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Wild Pedagogies: Six Initial Touchstones for Early Childhood Environmental Educators

Bob Jickling[1], Sean Blenkinsop[2], Marcus Morse[3] & Aage Jensen[4]
[1]*Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada*
[2]*Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada*
[3]*Latrobe University in Bendigo, Victoria, Australia*
[4]*Nord-Trøndelag University, Bodø, Norway*

Abstract This article is a small piece of a much larger and still evolving project. Herein we focus on six touchstones for wild pedagogies. The article begins with a short orientation to the larger ideas behind the project and then focuses on exploring six current touchstones with a view towards early childhood environmental educators. The six explored here are: (1) agency and the role of nature as co-teacher; (2) wildness and challenging ideas of control; (3) complexity, the unknown, and spontaneity; (4) locating the wild; (5) time and practice; and (6) cultural change.

It is a classic 'possibility of showers' day here on the west coast of Canada. The ground is damp from an early morning rain, but the cloud base is defined and broken intermittently by patches of blue. Known as 'sucker holes' by the locals for their tendency to disappoint, anxious teachers are noting these blue patches more hopefully today than they usually do. Their school, and its K–3 (ages 5–8) elementary program, is having an auspicious visitor. In spite of the fact that they and their students are out rain or shine for several hours most days of the week, they know that most Canadians still think of weather in terms of good and bad, and that the latter tends to dampen enthusiasm; an ardor that the teachers would rather not dampen. The Lieutenant Governor of the province has specifically asked to visit their school today, to see their students in action and to witness the pedagogies they have been developing in consort with this rich natural environment on the edge of an urban metropolis.

Wild Pedagogies, as conceived here, is a relatively new idea. We began discussing it together in 2014 and have since agreed to explore and expand this idea as an agent for educational change, especially in a time of heightened ecological awareness. As such, this article is a small piece of a much larger and still evolving Wild Pedagogies project[1]. It is a first walk through a gathering of ideas that is being expanded, changed, and

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Address for correspondence: Bob Jickling, Faculty of Education, Lakehead University, 955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada P7B 5E1. Email: bob.jickling@lakeheadu.ca

nuanced as you read. Yet, our sense is that it is a project that needs visibility so that interested early childhood educators, educators in general, parents and policy-makers can begin to recognise themselves therein. And it needs visibility to add diversity to a larger conversation, and to shape ideas for individual locations, contexts, and realities. To that end we offer here a short description of the project and set of initial guiding principles, or 'touchstones', for practice that has emerged thus far.

It is clear to us that there is a growing recognition that life on this planet is in trouble (Barnosky et al., 2011; Pimm et al., 2014) and that if change is going to happen then education needs be at the heart of that work (Sterling, 2017). And yet education, as it is often currently enacted, is unable to shoulder the challenge of this work. Often, either explicitly or implicitly, it aids and abets the problem. It bends toward the status quo. This description of the challenges we face is not new, nor is the school mentioned in the anecdote above an especially radical departure. Still, it points to possibilities, to a questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions, to work already underway, and to an interest in alternative educational approaches.

It is likely that readers of this work are already aware of, involved in, teaching at, or creating programs, pedagogies, curricula and stories that respond to the concerns and intuitions that we have begun to identify. And our hope is that the touchstones offered below both resonate with, and constructively challenge, the work and thinking we are all doing. In this article we have chosen the term *wild pedagogies* as the clearing in the forest in which to gather these converging stories and as a guide to enable our experiments in practice.

As with any projects that are much larger than a single journal article, we have to cut some corners in the range of discussions possible. For example, we acknowledge that people are situated differently, we come at wild pedagogies with our own stories, and we have different staring points. Those who have been privileged within industrialised capitalist societies will need to approach the task differently from those who have been disenfranchised, marginalised and/or colonised. Our choice with this particular article is to focus on how the four of us — all privileged, male, outdoor and environmental educators — have gathered ideas to this point. Readers will notice gaps regarding the concept of the wild, limited reference to educational diversity across cultures, and insufficient discussion about urban contexts. Our hope is that over time these expanded conversations about wild pedagogies will appear. Indeed, some accounts of wild pedagogies have already surfaced and more are on their way.

We frame the ideas in this article with the metaphor of 'touchstones'. In using the term *touchstone* we are suggesting that they might be read both as points of departure and places to return. The goal is threefold. First, we aim to bring discussions into focus in a manageable way. Second, we wish to create a solid grouping of interested educators and grounded ideas that can be revisited. The touchstones we identify, then, can act as reminders of the educational project of our times, and of the commitments wild pedagogues are making. Third, we want to name and bear witness to the project and its challenges. The earth, its myriad denizens, and many human ways of life as well, are in trouble. If education is going to play the important role that we think it must, in the change that needs to occur, then it might need to be re-wilded.

Why *Wild Pedagogies*?

We use the word 'pedagogy' because we understand that education must, and will, play a crucial transformative role in responding to the challenges of our time. A critical part of that process likely involves the actual praxis, the ways enacted by teachers to support learning and change. This is expected to include both the didactics, the nuts and bolts

of educational practice, but also the larger umbrella term of *pedagogy*, which draws in theories of knowing, valuing, developing, and being in the world. We pluralise 'pedagogies' to acknowledge that there are multiple ways of putting our general ideas, indeed the touchstones, into practice. Elements such as context, individual learners, particular natural beings present, and voices of the teachers will influence pedagogies used. This is not to suggest an unlimited set of responses. Rather, as the touchstones described below attest, we are suggesting that there are key elements of the proposed pedagogies that we have chosen to gather around the descriptor 'wild'.

The term *wild* itself is not without cultural baggage (Cronon, 1996), as notions of savagery, danger, primitiveness, and emptiness all spring to mind and have deep colonial implications. However, a hope in using the idea is that the word, and its relatives 'wildness' and 'wilderness', might be reconsidered in light of the project. Thus, the first reason for using the word 'wild' is one of reclamation, reimagination, and reintroduction. Historically, 'wild' has also been associated with the notion of the *will*, so to be wild is to be self-willed (Nash, 1967). And this idea appeals to us, both within the auspices of an educational practice that requires learners to change and adapt but also, and more importantly, to make themselves and their own re-creation part of the process. As such, in a wild pedagogy the subject matter includes the subjects themselves.

Wild pedagogies also appeal to us because it is a challenge to dominant cultural ideas about control — of each other, of nature, of education, and of learning. Wild pedagogies also rest on the premise that an important part of education can include intentional activities that provide a fertile field for personal and purposeful experience without controlling the environment and its actors, the learners, or the outcomes (Jickling, 2015).

While wilderness areas — and also what some would call hybrid spaces — can often be the crucible for reflection on these issues, this idea of wildness itself guides deeper reflections. This wild entrée riffs off of the Old English meaning of wilderness, of self-willed land. This is not about empty, unpeopled, or utopian lands afar but about places where people and more-than-humans are able to interact in equitable ways, where all have the opportunity to flourish and express themselves as they best might. The wild is about places where each is honoured for its uniquenesses and contributions, where restrictions of possibility are responded to, and where things happen on the terms of, and at the determinations of, all of those who live there. The opposite, then, is colonisation. That is, being forcibly controlled by others — or, as Livingston (1994) called it, domesticated. Of course these are not absolute terms, but ones that need to be contextualised, with much nuance between these broad distinctions.

In this sense, wildness invites considerations about control. What, then, is there about wild experiences that people value? Are there core elements that can disrupt ideas about control? And, are there core elements that can provide basic framing of wild pedagogies while being further developed in, and fed by, specific contexts? Can core elements be welcoming and relevant for people across disciplines and for more-than-humans across ecosystems? What could self-willed pedagogy or self-willed education look like? The six touchstones shared below are our start towards finding adequate answers to the above questions.

Six Touchstones for Early Childhood Educators

1. *Agency and Role of Nature as Co-Teacher*

   Raven: 'Well, see, you speak your way, they [different members of the natural world] speak different ways, like thousands of different ways. Billions. It's like the birds with those signals, like when you see a bird flapping up in the sky and

> *a flock of birds how they all move at the same time, it's because they tell each other like through mental speaking.' (Blenkinsop & Piersol, 2013, p. 54)*

For Raven, a Grade 4 student at the Maple Ridge Environmental School, the idea that the natural world 'speaks' to her and that it has agency and the capacity to teach her things is literally true. It is also a possible starting point for the renegotiation of the relationship between humans and more-than-humans called for by political scientist Bruno Latour (see, e.g., 2014). With the potential emergence of an Anthropocene, this era of negotiation, a time when humans must engage in a different kind of relationship with the rest of the planet is upon us (Serres, 2014). And, it is likely children, young ones like Raven who have been immersed in the natural world for much of their lives, who will play key roles as interpreters for this process. If this is correct, then early childhood educators will also play an important role in allowing children to encounter the natural world, and its denizens, on an ongoing basis. These educators will, at the same time, be challenged to recognise their own limitations in hearing and interpreting the encounters their students are having. Given this assertion, what might the educational implications be?

We suggest that any educational plan that aims to move toward a radically revised relationship within the world will, at its core, seek to recognise nature's agency. Education can work to encounter this agency in non-hierarchical, equitable, and indeed different ways. One way in which we might do this is to begin to consider more-than-humans encountered on a daily basis to be part of the pedagogical team. If we take seriously the notion that the natural world is filled with active and vibrant participants, then our relationships and attention toward possibilities for educational partnerships changes. In adopting an idea of nature as co-teacher (Blenkinsop & Beeman, 2010; Macquarrie, Nugent, & Warden, 2013), early childhood educators might become open and available not only to the joy of the wild but also to a wider range of facts, knowings and understandings that places have to offer. Such attention involves carefully listening to available voices and will at times involve actively needing to de-centre the taken-for-granted human voice and re-centring more-than-human voices. No longer is the environment an important backdrop upon which learning happens, nor is it simply something to be interpreted solely by adult humans, but it might become an active member in teaching and learning.

The ways that early childhood educators respond to this discussion of agency and pedagogical partnership will have implications. Their responses will shape the ecologies of their classrooms, expansive location of their classrooms, and the pedagogical approaches nurtured in these expanded class settings. Any co-teaching dynamic necessarily involves providing space for each to work, building strong partnerships, and finding ways to reach all learners. So, while learners might be recognising that they share space with more-than-human beings, teachers will be working to be able to engage, learn, and negotiate with these beings in an equitable and complex manner. Early childhood educators will also be challenged to hear the students in ways that might be unusual in much the same way that Raven has had to be heard by the adults in her life.

What then must the curriculum include and how can early childhood educators prepare? This process of re-wilding pedagogy involves rethinking the very concept of teacher and examining every aspect of practice with a critical lens — *nature has agency and this idea is really unusual for most educators.* Early childhood educators will likely find that they must change metaphors, traditions, and the systems that they often use. There is an ever-present danger that those historical ways of educating normalise the hierarchical separation of humans from all else, that they silence

the voices of children and others, and that they assume passivity on the part of the natural world.

With this discussion as background, early childhood educators might want to consider questions such as:

- How did my practice today involve the natural world as a co-teacher?
- How did we as a class contribute to the potential flourishing of each other and the particular beings close to us?
- Were we able to learn with, through, and from members of the natural world?
- How will I make sure that I listen to the experiences of my students and allow them to interpret things for me that I might hear myself?
- And, were we able to just be and experience the diverse qualities of the natural world without any human agenda at all? Were other voices heard and heard in their own ways?

2. *Wildness and Challenging Ideas of Control*

In this article we offer these key touchstones hoping that they might facilitate an educational pathway towards an, as yet, unknown radical ecology. In using the term *ecology* we are suggesting that what is required is nothing short of a radical reworking of the relationships that we have with/in the world; it is a revised way of being within the world. And, what is desperately needed is an educational system that can promote and support such change.

We believe any resultant ecology will, in part, emerge from the process itself. That is, by the acts of doing, making, and changing, we will come to better understand the ends we are seeking. And, by supporting young children to engage in such processes earlier in their educational life, we will assist in the building of the relationships and resiliences necessary to see a project of this kind through to fruition. The processes, then, must try and emulate the imagined possibilities and adhere to principles implied in such an ecology. And so we are not entirely in control of the outcome because it is not possible to see the outcome — and further, we recognise that any radical ecology *arrived at* will, and must, continually be in a state of flux. This implies a constant generation and regeneration that any vibrant ecosystem has. We suggest that there is integral to the processes themselves, an element of wildness, a sense of the unknown and the spontaneous, beyond our meagre control. This, too, has significant implications for educators.

In supporting the move towards any radical ecology, early childhood educators must recognise the incomplete and unpredictable nature of the overall process. No one can completely know what the final outcome will be, nor are there definitive or correct answers. Early childhood educators, in recognising the range and self-willed nature of those involved (both the children and the more-than-humans), will likely come to understand that they are partners in this radical endeavour. In other words, in recognising nature's agency and inviting negotiation on a level playing field, we must respect the legitimacy, wildness, and self-willed nature of all those involved and bear in mind our own limitations. This requires a radical rethinking of the ways in which we go about education because much of what is currently involved in the Western educational project implicitly involves elements of control.

Such control appears in many ways in education. Children are told what to do, where to go, and even what to think. Universal and measurable standards are created based on a set of concrete truths (Au, 2011; Smith, 2016). Schools function to define and legitimise the places in which learning can occur, and students are controlled via set timings, locations and modes of operating. Knowledge is understood to be definable and amenable to fragmentation into deliverable parts, independent of the context in which it is immersed.

In challenging ideas about control, we are not suggesting an unmediated free-for-all. Rather, we suggest pedagogical shifting toward emphasis on creating diverse and stimulating learning environments with generative questions. Here, learning can more freely arise from the learning contexts. There is less emphasis on controlling outcomes; the results of this learning are more expressive, more contextualised, more informed by the more-than-human 'voice'. Thus, wild pedagogies makes room for the kind of learning that is more typically 'weeded out' because it cannot be measured, easily evaluated, or reduced to abstract analysis.

For early childhood educators, then, and those interested in shifting ecologies, there must be consideration given to what modes of operation are being used for student wellbeing and which are reifying particular problematic forms of control. More deeply, epistemological and ontological conceptions — the ways of knowledge and being in the world are enacted for children — might have to change. No longer is the human teacher the sole arbiter of the truth. Meaning will become more fluid as it is seen as a shared endeavour, and time spent immersed in the natural world may become identified as an important category of learning, time well spent, and even life well lived.

In moving toward a new ecology, we are suggesting it is important to understand the world as relational, complex, spontaneous, and deeply connected. For educators involved in a continual process of questioning metaphors, practices, and understandings of what it means to learn, the relevance of learning *with* rather than *about* the natural world will gain a particular salience. It might involve overcoming our current educational system's reliance on defined outcomes, known standards, and measured results (Wals, 1990). It might be that 'the answers' must become more fluid, flexible, and diverse. This challenge of releasing control will require educators and humans to decentre themselves as experts, professionals, and lone contributors if we are to take the real risks of employing alternative conceptions of education.

Early childhood educators might consider questions such as:

- How did I take risks in my practice today to move away from the full control of assumed ends?
- Was there room for the unknown, spontaneous, and unexpected to appear and be taken seriously in our work today?
- Was I able to decentre myself in the teaching today?
- Was the natural world able to self-represent, make itself known to us, in its own ways?
- How did we learn with/in the natural world today?

3. Complexity, the Unknown, and Spontaneity

This touchstone builds on the previous two, in which the early childhood educators reconceptualise their relationship with the world, change their working metaphors, and jettison cultural norms that are anthropocentric and antirelational. In doing so we open up possibilities for complexity and spontaneity that might continue to drive the process. As Gough (2013) suggests, 'complexity invites us to understand our physical and social worlds as open, recursive, organic, nonlinear and emergent, and to be cautious of complying with models and trends in education that assume linear thinking, control and predictability' (p. 1220). This implies that educators need to, at least in part, release the controls and self-domestications that are ingrained in our pedagogical beings.

Wild pedagogies can challenge ideas of control in education by embracing complexity and allowing for emergence — for example, what might arise, unpredictably and unplanned, from the interaction and inquiry generated through the collaboration of learners with each other and with nature. This suggested touchstone involves actively embracing the unknown, learning to deal with an incomplete complexity, and allowing

space for the spontaneous. All three of these components involve a kind of stepping back from the centre, an undoing of the human as centre of the world — as arbiter of everything — in order to allow other ideas, possibilities, spaces, beings, and imaginations to emerge.

> *A short interlude on Icebergs:*
>
> *It is our last day of a long raft trip on the Tatshenshini River and two of the authors have spent the day in heavy fog rowing on a body of water so large that at times the banks were invisible and it was easy to lose track of the current while imagining oneself lost on the rolling swells of an open ocean. With landmarks obscured, it is hard to anchor movement, flow, and direction of travel, such that one's perceptions are unravelling by the time we arrive in camp. The camp itself, situated on a small island in Alsek Lake, surrounded by massive and ancient glaciers, does nothing to relieve that perceptual uneasiness as we are confronted by the beauty, complexities and cacophonies of a massive jumble of icebergs.*

As adults, discombobulations, new discoveries and experiences that challenge what we think we know, such as in the anecdote above, are surprisingly rare. Yet, for the young, who have fewer convictions and commitments, it is important to recognise how common they are. It is in the spontaneous nature of this encounter with floating blocks of ice that an educational metaphor might be drawn. At the perceptual level there is the beauty and immensity of the encounter, but with varying histories of iceberg relations it is also apparent that people's ideas, understandings, and knowings of ice are being crushed, cleaved, and flipped over in sympathy with the bergs themselves. So, too, we hope wild pedagogies might provide opportunities for the implicit to be made explicit, the taken-for-granted to be questioned, learners to acknowledge complexity, and to see the 'ice below the surface'. Just as the concept of iceberg was overturned by this encounter, wild pedagogies might allow for spontaneous encounters that are both novel for young learners, but that these encounters might also challenge implicit ways of knowing and being, disrupt cultural truths and challenge the known — even the known of the 2-year-old. Early childhood educators can then increase the recognition that there is more complexity than is visible, and that knowledge is always incomplete.

Early childhood educators might consider questions such as:

- What did I do to embrace spontaneity and complexity in my teaching today?
- Did the learners encounter the interconnected, complex, and incomplete nature of knowledge today?
- Did I provide sufficient time for students to be alone and encounter the places they were in?
- Was I able to support learners' journey into the complexity of knowledge and not reach for the easy, seemingly final, answer?
- How will I offer experiences tomorrow for my young students that help them build their understandings of the world?

4. Locating the Wild

The Norwegian eco-philosopher Arne Næss was asked about what teachers can do in urban areas and how teachers can meet some of the challenges in taking children outside. He replied:

> *Some people have hundreds of good joyful experiences that cost nothing. In the schoolyard itself, you find a corner where there is just one little flower. You bend down — you use your body language — and you say: 'Look here.' And some answer: 'There is nothing there.' And then you talk a little about what you see:*

> *'This flower here, it's not the season for it. How can it be there this late in the year? And look at it. It certainly has need of a little more water; it's bending, look at the way it bends. What do you see when it's bending like this?' I call teachers who behave like this 'nature gurus.' It is a little more like an Eastern kind of education. More in terms of personal relations. Try to make them see things they haven't seen before. Use your body language. And even inside the schoolyards you find nature's greatness. (In Næss & Jickling, 2000, p. 54)*

As Næss points out, there is the potential to encounter the wild in a range of settings. Wild pedagogies are not just about some long trip in a distant backcountry. And, given that a vast and growing majority of us live in super-urban, urban, and suburban places where the wild may not be easily and immediately apparent, this touchstone presents both fertile ground and difficult work. One difficulty in bringing the young students to a place where they can encounter the wild is the realisation that there are no educational guarantees. There is no simple solution for how to facilitate childrens' encounters with the wild, the self-willed, and self-arising others that surround us (Griffiths, 2006). There is, equally, no simple way to nourish that curling, reverberating, upending version of wildness that exists within.

The wild is everywhere and is often better recognised by the sharp eyes of those closer to the ground. And yet we also note that the encroachment of the wild into the psyches of students often appears to be more common in the wilder, more self-willed places. In spite of the incredible efforts of many urban environmental early childhood educators, the murmur of wild can be easily distanced by the noise, smell, plastic toys, demands for cleanliness, and dominion of other overbearing human constructions (Derby, Piersol, & Blenkinsop, 2015).

Encountering the wild provides educators with opportunities and difficult challenges. The anti-colonial literature of Tunisian scholar Albert Memmi, for example, offers a troubling analysis of a colonised world (Blenkinsop, Affifi, Piersol, & Derby, 2017). Such an analysis implicates all environmental educators, early childhood as well, in a complex project that is not simply about providing opportunities for students to encounter the wild. It also requires helping children to not slide into the privileged and alienated discourses in which they are often immersed. Watching small children happily creating shelters and engaging in imaginative play afforded by the natural world is important. But, it is also important to recognise and respond when the language of domination and nature as solely of utility to humans leaks into the play. Offering young children fodder for their imaginations — that allows them to create worlds that are not reliant on colonial tropes — is challenging work.

Early childhood educators interested in wild pedagogies, will likely need to challenge themselves by ongoing process of decolonisation, while at the same time allowing children the possibility of encountering an active, agential, dynamic, and wild other. This educational project becomes genuinely challenging as educators begin to recognise how so much language, ways of being, educational structures of schools, and urban settings are oriented to expressly draw students away from the wild — relentlessly reconfirming dominant human-exceptionalist narratives.

Early childhood educators might then consider questions such as:

- How well did I notice and respond to anthropocentric and colonising moves that I, or others, made today?
- What might my next steps for my own process of decolonisation be? And how am I being an ally for the children I work with and the natural world that works with me?
- How did I make it possible today for students to potentially have encounters with the wild and/or self-willed communities?

- What did I do to provide moments for the wild within and without to be encountered and acknowledged today?

5. Time and Practice

This touchstone is about process. The kind of work described in all previous touchstones requires time. It takes time for educators to incorporate new habits and overlay the sediments of old habits. For pragmatic philosophers, habit change is a process of deep self- and cultural-examination. This means that early childhood environmental educators who are coming to recognise their own habits are going to need time too. Existing habits have been developed through a lifetime of navigating existing cultural waters; they are deeply engrained and resilient. Yet, they are also problematic in light of this project of changing relationships with the natural world. Early childhood educators are going to have to find ways to set aside time to first recognise such habits exist — to make them visible for critique and revision — then to engage in a process of self-(re)creation so that they can enact new pedagogies and ways of being an educator.

Time is also required for early childhood educators and their charges to build relationships with beings, things, and places. Many adults are deeply alienated from the wilder world and many children have very little free time with which to play. Collectively, we have a limited range of experience with other-than-humans. Thus, to develop new relationships that reach to a deep cultural level, adults and children will require such experiences: time spent — and lots of it — immersed in, dialoguing with, and learning with the natural world. All of us involved in education will need the time and opportunities necessary to build and maintain real and significant relationships with the more-than-human.

Closely associated with time is practice, and we use this term in at least two ways. The first involves educators developing their own practice in a way that can deepen their own relationships with local places and beings. And this work, sometimes likened to meditative practice, even discipline, requires listening more deeply to potential co-teachers as a first step towards a radical reworking of relationships. Our second meaning involves educators developing the will and ability to rework their own practices — their own pedagogies. This will require reflexivity. It is about taking risk, implementing possibilities, examining the successes and failures thereof, and then continuing the process. Students and teachers must be given the opportunity to engage with new practices. They need time to try on their discoveries, to enact the new ways of being they are exploring. Wild pedagogues, and their students will also need time to exist in that interstitial space — between old habits of relationship and potentially radically new ones.

Early childhood educators might want to consider questions such as:

- Did I leave enough space and time in my teaching today to allow my students and myself to engage with natural places and beings nearby?
- Were we, together, able to find ways to step out of the linear time of the modern school system and encounter time working in different ways? How am I maintaining and nurturing my own practice of immersing in, and building relationship, with the places and beings I encounter?
- Was I able to notice, respond to, and support students who were trying out new habits?
- Am I noticing my practice, trying new things, reflecting on what has been attempted, and creating the kinds of support that allow me to continue to expand as a teacher?

6. Cultural Change

This touchstone may be considered the most controversial as it requires teachers to become consciously political — even to become an activist, and ally. Such a stance has often been seen as being anathema to the professional early childhood educator. It has

been readily acknowledged that education is value laden, though how to respond to this realisation remains contested. Most obviously, fear arises when educators begin to impose their own political or religious views onto learners in ways that affect their ability to choose for themselves in a secular and inclusive state.

However, seeking to avoid the political in education has always been problematic. It is quite clear that any choice being made in the classroom by teachers is political and has implications for, to paraphrase philosopher Martin Buber (1968), the world that is being brought to the students. Let us be clear: to teach to a supposedly impartial status quo is to acculturate the children to a specific paradigm and set of beliefs and practices — usually those of the dominant culture. This implicit curriculum, then, offers children, often unconsciously, the politics of the status quo — the position of the centre. And, as with any centrist reality, it is not until the margins respond that the unseen appears. These unquestioned assumptions can come to represent the real authorities in our cultures. These are the norms that are not understood, or even seen, by the fish swimming in those waters. And for early childhood educators, the implication is that they are involved in filling the pool into which their learner fish will slip. The question for the wild pedagogue here is: What water would I like them to be swimming in and who is helping fill the pool?

There will always exist a tension around limiting the politics of education — to avoid the descent into unrestrained politicisation of education, particularly in an era of ideologues and demagoguery. Having said this, there remains one set of value choices that cannot be avoided, and these are the content and pedagogical choices that are made — certainly in prescribed curricula — but also in the choices the educators make every day. These boil down to choices about what content and pedagogies are most worthwhile. And despite what seems at times to be Herculean efforts to control these choices, teachers' choices can still make a difference.

If indeed the Earth is rapidly shifting from the Holocene to something being called the Anthropocene (Crutzen, 2002) — and there is plenty of evidence to support this observation — then this shift does not augur well for the future of Earth. As Orr (2017) suggests, the trajectory we are on in all things, including education, is in the direction of producing evermore clever vandals of the planet. We contend, then, that as educators we need to trouble the dominant versions of education that are enacted in powerful ways that bend outcomes towards the status quo — toward being the same kinds of people that have enabled the Anthropocene, and disabled the Earth. Disrupting current trends means, fundamentally, being differently.

Thus, wild pedagogies are explicitly and deliberately about enabling change. In choosing content and pedagogies there is an aim — humbly submitted — in the work to enable *being* differently. Being differently is to change the relationship humans currently have with the natural world, from a dominantly human-centred orientation into one that is much more equitable and interactive. Herin lies some hope for of stopping the massive destruction being wrought upon Earth.

This touchstone is genuinely wild, for we cannot know in advance what the outcomes will be or how future learners will enact their learning, although what is intended is that wild pedagogies will change education — how it is conceived and enacted — and this will disrupt the invisible centre. And, it may even result in learners who are more loving, caring, compassionate, and who can be competent healers, restorers, builders, and midwives to a decent, durable, and beautiful future.

Early childhood educators might want to consider questions such as:

- What opportunities appeared for the wild to encroach?
- Were there situations that arose that allowed students to consider their current relationships with the natural, and potentially move to change them?

- How was I consciously political today?
- How was I able to focus on necessary change for the whole society?
- Where are my habitual ways of doing things still limiting possibility?

Conclusion

Talk about a need for educational change is common in international discourse. Results seem more elusive. Indeed, change is harder than it may seem, often painful, and ultimately visible only in hindsight. Meaningful change will need to fundamentally disrupt dominant visions of education. In responding to Earth's peril there is also a collective urgency among many of us to 'educate a generation of students who grow dangerous to the status quo' (Orr, 2017, p x.).

So, where are we now after exploring a series of touchstones and asking some provocative questions? The hope is that there are resonances, languages, and ideas that were already present for the reader, and that there were challenges and possibilities offered as well. That the touchstones in this form, or as you see fit to modify them, can be both supports on which to rest pedagogy and commitments that might challenge us all to be better educators and allies of, for, with, and in the more-than-human world.

It is also the hope that the touchstones and their associated questions can provide kernels of inspiration — invocations to experiment with change and to take concrete actions within your own educational contexts. There is, as yet, no roadmap for getting started, or answering the questions posed. In the end, these tasks will be worked out by real people who are immersed in real places. We encourage you to share your experiments and your stories with colleagues — and with us — as we work together in enacting wild pedagogies.

Endnote

[1] Wild Pedagogies began as a graduate course at Lakehead University in 2012. Then, in the summer of 2014, a broad cross-section of educators gathered on the Yukon River for Wild Pedagogies: A Floating Colloquium. Work from that gathering has been published in a special issue of the outdoor education journal, *Pathways* (2016). Further presentations and conversations have occurred at the World Environmental Education Congress in Sweden in 2015 and the annual meeting of the Canadian Network for Environmental Education and Communication in 2016. There have also been two more gatherings, a small one in May 2016 called The Tetrahedron Dialogues and a much larger one, a floating colloquium, in May 2017. The latter gathering has led to a book, *Wild Pedagogies: Touchstones for Re-Negotiating Education and the Environment in the Anthropocene,* to be published in 2018.

Keywords: environmental education, environment, pedagogies, wild, wildness, agency, control, time, practice, change

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Author Biographies

Bob Jickling is Professor Emeritus at Lakehead University. As an active practitioner, he has taught courses in environmental philosophy; environmental, experiential, and outdoor education; and philosophy of education. Jickling was the founding editor the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education,* and he co-chaired the 5th World Environmental Education Congress in Montreal. He has also received the North American Association of Environmental Education's Awards for Outstanding Contributions to: Research (2009) and Global Environmental Education (2001). As a long-time wilderness traveller, much of his inspiration is derived from the landscape of his home in Canada's Yukon.

Sean Blenkinsop is a Professor of Education at Simon Fraser University. He can be reached at sblenkin@sfu.ca.

Marcus Morse is a Senior Lecturer in Environmental Studies and the Director of Outdoor Environmental Education at Latrobe University in Bendigo.

Aage Jensen grew up in the Norwegian countryside in the late 1950s where he had a perfect time for free roaming both on water, in the forests and up in the mountains. Later he was educated to be a teacher and has practised at all levels in the Norwegian school system — from primary school to the university. He has degrees in both Science (Cand. scient) and Pedagogy (Cand.polit).