Reflections on Campfire Experiences as Wild Pedagogy

Zabe MacEachren, Queen's University, Canada

Abstract

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

Résumé

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

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

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

Introduction & Background

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> *People are gathered on the shore, the majority of whom are focused on picking up the litter. This can be considered shallow ecology. At the same time, a smaller group of people are looking upriver to determine and understand the source of the pollution—the how and why of the problem. These people are practising deep ecology because they are seeking to understand the bigger picture: Why have cultures become so destructive to the environment? Think of your leadership team as comprising those people who are looking for the source of pollution so they can understand why it is being made and how to prevent it—although in your case, you are seeking appropriate activities to be done in Fire's presence. Maybe, instead of singing songs we have learned from Disney movies, we should be creating our own chants and dances or joining the coyotes and howling at the moon. Your task is to get people up, moving, dancing, chanting, basically celebrating their ability to be with Fire—thinking about Fire in a new way. If you could ask Fire what we should be doing in Fire's presence, how would Fire respond?*

The DEC leaders are also informed that everyone will have made a shaker in time for the DEC, which they can incorporate into the evening's activities. I also let the leaders know that if participants want a snack, there is popcorn that can be made. Overall, the DEC nights have proven very successful, and they are the evening I most look forward to during the school year.

Every year, the DEC evening is different. The evening unfolds with both leaders and participants demonstrating innovative activities that lead to varying degrees of expressed freedom, abandonment, and self-censorship; frequently, a spontaneous howling like a pack of wolves will erupt, and amazing rhythmic vocalizations will be created. Over the years, the DEC has given birth to a wide range of creative activities that foster each TC's ability to approach and experience Fire in a deep, introspective, community-based manner. It is worth noting that the DEC activities described herein provide a consciousness-expanding experience that focuses on the here and now, and which does not involve external chemical stimuli.

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

in impressionable ways. Over the years, the initial warm-up activities have included participants being blindfolded and led on a sensory walk, or having their faces painted with mud or charcoal. One year participants were asked to assume the identity of a selected animal as they wait in a field for darkness to arrive before parading to the designated campfire setting. On the way to the fire ring, participants might follow a trail of lit lanterns or be asked to move toward the sound of intense drumming. One year's introductory activities were exceptionally captivating: Everyone waited in a line behind a tarp which blocked the view of the fire. As they waited, unusual sounds issued from the fireside. One by one, the participants were guided to take a handful of wood shavings to the fire side of the tarp, where leaders made gestures indicating they should throw their shavings into the fire as a contribution. The action resulted in sparks flying and subsequent cheering. Simultaneously, the source of the unusual sounds became evident.

One effective activity the DEC leaders have frequently used is to produce the sound of a thunderstorm. The activity uses few words and depends upon participants imitating the leaders' gestures. The process has been particularly effective for encouraging participant interaction and setting a precedent to follow the leaders' non-verbal clues. Call and response is another technique the leaders have used involve participants in the creation of a soundscape. Leaders invoke a symbol of animals approaching a watering hole by placing a bowl of popcorn in the middle of the circle and having participants approach it as if they were an animal. One year, a particularly creative group of leaders only allowed the participants to grab a handful of popcorn if they growled at the leader, who was protectively holding the pot. Generally making bird-like sounds has also yielded a soundscape that intuitively feels harmonic with the forest setting and at the same time encourages participants to lose their inhibitions, helping them to overcome the fear of blending their voice with others. I have observed that when leaders create rhythms on large rain barrels, the participants are often moved to get up and dance.

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

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

TCs to choose one activity and elaborate upon why it was the most significant learning activity for them at field camp. Over the course of 20 years, even when TCs are able to choose any topic from their field camp experience to elaborate on, the most popular subject matter chosen has been the DEC evening. Indeed, throughout the year, students return to the evening's activities as an experiential point of reference when discussing other wild pedagogic issues, particularly when exploring the disconnection from the natural world they feel in most of their educational course work. The students' ideas and accounts of the DEC align well with the six wild pedagogies touchstones presented by the Crex Crex Collective (2018).

The Six Touchstones for Wild Pedagogies in Practice

My idea to develop a DEC originated in part from my own life journey. As a child, I was interested in primitive skills, an interest which carried through to my adult life and my professional work as an outdoor environmental educator. I first encountered the term *wild pedagogies* as a participant at the Yukon River gathering in 2014 entitled *Wild Pedagogies: A Floating Colloquium*. At the gathering, I realized that I was predisposed to many of the ideas discussed within the concept of wild pedagogies because of my previous participation in deep ecology workshops, explorations of Earth-based spiritual practices, and my experience teaching in remote First Nations schools that still held traditional ceremonies. If I were only beginning to facilitate the DEC activities today, I would likely refer to them as wild pedagogies campfires.

After reading *Wild Pedagogies: Touchstones for Re-Negotiating Education and the Environment in the Anthropocene* (Crex Crex Collective, 2018), it was apparent to me that the six touchstones presented in the book strongly reinforce that the DECs constituted an example of wild pedagogy, one crafted to further the rewilding of education. As the authors contend, "Re-wilding education thus requires learning from place and landscape. Listening to voices from the more-than-human world" (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p. x). Throughout my career, I have asked TCs to listen to Fire, a more-than-human voice. The six touchstones for wild pedagogies in practice that are presented in *Wild Pedagogies* (Crex Crex Collective, 2018) provide a useful framework for studying the components of the DECs; at the same time, they serve to illustrate the flexible and evolving character of wild pedagogies. I agree with the Crex Crex Collective's premise that "there will never be—nor should there be—a single wild pedagogy" (2018, p. xi).

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

Touchstone #1: Nature as Co-Teacher

> This touchstone reminds educators to acknowledge, and then act, on the idea that those teachers capable of working with, caring for, and challenging student learning include more-than-human beings. … it includes learning with and through [the natural world] as well; and thus, its myriad beings become active, fellow pedagogues. (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p. 80)

The directions I provide to the campfire leaders incorporate the perspective that the more-than-human—Fire—is a co-teacher. This oral direction's emphasis on imagining a dialogue with Fire, and asking Fire directly what we should be doing in Fire's presence, sets a tone that Fire is not an *it* but rather is a teacher worthy of being asked questions. Our task as humans is to be open and listen. For what is likely the first time, leaders are asked to consider the source of the campfire curricula they have been exposed to and question the role of popular culture (e.g., Disney, Hollywood) in their campfire experiences. By referring to Fire as a being, I provide the opportunity for leaders to recognize their own conditioning to attend to human constructs when considering valid teachers rather than to more-than-human ones in general and Fire in particular.

The concept of Fire as teacher redefines Fire by decentring the anthropocentric voice. The campfire leaders are asked to do what the Crex Crex Collective describe as the first touchstone: "carefully listening to available voices and building partnerships with seashores and forest dwellers. And it will, at times, involve actively de-centring the taken-for-granted human voice and re-centring more-than-human voices" (2018, p. 81). Upon hearing their directions, the leaders often stare back at me wide-eyed, expressing a mix of excitement and nervousness. They are thrilled at the possibilities, but challenged by the novelty of the process.

I answer any additional questions from the leaders regarding their task before informing them that it is their responsibility to find the additional time required to plan and discuss the deeper meanings that they want to present and how to best support the Fire paradigm shift. They have two days to prepare for their evening, during which time they must integrate the new concepts to the point that they can successfully articulate a new way of being around Fire to their peers. One TC, on the DEC leadership team, journal entry captured the way the DEC facilitated their capacity to recall a previous deeper connection with the more-than-human: "It was interesting and awesome to find myself in a situation that brought me back to my roots and primal instincts" (student journal).

A wonderful example of the way leaders one year conveyed how Fire had become their teacher is illustrated by the opening activity they chose. The campfire evening began as the leaders circled Fire, took a long slow bow in unison, then turned to face their peers, and bowed again before they returned to their seats in the circle. Immediately, and in unison, the participants stood, imitated the gesture, walked closer to Fire and bowed, then turned and bowed to the seated leaders. Watching TCs silently circle Fire and bow reverently to

the more-than-human teacher before turning and bowing to the humans struck me as a beautiful and poignant act. It demonstrated in a profound way how much we all owe to Fire. Many anthropologists consider our relationship to Fire to be the defining more-than-human entity for humanity (Cobb & Goldwhite 1995; Tattersall, 2012; Warren, 2020). The respectful bowing to Fire as teacher acknowledges the archetypal importance of Fire to humanity. Two additional student journal entries that support this touchstone include: "What an experience! I felt so connected to the earth and to nature" and "Holy Fire. It was incredible to feel like I was a part of such a meaningful and respectful experience" (student journals).

Touchstone #2: Complexity, the Unknown, and Spontaneity

> Embracing complexity will require encounters with that "which cannot be known," which cannot be predetermined and prescribed in advance. … Complexity can be understood as dynamic, fluid, and unpredictable, and is best described in reference to qualities without fixed boundaries. (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p. 84)

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

In such a form of wordless communication, leaders and participants must rely on their ability to read facial expressions and other non-verbal clues. Initially, leaders are often unsure if others will join in their efforts to express their joy with a dance or chant around Fire. Further, leaders commonly fear that participants will sit at Fire uninvolved, thinking that their antics are crazy or meaningless. At the same time, participants are uncomfortable; they are unsure of what is going on or whether they are supposed to join in with the seemingly odd physical expression the leaders are demonstrating. Although initially experienced as uncomfortable or foreign, silent or wordless communication provides the means to spontaneously communicate in new and pleasant ways. This form of communication builds on our sensations of the more-than-human world. During these silent moments, it is as if we are allowing the more-than-human voice to be heard and we are giving ourselves permission to develop novel ways to participate and be with Fire, landscape, ourselves, and others. One student wrote, "The lack of speaking and the unifying feeling that the drums and shakers created was definitely a unique one; and one that I had never felt before and very much enjoyed" (student paper).

It is noteworthy that in all the years I have offered the DECs, only two times have they resulted in prolonged moments of bewildered staring and minimal participation in the movement and dancing component. When participants in the DEC evenings embrace the challenge of responding to non-verbal directions, they are, without knowing it, engaging in what the Crex Crex Collective refers to as "unknown and unclear spontaneous involvements" (2018, p. 84). TCs' journal entries repeatedly describe the evening as having invoked something powerful and foreign. Their entries confirm that the TCs feel encouraged and supported to question and think deeply about what they have experienced. For example, one student wrote, "Wow! I don't know what that campfire was all about, but I want to learn more," and another shared, "Later we had a great conversation about age-appropriate ways to execute the primal fire. I would love to be able to offer this next summer at camp to my tripping group" (student journals).

Each year, I evaluate the cumulative experience of the previous DECs and, when necessary, I modify the description I offer to the campfire leaders. I give particular consideration to what has previously led to either euphoric or awkward moments. Student journal entries and group discussions have offered critical input for shaping the directions I provide the following year. For example, after the second DEC, my explanation to the leaders emphasized the importance of beginning the evening with sensory-based activities (e.g., blindfolding, mud paint, animal calls). Student feedback included: "To give up my sight forced me out of my normal comfort zone … being blindfolded allowed me to learn to trust those who were leading the activity" (student paper). During the third DEC, one nervous leader talked on and on, disrupting our ability to focus on anything but their words. This experience led me to strongly discourage any talking in subsequent years. As the years went by, I raised the bar for focus on non-verbal communication, informing each new crop of leaders that in previous years the entire campfire had been successfully executed without the use of words.

One year, the leaders took my directions to say nothing so literally that they did not provide the participants with any information at the beginning of the evening. As a result, the night began with much confusion, and participant involvement was slow to emerge. In subsequent years, I made certain that I clarified to the leaders that communicating some information is essential in facilitating the participants' ability to let down their guard enough to accept that they are to expect the unexpected and feel free to participate.

Students often record what constitutes effective instruction so they can later recall valuable leadership techniques. One year, I noted that many students recorded in their journals what they remembered of the instructions provided prior to a particularly successful DEC. One student wrote the following:

> The only instructions provided were to meet at the rock outside the dining hall when you hear howling and then follow along. Bring your flashlight if you want for your walk back to your tent afterwards. Also bring your completed shaker and an open mind! Then they added deliberately "No words will be necessary." (student journal)

The directive to communicate non-verbally is effective because it requires participants to reclaim the spontaneous and creative way of playing through imitation that predominated in their childhood. One student commented, "During the campfire tribal ceremony, it was really interesting and fascinating to see in action just how instinctive and easy it is for humans to observe and mimic one another" (student journal). Imitating others may trigger our earliest ways of being in the world, when we are incapable of distinguishing ourselves from that which surrounds us—especially the more-than-human world. It is an unfortunate characteristic of many educational systems and institutions that the learning experience consists of the static observation of electronic screens, or the reading of text. These practices—especially the first—fail to recognize the disconnect between the two-dimensional experience of viewing images on a screen and that of *being* in the wild; in such pedagogies, images can be readily altered and distorted. By contrast, the authenticity of experiencing the wild in wild pedagogies cannot. Learning through imitation, especially when directed towards the more-than-human world, acknowledges and reinforces and the way most young mammals learn. When humans imitate the more-than-human world without judgement, they find a way to access and learn what Devall and Session describe as deep ecology, that is, "a more sensitive openness to ourselves and the nonhuman life around us" (1985, p. 65).

Kurt Hahn, founder of Outward Bound, aptly refers to one of the industrial world's societal deficits as "spectatoritis"; he maintains that this is the result of a decline of most people's initiative and enterprise (Hahn, n.d.). My experience with the DECs has highlighted the importance of having leaders set up the experience so that participants will understand enough of what is taking place that they will feel inclined to imitate and participate. This will enable their ability to briefly reclaim their childlike tendencies to perceive the world holistically and in the present moment. Of this holistic form of communication, one student noted the following: "loud drums and odd sounds pierced the power that lies within all humans to feel rhythm. It was the best conversation of field camp so far and came as a result of primal fire" (student journal).

Touchstone #3: Locating the Wild

> The challenge for many urban-based environmental educators is, then, that the murmur of wild can be overwhelmed by the noise, smell, and dominion of human constructions. (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p. 90)

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

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

at the OEE field camp on both the first and third night. The lyrics ask the singers to "draw nearer, draw nearer" to Fire's lessons. By contrast, many contemporary songs and activities that take place around a campfire encourage us to laugh and sing; they build on our collective popular culture and in so doing pull us away from the wild, directing us toward what can be conveyed by electronic screens and profit-driven industries eager to turn our watching into an addiction. Locating the wild, even when situated in a campfire ring deep in a forest, requires the development of *patterns of being* that diminish the role of modern constructs in our lives, replacing them with practices that help us to focus on the immediate.

A notable relevant truism was stated by a student leader who had discovered it in the course of her improvisational-acting studies: "No matter what happens, remember that we [all of us leaders] will have your back and be following you" (student journal). That year all the DEC leaders expressed strongly that their conversation around this raised point served as a pivotal moment in the shaping of their plan, and ability to successfully lead without speaking. They all expressed that their confidence in their own leadership was the result of the support they had agreed to give each other. Likewise, they confirmed that their collective self-confidence had resulted in successful participant engagement. The leaders' universal acknowledgement of the importance of mutual support reinforced for me that this concept of team members having each other's back should be stressed with leaders in the years to come.

We can best help students to locate the wild when we, as wild pedagogues, are supported on our own wondrous journey to meet the more-than-human world. When leaders are hesitant to act the fool, or when they are reluctant to share their wild encounters for fear that their story will fall on deaf ears, we diminish our ability to grow as wild pedagogues. With each successive DEC, I realized I must find the means to effectively communicate my support to both leaders and participants, helping to foster an environment in which they could adopt new perspectives and foster novel relationships with Fire. Two student journal entries addressed this topic: "An interesting point came up about being genuine & honest & invested in the ritual in order to inspire others who may be concerned about their image as they 'let loose' in front of their peers"; and "Something that was brought up was our idea of 'crazy' and why we thought acting 'primal' was considered crazy—we call things we're not used to or familiar with 'crazy' even when they are not. Goal: Eliminate the word 'crazy' from my vocabulary" (student journals).

Touchstone #4: Time and Practice

> Here intuition, a product of deep time, plays a more important role than reason, which is a product of more recent cultural history. … Closely associated with time are invitations to practice. The first invites teachers to develop their own practice in a way that deepens relationships with local places and beings (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, pp. 94–95).

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

One of the student's objectives was to learn various ways to make fire by friction, and her honed skill allowed her to confidently help her peers do the same at the final class gathering. She provided few oral directions when organizing her classmates, and, once organized, everyone worked co-operatively to use a large spindle to create fire by friction. As the students worked, she softly sang a tune about "finding the fire in your heart." Soon, as the smoke began to rise and the cord whipped back and forth on the spindle, a corresponding, enthusiastic chanting arose from everyone. The spark was successfully fanned into a small Fire. Cheering erupted and all began to joyously dance around the flame.

Witnessing the spontaneous eruption of song and dance as the students responded to their deepening connection with Fire affected me profoundly. I mark what occurred this evening as one of my proudest teaching accomplishments. Of particular note was the way in which the TCs had risen to *an expression of the wild* through their collective activities, and without my direct input. Importantly, the students had created a second DEC and in so doing had demonstrated their willingness and ability to further experience the wild. The furthering and deepening of being with Fire had been due to one skilled peer and everyone's previous collective experience of the first DEC evening.

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

I came to understand and appreciate how strongly TCs craved wild pedagogical opportunities to learn. Consequently, I came to realize that one of my primary tasks as a wild pedagogue is to expand the opportunities for students to learn around a campfire rather than in the sterile conventional classroom environment of most schools. Additionally, I needed to find the means to create assignments and lessons that would enable students' increased time spent interacting with the more-than-human world. One student expressed an interest in practising teaching without the use of language: "this use of silence intrigued me and I hope to try to experiment with it across a wider range of programs. In a world that seems to be so language driven, I would be interested in seeing the effects of removing such an integral part of everyday life, just like the organizers of this campfire did" (student paper).

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

Touchstone #5 Socio-Cultural Change

> We believe that the way many humans currently exist on the planet needs changing, that this change is required at the cultural level, and that education has an important role to play in this project of cultural change. … In response, we seek wild pedagogies that are actively and politically aimed towards telling a new geostory of a world in which all beings can flourish. (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, p. 97)

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

As wild pedagogues, we must ensure that our efforts to encourage ethical socio-cultural changes in society do not simultaneously impose counterproductive limits on learning and personal growth. Seeking a broader understanding of the historic role of pan-cultural campfire activities (e.g., drumming, chanting) can facilitate participation in archetypic practices leading to connection with the more-than-human world.

Participation in diverse art forms and workshops (e.g., pew dancing, hand drumming, Feminist Spiritual circles, 5Rhythm dance [Roth, 1989]) enhances my ability to recognize and acknowledge numerous cultural practices that can be used to heal the damage to ourselves that results from the modern disconnection from the more-than-human world. Redmond (1997) writes about how drumming is once again becoming a tool for individual and cultural healing and transformation: "I've been teaching and performing with the frame drum for many years now, and I'm continually amazed by its enthusiastic reception. Its voice inspires instant communion with everyone who hears it. I am convinced that the new drumming phenomenon answers a deep cultural need to reestablish our rhythmic links with nature and one another" (p. 3). Clifford (2012) focuses on exploring how playing music enhances the nature experience. He describes how skills like drumming and music-making are "timeless skills that aid our ability to connect" (p. 8). Warren (2020) describes how few Americans (with specific ethnic-group exceptions) are comfortable sharing private concepts, particularly precious or reverent ones. Warren concludes that many Americans "secretly crave ceremony" (p. 103).

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

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

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

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

Although it is challenging to walk with students through what is admittedly a cultural, intellectual, and political minefield, it is both necessary and rewarding to create the type of environment where a cultural transformation can be undertaken to foster wild connections through community learning. After one DEC, a student asked,

> Why would we think of dancing around a fire as something *crazy*? I think this speaks to a settler/colonial attitude that values a specific kind of "rationality." Anyone who does not meet this standard (read: animals, Indigenous peoples) are "othered" and consider[ed] to be lesser than. Thus, there is lots of work that needs to be done in order to respect and elevate Indigenous perspectives and decolonize our minds!" (student journal)

Another student summarized this cultural shift of negotiating appreciation versus appropriation as "learning is un-learning" (student journal).

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

Touchstone #6 Building Alliances and the Human Community

> Healthy communities are places where people can take risks, where we can try out new ideas or practices, where we can depart from the *status quo*. People find belonging, friendship, and joy in their communities. We all need supportive communities as we attempt to re-wild our lives, pedagogies, and places where we live. … This touchstone suggests that we can "wild" our communities when we seek collaboration amongst allies. … Re-wilding our communities is about recognizing the agency within all beings, including human beings, and the ways in which that agency has been ignored or oppressed, and then striving for a positive resolution equitable to all, including the more-than-human world (Crex Crex Collective, 2018, pp. 104–105).

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

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

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

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

> I once read a paper about how important it is to have camp fires while camping. In the article, it explained that this practice comforts us because, as humans, there is a deep connection to our ancestors, which makes camp fires a very emotional-spiritual element of spending time outside. People feel the need to gather together, be present in the moment, and enjoy the company when a fire is ignited. (student journal)

The presence of Fire at our community events helps us to grow in a way that is similar to a small spark that eventually expands outward and ignites. As we watch flames shimmer on the boundary of a dark night sky, we recognize the edges of our own knowing. We see, reflected outwardly, our dancing comrades radiating an internal glow. The power and beauty of the more-than-human world resides in an ever-growing concentric ring of connection.

One student recognized connection when the DEC provided them with the opportunity to progress as a teacher and clarify where their vision of education still needs to be broadened: "It made me think that as teachers, we always seem to focus on what we should be doing based on curriculum documents and other teacher's examples, but what we really should be thinking about is what we could be doing. As a teacher it is important to break out of the 'normal molds'" (student journal).

Whether we call ourselves a teacher, educator, or wild pedagogue, it is important to identify with others through our collective experiences and build upon activities that provoke our sense of ourselves as extending beyond the boundary of our skin. The following quote summarizes how one student planned to take forward the lessons they learned from the DEC:

> I thought the primal campfire was extremely well facilitated and thought provoking. I have never considered running a program like this, but have been forced to question why I haven't and how I can apply these concepts and learning to my future as an outdoor educator and as a teacher. (student journal)

Summary

The six wild pedagogies touchstones presented by the Crex Crex Collective provide a relevant and timely context in which to examine what often appears to be an intangible relationship with the more-than-human world. Modern Western culture and language encourage the adoption of an anthropocentric philosophy,

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

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

Educators, regardless of their role (student teachers, environmental and outdoor educators, wild pedagogues), can share the models and methods described above to further develop and create their own wild pedagogies. The touchstones offer wild pedagogues a functional but unorthodox toolbox to help them to think outside and beyond conventional learning techniques. In so doing, the touchstones constitute an important component of wild pedagogues' primary directive, that of re-wilding our lives.

Notes

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

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Notes on Contributor

Zabe MacEachren is the coordinator of the Outdoor & Experiential Education program at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada. She received her PhD in Environmental Studies from York University. Her doctoral thesis is entitled *Craftmaking: A Pedagogy for Environmental Education*. One of her graduate

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

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