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## Afterwords

### The Crex Crex Collective

**Abstract** In many ways the ideas in this book build towards the touchstones in the previous chapter. In the meantime some educators have already been drawn to wild pedagogies and found the touchstones helpful. Samples of their stories are presented in this chapter, for a couple of reasons. First, these are examples of individuals who are openly renegotiating their practices, and are actually making changes—they are walking the talk. We think that exemplars, or concrete examples can do work, too. They can help people see themselves through images of others making changes. And they can be inspiring. Second, wild pedagogies

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*The Crex Crex Collective* includes: Hebrides, I., Independent Scholar; Ramsey Afffi, University of Edinburgh; Sean Blenkinsop, Simon Fraser University; Hans Gelter, Guide Natura & Luleå, University of Technology; Douglas Gilbert, Trees for Life; Joyce Gilbert, Trees for Life; Ruth Irwin, Independent Scholar; Aage Jensen, Nord University; Bob Jickling, Lakehead University; Polly Knowlton Cockett, University of Calgary; Marcus Morse, La Trobe University; Michael De Danann Sitka-Sage, Simon Fraser University; Stephen Sterling, University of Plymouth; Nora Timmerman, Northern Arizona University; and Andrea Welz, Sault College.

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are relevant to educators in a wide variety of settings and this chapter has, thus, included stories from a range of educators and educational settings.

**Keywords** Co-teacher • Curriculum • Education • Environment • Nature • Touchstones • Wild • Re-wild • Pedagogies

In this book we have worked towards bringing ideas and practices together. Like a well functioning ecosystem, when working together, ideas and practices allow each other to flourish. In the end, though, it will be through our practices that our friends, colleagues, learners and, indeed, Earth will know that we have changed our ways of being. As we have attested, to do this will be challenging; and it will not happen all at once.

In many ways the ideas in this book build towards the touchstones in the previous chapter. Highlighted amongst them were suites of questions that educators could ask themselves as a means of challenging and transforming their practices, and re-negotiating their ways of being in the world. The value of these questions will ultimately lie in the work they do. We encourage readers to re-write them and craft new questions, if they aren't doing enough work, or if they aren't heading you in what seems to be the right directions.

In the meantime some folks have already been drawn to wild pedagogies and have found the touchstones helpful. We have included a small sample of their stories below, for a couple of reasons. First, these are examples of individuals who are openly re-negotiating their practices, and are actually making changes—they are walking the talk. We think that exemplars, or concrete examples can do work, too. They can help people see themselves through images of others making changes. And they can be inspiring.

Second, we believe that wild pedagogies are relevant to educators in a wide variety of settings and have, thus, included stories from a range of educators. We want to stress that this book isn't just for those working in schools or universities. The stories that follow arise from: an art gallery; public schools and their administration; a small Scottish non-governmental organisation; a Japanese University professor's experience

of her country's move away from traditional knowledge towards a universal and capitalist educational system; private sector early childhood education and a college programme; and academic research that challenges research norms. From this modest beginning, we expect the breadth and depth of exemplars to build. For now, this is a beginning.

## Out the Gallery Doors

*Vivian Wood-Alexander* is an educator at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery in Canada. She first encountered wild pedagogies, as an idea, during a graduate course at Lakehead University in 2012. She also participated in 2014 *Wild Pedagogies: A Floating Colloquium*, in the Yukon, There she revelled in the artistic possibilities of river clay as co-artist and co-teacher.

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At the entrance of the public art gallery where I work, I push open the heavy glassed doors. A class has arrived. I look at the line of children, and then over their heads at the trees and sky behind them, visible through the space in the familiar caribou sculpture by Ahmoo Angeconeb—a stylized steel caribou, totem of the creative ones. In that moment wild pedagogy arises for me. Instead of inviting them in, I step out toward them, I am unsure of where to begin but I have decided that their first creative experience will not be inside. The wild need not always be located outdoors but it does present a good starting point. I could show them Mary Anne Barkhouse's bronze wolves, which young people always enjoy. Instead, we stop by a small installation piece created with the help of various groups and students, entitled "the hyrdel." This is a small vine maze (slightly reminiscent of a labyrinth) created to walk through: a short winding pathway bordered on both sides by a crazily woven fence. It is about 24 inches high and just wide enough for one person. As they walk through in a line, I wonder what their response will be. The few ooohs and ahhs and "this is cools" are a bit of relief. Wild pedagogy gives me the confidence to proceed sometimes when it would be easier not to try to include the wild in an already packed agenda.

## Trouble with the “Hyrdel”

It wasn't clear why I was being asked to take this work down. Although, it had started to look shabby. Somehow this outdoor eco-art work, the hyrdel, is part of my wild pedagogy. Eco-art put simply, is art that improves our relationship with nature and I have always felt wild pedagogy was a good fit with my interest in it. Wild pedagogy is in how the hyrdel was collaboratively hand-made; it is in the use of vine and sticks, both unwanted plants; it is in the challenge of keeping it; and it is in making it part of the Gallery tour. The hyrdel provided an opportunity for youth to consider a different creative process and a different aesthetic. The elements and principles of design are not all that applies here, and visitors experience creative work that can occur outdoors and made with our hands. It is a statement about art and art making. Wild pedagogy seems to embrace thinking and acting beyond the norms. If an art gallery is open to stretching one's thinking and perceptions then wild pedagogy is a welcome fit for an art educator.

As we head back towards the building, I have them look up the trunk of a tall spruce. I want them to observe a clay face up in the tree. By some miracle the face made with raw clay and never fired, has survived for over a year. It is the last of 37 sculpted faces placed up in the trees around the Gallery and like the hyrdel, it persists long past its expiration date. And I persist in pointing it out. I admire its survival. This work creates the sensation that the tree is looking at us, part of an installation called “conversation decay” by local artist Matt O'Reilly. What is the conversation that is in decay? Part of the answer is part of the reason I embrace a wild pedagogy. That conversing with the wild has been in decay, *is* in decay, but it also persists in the outdoors and with impermanent works that are made of natural materials. Being with these art works is part of acknowledging that conversation with the wild; therefore, the wild pedagogue in me allows for starting a gallery tour in this way. The teacher points to the face, the children look—and they are surprised by it, and enjoy being so.

We don't have much time and usually words are few, explanations bare, but I also don't mind letting them wonder. This is also what wild pedagogy has done for my practice. It is about giving an experience and saying less, about taking a chance on the response of the students to artworks or art making. Art works are objects of knowledge and parallel to nature can indeed be “co-teacher.” After the tour I am out in the back lane collecting

more vines, and since writing this, the “hyrdel” has been freshly woven and hopefully kept from being taken down. I know there are still sighs and a bit of eye rolling (from adults) but let them wonder too.

## The Seeing of Rocks

It is part of the job of an arts educator to help students understand the materials they are using for their art projects, but I stumble when trying to explain rocks. The rock has often been used as a canvas, just a surface. When I found a rock left after a summer art camp that was smothered in acrylic paint I couldn't believe I actually scrubbed off the paint. I am reminded of a poem I found that describes a rock playing dead. Can we learn to see a world that is that alive? My friend scoffs at this, saying it is like going back to ancient times when the world was regarded as fully alive and it was rather frightening. But, in this world of teaching we can at least give the animals voice, the plants voice, and even the stones voice. I recall writing that we have to speak up for those that have no voice and in one way this is wrong—there is voice but it is us who have to listen. We can speak up but we must also listen. We listen with great attention to pings of our phones and act immediately on signals from our devices, so why is it strange that the world also has a kind of voice? Wild pedagogy seems to open up that door in its premise that nature might act as co-teacher. The wild pedagogy course and the floating colloquium on Wild Pedagogies helped me see the world as more alive.

These gatherings gave me confidence to keep telling my Christi Belcourt story. She is a Metis artist that had an exhibit at the Gallery. One of my favourite parts of working there is speaking with the exhibiting artists and I usually ask about what they would have me tell viewers as a message from them. One very large painting by Belcourt had many plants in it and I told Christi that children didn't seem to know the names of plants and showed little interest in knowing. I asked what I might say to them after they had taken time to look at the painting. She paused and then said, “Tell them... to introduce themselves to a plant.” Wild pedagogy would align quite nicely with this idea since it immediately addresses our relationship with nature. Art educators may be assured that many artists are potential strong allies in following a “wild pedagogy.”

## And Again

It happened again today—I chose to step outside to greet the high school group and mention that many artists are inspired by what they encounter in the outdoors and I guide them back down the sidewalk to look at the face on the tree. It feels natural and I feel more confident about doing these things because of wild pedagogy. I do the gallery tour and later I notice an artist has come to work on a piece that is already on the wall. It surprises me to see him working on the painting, although artists do last minute edits, even after their work has been installed in the Gallery. I mention this because when I asked the artist what his work was about he said tree spirits. I like this. Today two 19 year-old youth say these paintings are their favourite work. When I ask one why, he is silent then replies, “Because when I look at this work, I feel something is about to happen.”

I love the fresh response of young viewers, and I am suddenly aware that, yes, the work does have an aliveness and now that he has said this ... “something is about to happen!” Wild pedagogy insists on allowing the spontaneity of such a response and the spontaneity of my own reaction to a student’s words. Who is the teacher? How fun it is that I am nudged awake again. Nature as co-teacher, student as co-teacher, teacher as co-learner.

## Reflecting on Wild Pedagogies: The Yukon River, an Inspiration for Practice

*Victor Elderton* is a career educator who has served as a teacher, and as a School Principal at North Vancouver School District’s Outdoor School (re-branded as the Cheakamus Centre in 2013). He is currently a PhD student at Simon Fraser University. Victor participated in the 2014 *Wild Pedagogies: A Floating Colloquium* that took place on the Yukon River.

As a career educator, it is the Wild Pedagogies colloquium on the Yukon River I am drawn back to. I'm quick to discuss it with friends and colleagues. On my experiential learning playlist, it's in the top five. To-date the experience informs and inspires me, personally and professionally. My thoughts about it swirl like eddies. But, what is it about the experience that continues to wash over me? What is it that continues to create meaning and purpose in my learning?

No doubt it is the wildness—and the unpredictability of it—that makes wild pedagogies engaging, accessible, and meaningful for me. However, such meaning is not possible without intentionally setting the stage. As an educator and administrator I seek to incorporate ideas from exceptional instruction and experiences into my practice and theory. I argue that incorporating what has been experienced in one context and then making it useful in my own context is an effective way to improve practice. I admire instruction that is intentional and effective—there is an art to it, and a potential mastery. I strive for these artful goals, and wild pedagogies, as ideas and practices, helps me by exhibiting strong characteristics of intentional design. Attributes of wild pedagogies colloquia that stand out for me are their capacity for:

- Convening gatherings of like-minded, self-selected learners. By accomplishing this, the enthusiastic opportunity for shared learning is possible.
- Providing these groups with a topic to collaboratively investigate. With this, integration of multiple perspectives and appreciation is likely.
- Co-creating an itinerary with specific, and emergent, opportunities to discuss, collaborate, and exchange impressions and ideas. In this way intrinsic motivation is owned by the learner, what is being learned becomes more relevant.
- Setting the group on a physical journey through an inspiring place. Here, the wildness of the place becomes a co-teacher and the experiences give it a voice—makes it tangible.
- Utilizing immersive experiences, and human and other-than-human perceptions, to open opportunities for wider and deep understanding.

There is a high level of integrity in this approach to learning and intrinsic motivation.<sup>1</sup> Wild pedagogies can reinforce this instructional design in daily practice.

On a typical day, my classroom starts in a circle discussing how students are motivated. Each student has an opportunity to talk about what inspires them and what questions they want to ask. We also discuss how the day will unfold and develop a rationale for the order. From that starting point, both inside and outside locations become our classroom. We discuss what each of us will need to bring to our learning to make it meaningful and intentional. My skill as the maestro on this daily journey is to bring out the flavour of emergent opportunities, enabling them to flourish in daily learning. At the end of the day, we gather again in a circle that allows each student, me, and other staff members to wrap up our learning for the day. This is how wild pedagogy and my practice are linked. It's when I incorporate newly arising ideas into my teaching and struggle with them in application that truer instruction becomes apparent and useful.

Another key learning from Wild Pedagogies is its emphasis on being a hands-on endeavour—improving by doing. I don't think that this is just a function of Gladwell's ten thousand hour rule.<sup>2</sup> There is something deep and transformative in physical learning. For centuries philosophers and educators have identified unique learning and understanding that is intrinsic in doing. Confucius identifies charioteering and archery as two of the six disciplines essential to all-around development, Plato highlights gymnastics. Saint Francis believed that starting with the necessary makes the impossible—possible, Booker T. Washington developed his Tuskegee institute based on deeply learning a skill, Dewey and Montessori use direct experience as cornerstones of their educational practice and theory.

Wild Pedagogies on the Yukon River was instrumental in the continued development of my sense of education. It helped to illuminate essential ingredients to learning and teaching: motivation, inspiration, context, and dialogue. Wild Pedagogies exceeds the structures we have traditionally built for education, and that Montaigne argues against when he reflects on an education that: “cudgelled my brains in the study of Aristotle.”<sup>3</sup>



Wild Pedagogies on the Yukon River provided me with an opportunity to investigate my learning and understanding while physically immersing myself in a place-based context. This context demanded I be consciously and contemplatively present, simultaneously. While paddling, or in the midst of teaching, there are requirements to watch the currents and navigate a course. In a teaching setting the individual needs of each student demand attention, as does the weaving together of these needs to become the course. The Yukon experience occurred while passing through, and being in, a majestic landscape, with glimpses of other presences such as mother moose ferrying her new calf across the river, or sheep traversing a precipitous trail high above our river course. Similarly, in school a child may notice a bird building a nest in the tree outside class, and then talk about how hard it must be to build a house and create a home. It's in these teaching situations where motivation, inspiration, context and dialogue are holistic. It is in these structures for learning that I find the most meaning.

I sought active learning within intentional instruction. I wanted to explore learning with rich opportunities for self-motivation, inspiration, context, and dialogue. I received all this from *Wild Pedagogies: A Floating Colloquium* and it's why I continually draw from its deep currents to inform my practice.

## **Project Wolf: Re-wilding Head, Heart, and Hands**

*Joyce Gilbert* works for the Scottish Non-Governmental organization *Trees for Life*. It is a small conservation charity that seeks to restore the ancient Caledonian forest in the Highlands of Scotland. She has enormous experience across a broad range of educational settings, including formal schooling and with Non-Governmental Organisations. With her knowledge of local cultural history and her studies in the Gaelic language, she was a key resource person during the *Wild Pedagogies: A Sailing Colloquium* in May 2017. She begins her story by making connections between her present work with *Project Wolf* and wild pedagogies. She

then draws on the touchstones put forward to identify possible future directions for continued development of this project.

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In 2016 and 2017 *Trees for Life* embarked on an unusual initiative to aid the natural regeneration of wild forest in unfenced areas of their Dundreggan Conservation Estate. Called *Project Wolf*, dedicated groups of 3 volunteers came together for a month at a time in early spring when young trees are most vulnerable to deer damage. Sleeping during the day and emerging at dusk, the volunteers spent the night mimicking aspects of wolf behaviour to keep deer on the move and prevent grazing of the seedlings. Scientific methods were used to determine the impact of the “wolf interruption” and after two seasons, this innovative approach to natural regeneration appeared to be making a significant difference.

However, what hadn't been anticipated was the profound effect the experience would have on the volunteers. Within a few days, the first “Pack of Humandwolves” (as they came to be known), had chosen and named campsites, resting spots and significant landmarks and started to experience nature in a new way. Time was suspended in this strange night world and senses were heightened. One of the early *Project Wolf* volunteers described her experiences in a way that resonates with the wild pedagogies idea:

As a wolf, you must do more than rise to the challenge you have been set. You must look at the land and imagine what it would have been like. Re-wilding happens in heart and the mind as well as on the ground. Sitting at the top of *Binnilidh Mhor*, I see a land cut into fragments. But I also see the woodland, the wolf pack's territory, clinging to the hills below us, and think how wonderful it will be in 30 years' time. And words cannot do justice to how it feels to think I had a hand in that.<sup>4</sup>

With the experiences in the landscape came a deepening awareness of what it is to dwell in a place and the ability to recognise the complex relationships between trees, deer, predators, prey, but from the perspective of humans that are not merely observers of nature but playing an

active part in it. Another volunteer described her emerging awareness as follows:

On my nights spent as a wolf I really felt like I'd become part of the woodland. I was just another creature roaming around becoming familiar with its nooks and crannies. I had my favourite spots to sit and watch from as well as my favourite trees and sleeping places. I already knew I enjoyed spending time in wild places.... Being a wolf showed me that what's important is the feeling of connectedness that comes with living closely to the land. It also made me realise that this feeling of connection has been missing from my city life in recent years.<sup>5</sup>

As a development of the project, *Trees for Life* commissioned the design and creation of a “wolf den” by a young artist called Richard Bracken who worked in collaboration with the poet and artist Alec Finlay. Natural materials for constructing the den were sourced from the immediate environment. The idea was that this structure could be used by Humandwolves for shelter, but it would also invite people to view nature, wildness, and wolves from different perspectives. Richard and Alec developed a number of concepts, ranging from very light shelters to more substantial dens. They researched traditional shelters in Gaelic culture, such as shieling huts and *phouple* (tents used in hunting). In addition, they surveyed Gaelic place-names and garnered information on species, to create an “ecopoetic” mapping of the region. The site chosen was an elevated flat “table” covered with heather, and with juniper and birch around its sides. This provided a well-drained platform for a structure on a fairly prominent landscape feature that looked directly across the glen to *Creag a' Mhadaidh*—meaning the crag of the wolf, in Gaelic.

Alec Findlay described in more detail how paying careful attention to Gaelic place names could, in fact, give voice to the eco-social history of the place:

During the research phase, Richard and I considered working from existing natural forms, such as hill-shaped walls that remain permanently in place, which a tent-like covering can be attached to when needed—a memory of when folk would carry sails uphill to shielings, where they became a roof for the walls of a hut. We also developed the concept of tent-shaped hills—

these could be based on local names such as *Creag a' Mhadaidh*, wolf crag. The place-name research included a survey of wolf-related names such as *Ceap Mad*, root-bog of the wolf. We defined this approach as “eco-poetic” mapping.<sup>6</sup>

The final design was informed by talking to individuals who had undertaken the role of the Humandwolf, asking what they would want for shelter, how they had bonded, and how their experiences had altered perceptions. The unusual nature of the questionnaire devised by Alec provided some fascinating insights with respect to “wolfing:”

It became clear that the performative and imaginative aspect of the Humandwolves was highly relevant to concepts of re-wilding and human relationships to nature, indeed, we consider it to be some of the most important field research being undertaken in the Highlands.<sup>7</sup>

In retrospect, the similarities between the 1500 year old “beehive cells” (described by James Hunter in his book *On the Other Side of Sorrow*, and visited by the *Wild Pedagogies* group in May 2017) and the Wolf Den at Dundreggan are striking—in terms of form, function, and setting. However, the den is only one part of *Project Wolf*. Alec Finlay has noted that something deeper was revealed by the Humandwolves in their need “to dwell” and furthermore, this has the power to change how people respond to place—in Scotland at least:

Place-names insist on people’s right to have access and, if we accept that for now that battle has been won, the issue that must follow is dwelling. When the meanings of names are translated it can encourage communities to go beyond the pleasures of walking and shooting, and take on the responsibilities of stewardship. Summer-towns cared for many remote places—whether as tenants or squatters—and recovering their names is one way to suggest this could happen again—that you too could regenerate a patch of Glenmoriston, Glen Feardar, or Glen Affric. Scotland’s become stuck in an argument about land ownership when what’s really needed is for the right to care for a place to be added to the right to roam over a place.<sup>8</sup>

As a teacher who was part of the *Wild Pedagogies Sailing Colloquium*, I was curious to revisit the questions we had been asked at the beginning of our journey—what else, for example, might *Project Wolf* offer to educators who are interested in re-wilding the curriculum with nature as co-teacher? Based at Dundreggan, I had already started to work with local primary and secondary schools and community groups. At the most practical level, could I use the questions and wild pedagogies touchstones to help with curriculum design? Working with Alec and Richard for a relatively short time, the following preliminary ideas emerged. Based from *Trees for Life* we could:

- Produce a “wolf map” detailing natural howffs (rendezvous locations), good juniper bushes to shelter in, path networks, and other landmark features;
- Rethink a *Tainchell* (Gaelic for a traditional deer drive). This could entail a collective “drive” survey and communal walk to a single point on the hill. As an ecologically-minded activity, it could focus on progress in growth and regeneration;
- Organize special “Wolf Walks” which follow some of the tracks used by deer at Dundreggan and involve discovering nocturnal animals, insects, and birds; viewing the night sky; and visiting the Wolf Den story telling;
- Work with locals and visitors to create a sound installation that will capture elements of Project Wolf (e.g. woodland soundscapes at night, conversations about wolves and other ‘lost’ wildlife stories);
- Work with schools and communities to create poetic and story pieces (including traditional Gaelic nature-praise poems) that will link with the “ecological memory” mapping, wolves, and deer. In the process, new place-names and new stories will be created; and,
- Introduce “wolfing” as a new activity at Outward Bound Schools and Outdoor Education Centres.

*Project Wolf* started with the simple aim to reduce deer browsing young trees at a critical time. However, it was given the freedom to respond to the collective imagination of ecologists, educators, cultural historians,

native Gaelic speakers, and place-aware artists, and poets—it “wiggled in its own wildness” and in the process it was transformed.

## Modern Education in Japan

*Yuko Oguri* works in Higher Education at Kagoshima University in Japan. She specializes in community-based education and traditional knowledge. Her concern is the extent to which modern education in Japan is controlled in ways that support a nationalised agenda and, at the same time, alienate people from their lands and traditions. Yuko participated in Yukon’s *Wild Pedagogies: A Floating Colloquium* in 2014. For her, wild pedagogies is a term that helps to reframe a vision for education that reconciles “pre-modern education” and “modern education.”

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In Japan the concept of modern education was introduced after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. This was a time of social and political change and the beginning of the collapse of shogunate government. It was replaced by an Emperor system and Japanese unification. It also marked a shift from a feudal to a capitalist society. As part of this change, a new national schooling system was initiated in 1872. The purpose of this new educational system was to “control” people such that they would become members of a single nation. This was by design meant to deny, in the raising of children, the diversity of culture that belonged within each community and the unique natural environment in which each community was embedded. The outcome of such a well-controlled educational system was an “equally” developed nation with a “hundred million middle-class” citizens. There remained, however, many contradictions between old and new systems, including in peoples minds and values.

The book, *Chiho Shoumetu*, roughly translated as *Cities at Risk of Disappearing*, by the former Minister for Public Management,<sup>9</sup> created quite a sensation when it warned that 896 Japanese municipalities, mostly in rural areas, out of a total of 1718, will disappear due to decreasing populations. This “official opinion” stirred up a sense of crisis among

communities. However, the government's failures in national land use planning, and their development policies that accelerated the population decline, are seldom mentioned. Furthermore, there is no reflection on the merits and faults of the schooling system, and the role that it plays in enabling these trends.

As a Japanese educator living close to cities at risk of disappearing, I see a somewhat different trend and possibility within my community. I work with local leaders and officials to help foster a learning environment that encourages community members to share their worries and desires, and to support their collaborations aimed at developing livelihoods. I am always astonished by the strong ties that exist among these people, and with their land. In spite of the widespread loss of "places for self-formation,"<sup>10</sup> meaningful educational spaces do still exist in most cities. In the communities where I work, there still are places where experiential learning can take place, and there are places for activities that can encourage positive relationships between children and nature—and between other beings and things.

For example, in rural areas of Japan there is a strong will, and much effort given, to pass along traditional cultural activities and events that are Indigenous to specific places. The desire to pass along these year-round activities is especially strong in more remote islands like Amami. This cultural learning is a remnant of Indigenous living that once existed before Japan became modernized. Sometimes it is characterized by religious animism and the blessing of and caring for nature throughout the year. Both informal and non-formal education is engaged. Village Elders pass down their knowledge to younger generations. They share collective stories and demonstrate how seasonal events are prepared, performed, and tidied up, thus restoring the village's relations with its nature and people. These processes are usually overlooked as being "educational" in a schooling system that has disconnected people from the land for over 150 years.

The movement I am describing is not just going back into the past. Rather, it is a process of forming a new future vision of "education" that seeks to reconcile aspects of "pre-modern education" with modern education. In Japan, we don't have a correct word to express this new vision of "education," but I think the idea of wild pedagogy perfectly names it.

What is appealing about wild pedagogy is that it allows us to more deeply seek that alternative education which still exists. And wild pedagogies can help to describe the educational value and meaning embedded in the activities that are actively sustaining Indigenous culture. Using this term will help us to share and appreciate a search for a new vision of education within Japan, and perhaps beyond.

## Early Childhood Education

*Andrea Welz* describes herself first as an educator and parent. She is also a faculty member in the Early Childhood Educator Program at Sault College in Canada. Andrea has brought her experiences with wild pedagogies to bear in her teaching, in policy development, and in establishing a preschool programme offered in a natural setting. She first learned about wild pedagogies during a graduate course at Lakehead University in 2012. She also participated in 2014 *Wild Pedagogies: A Floating Colloquium*, in the Yukon, and the 2017 *Wild Pedagogies: Sailing Colloquium*, in Scotland.

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I love the intense conversations that arise whenever wild pedagogues get together. The concepts discussed stretch my perspectives such that new ideas and ways of thinking emerge. But I must admit, throughout this process I wonder what these concepts would look like in the world of early childhood education. Putting these insights into practice is exciting, both in my role as an educator working with children and as a college faculty member.

I think the recent pedagogical shift in early childhood education makes it receptive to wild pedagogy. It asks educators to become more reflective in their daily practice, specifically about their image of the child and the environment as teacher. And the call for building equitable relationships, where children are co-constructors of their learning, parallels some of the wild pedagogy offerings. With this in mind, I am working with a licensed childcare centre to develop a nature-based early childhood program in our community that encompasses wild pedagogy.



The plan is to offer a half-day preschool program in a natural setting. It will be play-based with lots of time for children and adults to fully engage in this natural environment. Along with this focus, the program will function as a parent cooperative; this means that two to three parents will be scheduled to work with the early childhood educator each day. Families will be involved in the evolution of the programming that will include using the wild pedagogies touchstones to guide our practice.

Elders have also been invited to participate and their involvement will be an integral piece of this project. I envision a program where children and adults might be found, either on their own or with groups, playing in puddles, gently touching moss, watching ants as they carry material back to their colony, building little shelters, working on projects like basket-making, listening to stories, or tending a fire. Adults, with the children, will narrate the stories about the learning that is taking place. Adults will share their reflections about how the touchstone questions shaped the way they engaged with the children and the more-than-human world, including the challenges and queries that arose. I think that these questions can also guide routine activities such as the selection of the stories and books that will be shared with children. It will be a process that will take time.

I found that wild pedagogies also helped me to shape the programme's policies and procedures. In Ontario (and many other provinces in Canada) an adherence to legislative requirements, and the policies and procedures that arise from them, is a critical piece of a programme. As dry as this topic may seem, these policies and procedures do frame the programming offered. One key policy arose in our planning because of concerns about black bears. This is a fear that often dominates discussions about, and at times deters, nature-based programming. The policy could have been very human-centric with a tone that sees the rest of the natural world as lesser-than-humans. However, using the wild pedagogies touchstones as a guide, a policy was created called "Sharing Spaces." It acknowledges that natural settings are spaces that are shared by many. Carefully selected wording emphasizes that all-of-the-natural world is valued. It is important to note that the policy does not negate the safety concerns regarding children; several strategies have been developed to manage risks. But it doesn't stop there; the policy also includes strategies to minimize impacts on the rest of nature (e.g. frequently changing locations to

avoid compaction of the soil). It is one tiny step forward in shaping a perspective that builds equitable relationships with all entities on this planet.

Integrating wild pedagogies into the college early childhood education program has been a bit more challenging. At first I wondered how teacher-directed experiences, designed to meet course-learning outcomes, might include wild pedagogies. I scheduled some classes in a forest area close to the college and, although planned experiences were still tied to learning outcomes, I observed, or students told me, how these experiences affected them in unexpected ways. For them, nature did, indeed, become a co-teacher. Inviting the Elders-in-residence to share Indigenous perspectives about nature and child development has also been more meaningful when we have met in the forest. They offer students an opportunity to learn about other ways of knowing and understanding the world around them. Doing this with a direct connection to the land added another dimension.

Another activity involved inviting college students to select a space they were drawn to so they could sit quietly on their own for thirty minutes: this was an experience that was initially disconcerting for some. A more task-oriented experience required students to look for ways that math and science concepts could be fostered in indoor, playground, and natural settings. Over the past few years students have overwhelmingly described these tasks as being more enjoyable in the forest where uncovering math and science concepts became intriguing and engaging. This is illustrated by a group who found little bead-like nodules in a bank along a stream. Time seemed to slow down as the students touched the nodules and discovered that they were connected to a root system. They marvelled at this intricate system and then began to question and hypothesize. Watching them in that setting, enveloped by the rustling of the leaves and the gentle murmur of the stream, I had a sense that there was more happening than just the meeting of a science-focussed learning outcome. In some cases this learning was something the students themselves might not be able to explain.

Sharing these ideas and subsequently dialoguing about them with different groups of educators and parents has been beneficial. It has led to both expanding my understanding of wild pedagogy and building a supportive community as we shift our ways of being in the world.

## On Nature as Co-Researcher

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If we take the touchstones for wild pedagogies seriously, then what implications might they have not only for educators but also for researchers? It is a question that has been bubbling for a while and in some ways wild pedagogies in Scotland was a tentative response. I say tentative because it is clear to me that I still have a long way to go in terms of listening to and understanding the voices and research agendas of more-than-human others, and in representing the results in genuine, just, and nuanced ways. For wild pedagogies, getting outside the cultural norms of public education is important. But research has norms too. In fact much of what is considered research in universities appears grounded in the same norms that created public education and pushed us into the Anthropocene. So, it follows that there might be something called “wild researches” and wild researchers. They, too, should be asked to push against troublesome cultural norms, become activists, build rich communities, and engage with the natural world in different ways. But we might also be asked to shift ourselves, our questions, and our methods away from the centre of contemporary research. In keeping with wild pedagogies, wild researches could consider research subjects more as partners not objects and hence, come to practice, present, and understand research differently.

My sense is that this book is a tiny step in that direction. There is an implicit comment on the mainstream concept of knowledge and the ownership of ideas. There is also an attempt to represent and recognize more voices than just those of the humans. There is a critique of conferences, particularly environmental ones, held in hermetically sealed hotels where the wild has little to no access. There is also a desire to move to a more dialogical form of sharing and away from the 15-minute presentation, with five minutes for questions, format. And finally, there is recognition that places afford differing possibilities to human

theorizing (e.g. we chose Scotland carefully or note the on-going metaphoric presence of the sea) and we have taken a crack at speaking in a multi-vocality that reaches and represents a wider constituency. Have we gotten it right, nope ... are we on the right track ... well ... we hope this contributes to growing challenges to research norms.

Questions I am beginning to ask myself as a wild researcher:

- How does the natural world ask and answer its own questions? What are its accepted methodologies?
- How do/did/might I engage with other-than-humans and represent them in my/our work?
- Where is the natural world positioned in my research? To what and whose end?
- Have I tried to represent my findings in a way that does justice to the contributions of others?
- In what ways did I enter and engage with research locations? Might there be room in community-based research methods to include more-than-human communities as full members?
- Where is my research maintaining anthropocentric forms?
- What are the implications of this research for the natural world?
- How do I deal with what seems to be the researcher's paradox—balancing being present and listening to the other-than-human against disappearing into my own thinking?

But, really I am just a beginner here ... what do you think?

## Going Forward

In closing this book, we want to stress that the work begun here is not complete. Indeed, we now wonder about a corollary to wild pedagogies, that is “wild learnings.” Throughout we have argued that wild pedagogues must be co-learners and the examples in this chapter illustrate the point. But what could this mean if we thought more broadly about learners through the lens of wildness proposed in this book? Ultimately this is a question to take forward. However, while writing these final pages a new

book presented itself, quite serendipitously, that might point us in a possible direction. In it, Kate Harris has openly told a story about re-negotiating her owning learning practice:

I was too good at school, in every doomed sense. After being on an achievement bender most of my life, the prospect of withdrawal, of doing anything without approval, or even better yet acclamation, kept me obediently between the lines I couldn't even recognize as lines. Isn't that the final, most forceful triumph of borders? The way they make us accept as real and substantial what we can't actually see?<sup>11</sup>

She speaks about how being good at school earned her a scholarship to Oxford. However, the learning environment she found on arrival was liberating: "once I got there I almost learned not to care about [school], or rather to care for the right reasons: not as a means to [an] end, or success sanctioned by others, but as an opportunity to think, dream, stray out of bounds."<sup>12</sup>

Harris also found professors who "encouraged digression, which is, after all, just a sideways method for stumbling on connection. Such as the connection between the philosophy of science and poetry."<sup>13</sup> And for her, the best part about studying the history of science was that suddenly she had, "to do for homework what I normally did for fun: read expedition journals, such as Charles Darwin's from his voyage on the *Beagle*."<sup>14</sup>

In reflecting upon her experiences with traditional education Harris asks, "What does it mean when you build your own walls? You have no one to blame but yourself for inhabiting them."<sup>15</sup> While Oxford is a renowned university, the question is not exclusive. In it, we have beginnings of a nascent touchstone that asks wild learners:

- What opportunities have I taken to think, dream, stray out of traditional educational boundaries?
- Have I crossed any borders that have re-excited my learning, and even made education fun again?

Our immediate reaction to this last story is that it encourages us, and readers to consider all of the touchstone questions as if being posited not

just for teachers but for learners as well. It invites us to revisit the touchstones anew. This story can also be seen as another invitation to take this book as an opportunity to think, dream, stray outside of traditional educational boundaries. That would be a splendid expressive outcome.

In many ways writing this book has been an experiment—in ideas, in practices, and in collaborative scholarship. We have gathered together, in these pages, the scent of potential change. We hope, though, that there is enough here for readers to get started—or to keep going if they are already on their own journey of transformation. And, as David Orr often says, “hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up.”<sup>16</sup> Our journey isn’t a passive one.

One thing that we are fairly sure about is that we will not figure out what is to be done, or how to do it, in advance. This, ultimately, isn’t an abstract project; it is real, and with real implications. And, we will learn most from doing—experimenting, trying things out, and making new colleagues, human and more-than-human. Again we hope that *Wild Pedagogies* will give readers permission to think anew, to try new practices, to get outside, to question deeply held beliefs, and to disrupt long-held traditions. So, wild pedagogies do not represent concrete frameworks or destinations; rather, they are agents of discovery. Good luck in your explorations. And thank you.

**Acknowledgements** *Crex crex* is the taxonomical name given to the Corncrake. We have chosen this bird to represent our collective because it was an important collaborator in this project and because its onomatopoeic name beautifully mirrors its call—a rasy crex crex. For some reason, it chooses to fly over England and breeds in Scotland and Ireland. Presumably this is due to loss of habitat in modern England, but perhaps these birds sense some epicenter of empire there? Who is to know?

## Notes

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3. William C. Hazlitt, ed., *Essays of Michel de Montaigne*. Translated by Charles Cotton (London: London Reeves and Turner, 1877).
4. Millie Barratt, Personal communication, 2016.
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10. Takahashi Masaru, *Self-Formation Space of Children* (Tokyo: Kawashima Shoten, 1992).
11. Kate Harris, *Lands of Lost Borders: Out of Bounds on the Silk Road* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2018): 63.
12. *Ibid.*, 52.
13. *Ibid.*, 47.
14. *Ibid.*, 48.
15. *Ibid.*, 65.
16. See for example: David Orr, *Hope is an Imperative* (Washington: Island Press, 2011).

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