves into time.” (WildAmulet)

Several participants linked this experience to ancestral modes of temporal organization, noting that time historically followed needs, work, and environmental conditions rather than abstract measurement. Time was described as being shaped by “outer nature (light, dark, cold, warm) and inner nature (hunger, tiredness)” (Earthangel).

“I felt that time was defined only by light.” (WildAmulet)

“The fact that we started to feel hungry is a clock—the clock of desire.” (CrystalUnicorn)

Critique of Time as Commodity

Participants reflected critically on how time is commonly understood through capitalist metaphors—as something to be “spent,” “saved,” or made productive. During the gathering, these notions appeared to lose their dominance. Having ample time enabled participants to attend to emotional states, creative impulses, and caring practices.

“Time was not a resource to be spent.” (WiseRoe)

“Time belonged to me; I didn’t belong to time.” (BlossomingAmazon)

“I experience the whole range of emotions because I have time.” (MossGoddess)

Experiences of Deep Time

Participants frequently referred to experiences in which time could no longer be described in quantitative terms. These moments reflected what many described as a deepened or differentiated perception of time—what can be understood as deep time. In some cases, this emerged through collective experiences, such as trance drumming or guided meditation.

“I couldn’t remember how long [the drumming] lasted. I have no idea. It felt very intense, so it felt like a lot.” (BarleyField)

In other cases, deep time emerged through solitary practices, such as sit spots or moments of intentional stillness.

“Was time deepening? Yes, quite often. I wanted to sit in a corner and do nothing. Just focus on what is there ... the essence of things, the meaning of life.” (SereneLightning)

These experiences carried strong emotional and cognitive significance.

“Embracing the rock at the river has been inscribed in my emotional world—power and tenderness at the same time.” (SereneLightning)

“Time increased my observation. Even the smallest act had repercussions.” (Pan)

Participants consistently described time as a transformative dimension of the gathering. A shared observation was that having ample, unstructured time constituted a rare condition in their everyday lives. This temporal openness appeared to facilitate both individual processes—such as attending to personal needs, emotions, and rhythms—and collective ones, including responsiveness to

others and the group as a whole. Through this experience, time was not merely reorganized but fundamentally re-perceived. While there were testimonies of how the process of experiencing time differently generated moments of discomfort or stress, these tensions were described as part of the process of unlearning dominant temporal habits.

Theme 3: Ontological Disruption and the Critique of “Normality”

Participants articulated a growing misalignment between the identities cultivated within the WP gathering and those demanded by “normal” life. This misalignment was consistently framed not as an individual discomfort, but as an ontological and socio-political tension.

BlossomingAmazon described this rupture as a loss of relational and temporal coherence in everyday life:

“There’s a need for sharing, a need for connection—which I think is universal. And the life we live has taken that away from us. We’re trying to escape fragmented time—which is also sociopolitical. We’ve become alienated, even self-alienated. And when we finally create a connection, we think it’s artificial, when in fact it’s the truth we want.”

Rather than positioning the gathering as an artificial or escapist space, participants repeatedly described it as revealing the constructed nature of what is commonly accepted as “normal.” The return to everyday life thus became increasingly fraught:

“What I see happening more and more is that I fit less and less into the outside world... It’s like I experience the ideal when I participate in WP gatherings. And then I have to return to the ‘normal’ world, and I feel I don’t want to.” (Earthangel)

“Still, I see how difficult it is to maintain these elements in daily life—the way we were there.” (MossGoddess)

Crucially, the gathering did not offer participants a ready-made alternative identity. Instead, it has created conditions in which the question of identity could no longer be deferred. Participants were confronted with who they are becoming—and at what ethical, relational, and ecological cost:

“I can say that I gained a lot... seeing the world again through new filters... also this openness, the ability to hold real honesty about how we feel and what we want. This genuine expression, which we often suppress ... it’s still affecting me in many ways today, in my life. Sometimes in a good way, sometimes in a difficult way.” (WiseRoe)

These reflections suggest that the gathering functioned as a liminal space in which dominant assumptions about identity, time, and social life could be questioned and reconfigured. The tension participants experienced upon returning to everyday contexts reflected a heightened awareness of how dominant social and educational arrangements shape ways of being. Ontological disruption thus became a dimension of learning, opening possibilities for more relational and ethically attentive ways of inhabiting educational and social worlds.

Theme 4: Learning New Ways of Being and Relating

Participants' accounts suggest that the gathering created conditions in which alternative ways of being and relating could be experienced and practiced. Through shared living, dialogue, and engagement with the more-than-human world, participants described shifts in self-understanding, openness toward others, and attentiveness to relational life.

Several participants described experiencing a sense of security within the group that enabled them to accept themselves more fully, including emotions that are often marginalized in everyday life, such as fear, anger, or disappointment.

"I find security in these groups, accepting myself a little more." (OwlFairy)

"It's all therapy—the cycle, the sharing, how the other person listens to you, how you respond, how you manage your anger, how you manage your disappointment." (WildSoulCat)

Participants also spoke of becoming more open to others and more willing to step outside their comfort zones in order to encounter the "other." This openness was described as both a learning and a conscious choice, even when it did not easily align with dominant social norms.

"I have developed a need for openness. It has become more pronounced, and I see that in some other contexts it does not fit in." (WiseRoe)

"I usually come across as very open, and I push myself to open up." (BlossomingAmazon)

WildAmulet reflected on the significance of this experiential shift and how it aligns with the theories of communal living she engages with:

"Because I'm constantly moving in these ideological spaces, I now have the privilege of saying it experientially: this is how it actually works, in practice. I finally lived what for years I'd only talked about in theory."

Several participants also described changes in their relationships with the more-than-human world, noting increased attentiveness, care, and ethical sensitivity in everyday encounters with plants and animals. These shifts were connected to a reconfiguration of fear—not as something to be avoided but as a meaningful form of relation and engagement.

“Even being afraid of an insect is a form of connection to it—it just takes the form of fear.” (BlossomingAmazon)

Overall, participants claim to have experienced shifts in how they understand themselves, others, and the more-than-human world. These learnings extended beyond the event itself, shaping participants’ everyday relationships and ethical sensibilities. In this way, the gathering functioned as a space where alternative ways of being and relating could be practiced.

Generally, it appears that participants’ experience of the WP gathering was in many respects awakening other ways of being, doing, and relating and perceiving oneself, others, time, and community. This will be discussed in the following section together with its implications as to an identity transformation.

Discussion

Taken together, the findings position WP gatherings as sites of transformative learning that exceed instrumental models of teacher development. The gathering created an opening in which educators temporarily moved from modes of “teacher doing” toward modes of “human being.” Instead of acquiring techniques or competencies, participants engaged in a reconfiguration of teacher identity through lived experience, deep time, and collective care. This experiential shift reshaped participants’ understandings of themselves, their relationships, and their pedagogical orientations. Importantly, these insights did not arise from predefined hypotheses but from a process of collective reflection on lived experience, highlighting the exploratory character of the inquiry process that guided this study.

Participants’ reflections demonstrate that learning within the gathering unfolded as a dialogical and emergent process, distinct from the outcome of intentional instruction. The realization of a participant that “we learn when we are not learning” captures succinctly the learnings of the gathering by pointing toward a form of learning that resists control and hierarchical transmission of knowledge. Learning emerged through shared inquiry, uncertainty and responsiveness, moving away from mastery or control. Importantly, participants emphasized that such learning was deeply embodied and affective: emotions, care, silence, and physical presence functioned as epistemic resources. This aligns with phenomenological and ecological traditions that conceptualize knowing as grounded in being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962; Naess, 1989). These findings

reinforce the argument that meaningful learning requires temporal spaciousness and bodily presence and cannot be rushed or instrumentalized (Jickling et al., 2018). This emergent, embodied learning was made possible, in part, by the relational conditions participants co-created—conditions in which care operated as both ethical orientation and communicative ground.

Indeed, a key contribution of this study lies in illuminating how care operates not only as an ethical value but also as a communicative ground. Participants described forms of coordination and decision-making that bypassed formal deliberation, relying instead on trust, intuition, and non-verbal attunement. Also, rituals, shared vulnerability, and practices such as nudity operated as conditions for authenticity, enabling what participants described as honest and liberating communication. These processes resonate with humanistic traditions that foreground authenticity, acceptance, and empathic listening as foundations for relational growth (Rogers, 1966), as well as with ecological conceptions of the expanded or ecological Self (Naess, 1988/2007). The findings suggest that when desire is legitimized and care is collectively practiced, community becomes a lived competence rather than an abstract ideal. These dynamics echo the WP emphasis on care, relational attentiveness, and the cultivation of community as foundational pedagogical conditions (Jickling et al., 2018; Jickling & Blenkinsop, 2020).

The findings suggest that participants' experience of time functioned as a decisive rupture from the dominant societal chronologies. Time is socially produced through regimes of productivity and efficiency (Pantazidou, 2022); a logic clearly recognizable in participants' descriptions of their everyday personal and professional lives. Against this background, the gathering created conditions in which time was no longer something to be managed, justified, or optimized, but something to be inhabited. The absence of schedules and clocks allowed participants to step outside what they describe as the rigid repetition of clock time in education, revealing instead a lived temporality aligned with bodily rhythms, environmental cues, and relational needs (Cole et al., 2024). This shift was not merely organizational but ontological, enabling participants to experience learning and being otherwise. Such experiences resonate with WP touchstones that challenge dominant temporalities of schooling and invite slower, more attentive engagements with place and experience (Jickling et al., 2018; Jickling & Blenkinsop, 2020).

Participants' accounts resonate with a Deleuzian reading of learning as non-linear, affective, and emergent (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004). The differentiated temporal experiences described—in which duration could not be measured, recalled, or quantified—can be understood as educational lines of flight, where thought deterritorializes from striated institutional time. In these moments, attention drifted, conversations spiraled, and meaning emerged sideways and not forward. Crucially, participants did not frame such experiences as empty or unproductive. On the contrary, they described heightened observation, emotional intensity, and ethical attentiveness. Deep time thus operated as a

pedagogical condition that legitimized slowness, stillness, and not-knowing, allowing learning to unfold through curiosity, affect, and relational intensity rather than predefined pacing or outcomes.

Furthermore, deep time carried significant ethical implications for how participants related to themselves, others, and the more-than-human world. Experiences of sitting in silence, attuning to light, hunger, or temperature and engaging in collective or solitary practices enabled a cyclical, rhythmic sense of time akin to what Abram (1996) describes as the embodied, ecological temporality of Indigenous worldviews. By stepping out of linear, historical time and into the cyclical time of the sensorial present, they cultivated an ethics of attentiveness to the needs, presence, and communications of the human and more-than-human others sharing that moment.

Within the gathering, participants experienced modes of being grounded in relationality with both human and more-than-humans through attentiveness and shared responsibility that rendered dominant social and educational norms increasingly untenable. In this sense, participants' experiences resonate with WP touchstones that emphasize dialogical learning, relational inquiry, and the decentralization of authority in educational processes. This dissonance aligns with critical traditions that frame awareness as the recognition of social structures as historically produced and ethically contestable (Freire, 2000).

In this way, identity crisis within WP becomes a form of ethical awakening: a lived recognition that extractive, efficiency-driven modes of existence can no longer be inhabited without friction. WP gatherings respond to Snaza's (2013) call for an education that leads us "away from being human, or at least away from thinking that we have any clear idea about what that means" (p. 49). These gatherings create conditions in which living, teaching, and knowing differently is sensed as not only possible, but absolutely necessary in a world marked by ecological precarity and social injustice. In this sense, identity disruption becomes a form of response-ability, an embodied obligation to respond differently within entangled human and more-than-human worlds (Barad, 2007).

To conclude, this study suggests that WP function as an ongoing ethico-onto-epistemological invitation to re-inhabit education and the world differently. As Jickling et al. (2023) argue, expanding imaginative capacity requires "a willingness to change; an active gathering of ideas about how to be differently in the world ... and an intentional engagement in a diversifying range of experiences" (p. 188). The gathering described here provides precisely such conditions: through deep time, collective care, and more-than-human encounter, participants gather the experiential "stuff" that makes new imaginaries possible. If learning is understood as a process that transforms ethical orientations and, ultimately, action, then these experiences enable educators to imagine and enact different relational possibilities—possibilities that move beyond reproducing unsustainable social arrangements toward something more responsive, more caring, and more alive (Jickling et al., 2023).

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the eleven humans and the many more-than-human partners who gathered at the Varvara waterfall. We thank our collaborators in the land: the forest, the creek, the waterfall, the pond, the soil, the fire, the rocks, the visiting cat, and the deer of the morning. This paper is a collective homage to the place and the relationships that unfolded within it. We also wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback and the care with which they engaged our work.

Notes on Contributors

Angelos Konstantinidis, PhD, is an educational advisor at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. His work focuses on open education, student well-being, learning-oriented assessment, game-based learning, and digital ethics.

Zoe Theodosaki, MEd, is a practitioner in the field of Environmental and Sustainability Education. Currently a PhD student, her research focusing on the emergence of an Ecological Self via Wild Pedagogies.

Stelios Pantazidis is an adjunct lecturer and postdoctoral researcher at the University of Thessaly, in the field of Educational commons. He is an educational activist, committed to improving public school education through democratic and socially just pedagogical practices.

Georgia Tsismalidou is a physicist with an MSc in Science Education, University of Ioannina. Her research interests focus on ecofeminist pedagogy and Wild Pedagogies.

References

- Abram, D. (1996). *The spell of the sensuous: Perception and language in a more- than-human world*. Pantheon books.
- Apple, M. W. (2009). Can critical education interrupt the right? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 30(3), 239–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300903036814>
- Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388128>
- Beavington, L., Beeman, C., Blenkinsop, S., Presthus Heggen, M., & Kazi, E. (2022). The Paradox of Wild Pedagogies: Loss and Hope Next to a Norwegian Glacier. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 25, 37–54.
- Biesta, G. (2020). Risking Ourselves in Education: Qualification, Socialization, and Subjectification Revisited. *Educational Theory*, 70(1), 89–104. <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12411>

- Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K. (Eds.). (2011). *The SAGE handbook of grounded theory*. Sage Publ.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). Grounded Theory in Global Perspective: Reviews by International Researchers. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(9), 1074–1084. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414545235>
- Cole, D. R., Rafe, M. M., & Yang-Heim, G. Y. A. (2024). Educational Research and the Question(s) of Time. In D. R. Cole, M. M. Rafe, & G. Y. A. Yang-Heim (Eds.), *Educational Research and the Question(s) of Time* (pp. 1–16). Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-3418-4_1
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Oakes, J. (with Wojcikiewicz, S. K.). (2019). *Preparing teachers for deeper learning*. Harvard Education Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2004). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (B. Massumi, Trans.). Continuum.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Blackwell publ.
- IPCC (2023). *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report*. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)].
- IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, <https://doi.org/10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647>
- Jickling, B., & Blenkinsop, S. (2020). Wilding Teacher Education: Responding to the Cries of Nature. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 23(1), 121–138.
- Jickling, B., Blenkinsop, S., Timmerman, N., & De Danann Sitka-Sage, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Wild Pedagogies: Touchstones for Re-Negotiating Education and the Environment in the Anthropocene* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan Cham. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90176-3>
- Jickling, B., Morse, M., & Blenkinsop, S. (2023). Wild Pedagogies, Outdoor Education, and the Educational Imagination. In J. Činčera, B. Johnson, D. Goldman, I. Alkaher, & M. Medek (Eds.), *Outdoor Environmental Education in the Contemporary World* (Vol. 12, pp. 183–198). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-29257-6_12
- Kahn, R. V. (2010). *Critical pedagogy, ecoliteracy, and planetary crisis: The ecopedagogy movement*. Lang.
- Konstantinidis, A. (2025). A Metaphor for Rethinking Artificial Intelligence in/and Education. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, 2025(1), 17. <https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.981>
- MacEachren, Z. (2022). Reflections on Campfire Experiences as Wild Pedagogy. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 25, 102–119.
- Naess, A. (1989). *Ecology, community and lifestyle: Outline of an ecosophy* (D. Rothenberg, Trans.). Cambridge university press.
- Naess, A. (2007). Self Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World. In *Thinking like a mountain: Towards a council of all beings*. New Catalyst Books. (Original work published 1988)
- Orr, D. W. (2011). *Hope is an imperative: The essential David Orr*. Island Press.
- Ostovar-Nameghi, S. A., & Sheikhhahmadi, M. (2016). From Teacher Isolation to Teacher Collaboration: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Findings. *English Language Teaching*, 9(5), 197. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n5p197>
- Pantazidis, S., & Moisiadou, S. (2025). Reclaiming education through commoning and critical action learning: Insights from Freinet teacher learning networks. *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, 22(2), 157–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767333.2025.2510798>

- Pantazidou, M. (2022). Right here, right now: Rapid avocados, gig work and temporal justice. *The Sociological Review Magazine*. <https://doi.org/10.51428/tsr.nqwp8620>
- Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (Eds.). (2013). *The SAGE handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice*. SAGE.
- Rogers, C. R. (1966). *Client centered therapy* (Vol. 3). Basic Books.
- Schmidt, J. (2022). The Place of Ruin within Wild Pedagogies. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 25, 55–69.
- Smallwood, A. E. (2025). Embracing Agency: Ontological Considerations for Wilding Pedagogies. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 41(2), 144–155. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ae.2025.21>
- Snaza, N. (2013). Bewildering Education. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 10(1), 38–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2013.783889>
- Theodosaki, Z., Georgopoulos, A., & Breskas, A. (2024). Two Wild Pedagogies Gatherings in Greece: How it all started, how it will continue. *Pathways, the Ontario Journal of Outdoor Education*, 36(4).
- Theodosaki, Z., Georgopoulos, A., & Gavrilakis, C. (2025). Wilding Pedagogies: Impact of an In-Service Teacher Training in Greece with Nature as Co-Teacher. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ae.2025.14>
- Urquhart, S. (2024). Wisdom from Lichen: The Ecology of Anti-oppressive Environmental Education. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 26, 141–157.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Winks, L., & Warwick, P. (2021). ‘From lone-sailor to fleet’: Supporting educators through Wild Pedagogies. *Policy Futures in Education*, 19(3), 372–386. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210320985706>
- Wolgemuth, J. R., Guyotte, K. W., & Shelton, S. A. (2024). *Expanding Approaches to Thematic Analysis: Creative Engagements with Qualitative Data*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003389149>