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

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Abstract

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

Résumé

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

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

The Theory of Wild Pedagogies

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

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

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

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

Wild Pedagogies in Practice

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Utopia in Theory and Practice

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

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

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

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

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

Utopia's Relationship with Wild Pedagogies

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

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

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

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

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

Does the Theory of Wild Pedagogies Represent Radical Otherness?

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

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

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

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

Does the Theory of Wild Pedagogies Critique Existing Societal Norms?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Do Wild Pedagogies Have a Pedagogical Effect?

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusions: What are the Implications of Wild Pedagogies?

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

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

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

Notes on Contributor

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