






EDITORIAL

Wilding Pedagogies: Theorising, Practising and Imagining towards a Changing, Decolonising and Reconciling World

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(Received 30 April 2025; revised 30 April 2025; accepted 30 April 2025)

We acknowledge and express our deepest respect for Country, along with its ancestors and the descendants of the Lands on which we gather, research, teach and wild. We recognise that the *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* is one of the oldest internationally refereed journals in environmental education and is located within the region of the world's oldest continuing living culture — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean —
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down —
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?
(Mary Oliver, *The Summer Day*, 1992)

Wild calls

Understanding the more-than-human is not a new phenomenon (Leopold, 1949) and is central to many Indigenous cultures (Williams *et al.*, 2018). Across the last three decades, there has, however, been growing calls to decolonise, reconceptualise, reorient, change and reconcile relations with the more-than-human worlds in education (Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles *et al.*, 2020). These calls have come from myriad frameworks and orientations, including: posthuman, ecofeminist, Indigenous, the arts and creativities, radical geographical and critical cultural studies (Abram, 1996; Haraway, 2016; Whyte, 2021). Many of these explorations imply the need for substantive change not just at the levels of personal behaviour and individual responsibility but at the cultural level as well, including its assumptions, values, ontologies, epistemologies and politics (Biesta, 2021; Blenkinsop & Kuchta, 2024; Nelson, 2020; Paulsen, 2022). Thus, it is pointed out that the signals and consequences of (and currently overall eco-socio-cultural inadequate responses to) the pressing global poly-ecological crisis reveal that globally dominant social norms and structures need to be changed (Brückner, 2025; Fettes & Blenkinsop, 2023; Jukes *et al.*, 2024; Lehtonen *et al.*, 2019; Paulsen *et al.*, 2022; Paulsen *et al.*, 2025; Varpanen *et al.*, 2024). This includes prevailing life-destructive practices in the context of modern mainstream techno-bureaucratic schooling that either directly or indirectly sustains life-destructive social structures and cultural norms (Brückner & Paulsen, 2025; Roy, 2003).

Thus, we assert: (1) that the Earth's current climate and environmental state threaten immeasurable living species, ecosystems including humans; (2) that effective responses require a radical rethinking of values and ways of being that oppose life-reductive practices; and (3) that education is crucial for this fundamental reimagining of ideas and practices, breaking free from life-constraining norms (Blenkinsop, Morse & Jickling 2022; Jickling, Blenkinsop & De Dannan Sitka-Sage 2018; Paulsen *et al.*, 2025). Modern societies have advanced forms of civilisation, technologies and the sciences. However, the same practices have led to a situation where one and all are on the verge of destroying — and thus externally self-negating — the earthly basis of life. This tells us that something is wrong with modern institutions, building on a logic of extraction, as a perverse modern “pimping of life” and its capacity for creation (Rolnik, 2017, p. 4-5).

If these conversations are on track and the change needed to have a chance at responding to the unrelenting ecological, social and cultural challenges, pressing in upon many earthly beings, then we assert that education, but not just any education, must be at the heart of the response. For cultural change is an educational undertaking (Blenkinsop *et al.*, 2022). However, what is also clear is that this is not an undertaking for the *status quo* generic colonial European forms (e.g. individualised learners, fragmented and extractive epistemologies, subject-based silos, human as only knower, focus on expertise, etc.) that tend to dominate public education as enacted around the globe (Jickling *et al.*, 2018). In response, we have experienced grassroots and emerging education responses, some aimed at re-wilding, some at cultural change, some at shifting from scientism to other knowledges such as Indigenous sciences (Whyte, 2018; 2020; 2021), some arising from diverse communities, and still others focused on particular lands and territories (Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles *et al.*, 2020; Green & Dymont, 2018; Irwin, 2021; Paulsen *et al.*, 2022; Quay, 2021; Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2023; Sobel, 2017).

We contend that for substantive change to happen, it is important to grow alliances, expand the diversity of voices, leave space for disruptions, understandings and cross-pollinations while at the same time deepening theoretical and philosophical underpinnings and expanding pedagogical and creative practices between, amongst and beyond these often isolated and presumptively distinct environmental education offerings. As we will elaborate in this paper, the articles assembled in this special issue on *wilding pedagogies* do some of this challenging and necessary work.

The special issue is inspired, though not limited, by the Wild Pedagogies Conference held in Sweden from August 20 to 25, 2023, which brought together 35 scholars and students to engage primarily with one of the recent responses to this challenge of cultural change, Wild Pedagogies

(Jickling et al., 2018). With a focus on one of the six touchstones, “nature as co-teacher” (Blenkinsop & Beeman, 2010), the gathering comprised explorations, discussions, critical examinations and pedagogical experiences that sought to work and feel into strategies and models for “wilding” education in a local, mountainous, outdoor Nordic context. However, it also became clear that without expanding these discussions critically, theoretically, pedagogically and creatively beyond the single touchstone, outside the Nordic context and even beyond the most radical edge of practice of environmental education, the chance for eco-social-cultural change that was capturing the imaginations and perhaps even driving the actions of the educator participants was doomed to fail.

In light of all this, we have taken the initiative to the special issue “Wilding pedagogies” to speak to those desires to respond to the world in rich, meaningful and substantive ways. The 18 papers that comprise this special issue explore, critically examine, philosophically challenge, imaginatively engage, practically and creatively embody how theory and practice of environmental education can be re/imagined, re/conceptualised, re/created, re/turned — re/approached in “wilding” ways. Ways that respond to some of the colonial, control-based, individualised, anthropocentric, patriarchal, Western (minority), anti-environmental aspects of the conventional, techno-bureaucratic mainstream education systems (Monbiot, 2014; Aikens, 2021) and at the same time haunt environmental education (Jickling & Sterling, 2017). Though many overlapping themes and connections exist, the special issue is organised under four parts, namely:

- Part I: Wilding pedagogies with relational ontologies;
- Part II: Wilding pedagogies in higher educational setting practices;
- Part III: Wilding pedagogies with children and more-than-humans; and,
- Part IV: Wilding pedagogies in between theory and practice.

Part I: Wilding pedagogies with relational ontologies

The Special Issue commences with three relational ontological contributions, beginning with Chris Beeman and Sean Blenkinsop’s *essaie* on “relational ontology and amalgam-being.” Drawing on “hunh?!” moments, Beeman and Blenkinsop challenges nature-child idealisations, nature-culture un-knowings, human autonomy and natural imagination. This leads to an Amalgam-being — “another way of being human” (this issue). Jennifer Skriver and Mathias Poulsen’s “attuned to love” contribution brings a further dimension to relational ontologies through love as affect and attunement. As Skriver and Poulsen resolve “*love moves through the rhythms of learning, through the shimmering edges of encounter, drawing us forward—toward attunement, toward transformation, toward the wild urgencies that shape our shared becoming*” (this issue). Amy Smallwood concludes Part I through a deep exploration of “primary” ontologies in outdoor adventure education — considering the spaces that exist between humans and nature.

Part II: Wilding pedagogies in higher educational setting practices

The four papers in Part II are all concerned with wilding pedagogies in higher education. They encompass trends, openings and barriers that are illustrated through their own examples. The first two papers, by Koen Arts et al and Reineke van Tol and Arjen Wals, are presented as a complimentary pair written by research teams at Wageningen University in the Netherlands. Their university is presented as a highly ranked institution including, in one instance, being rated as the “most sustainable university in the world.” Zoe Theodosaki’s contribution follows pointing to one of the most vexing challenges of environmental education in higher education; viz. teacher education. Theodosaki grapples with the dominant cultural atmosphere in Greece that

discourages outdoor dimensions of environmental education. Estella Kuchta's playfully written piece takes on the daunting task of wilding the pedagogies of postsecondary literature classes. These she describes as infamously oriented around stacks of bound paper and technologies unfit for rain, wind, dew and an absence of electrical plugins. Her goal is to creatively locate more-than-humans and selves within "typically indoor disciplines." Sarah Crinall and Nick Stanger's contribution concludes Part II with a compilation of letters to Earth. Three lines of utterances remain — "sensing what silent spaces say . . .," "following feels and fascination . . .," and "being at peace with bothness and becommening as a meoment-to-moment affair" (this issue).

Part III: Wilding pedagogies with children and more-than-humans

Four papers comprise part III, commencing with Liz Beattie's doctoral study on child-stick relations in learning experiences on the unceded territory of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) People (co-authored with Sandra Scott). Yanina Carrizo, Daniel Harris and Linda Knight's contribution follows through decolonising dust — where dust is positioned as a creative, lively, rebellious participant in early childhood education and care. As Carrizo, Harris and Knight eloquently note "*the translation of dust in Spanish, one of the author's mother tongues, is Tierra. Tierra, in Spanish (a feminine pronoun), means planet Earth, soil, dust and Pachamama, the Earth Mother.*" Charlotte Hankin and Hannah Hogarth offer a creative material multispecies contribution of becoming wild with chalk and paintbrush — positioned as everyday co-creators. Tejs Moller, Nanna Jordt Jørgensen, Birgitte Damgaard, Mia Husted and Søren Krog further contemplates nature in early childhood education and care through considering nature positionings and open-ended free play.

Part IV: Wilding pedagogies in between theory and practice

Lee Beavington's commences Part IV by responding to eight questions posed in "Wild Pedagogies: Touchstones for Re-Negotiating Education and the Environment in the Anthropocene" (Jickling et al., 2018). Beavington contemplates a co-becoming shift away from dominant university paradigms of control and hierarchy. Sean Blenkinsop and Linda Wilhelmsson follow in search of eco-democracy in what they frame as "crises" analogous with Orr's (1992) notion of crises. Four eco-democratic commitments are gestured: voice, consent, self-determination and kindness. Michael Paulsen, Helene Illeris and Tommaso Reato's contribution brings a practical arts-based approach, with a focus on nature writing, propositions and minor experiences. Andrie Savva's thoughtful piece considers "wilding" as a philosophical concept and questions how it might accentuate the -isms — such as capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, industrialism, scientism. Savva challenges researchers to consider "*how the wild trembles with the -isms and for lived, embodied artistic and teaching-pedagogical encounters that open-up spaces for an inquiry with the world and the relational trans-corporeal self* (this issue)." Megan Tucker and Sean Blenkinsop bring the Special Issue back to relation, with a focus on teacher-intuition and relational-intuition. Tucker concludes their contribution with apt questions for educators, with one being "*are there moments when I employ my intuition that are non-ecological, epistemologically fragmented, or alienating?*" The special issue aptly ends with Judith Wilks, Angela Turner and Mark Werner's contribution on Country, and the critical role of local Aboriginal community lead teachers in climate change education in affording a deep relationality with nature and culture. As one young person said:

"... I think custodianship is basically the same as stewardship, except it has a lot more culture to embrace about it." (Wilks et al., this issue)

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Linda Wilhelmsson: Senior Lecturer in Education at Mid Sweden University, holds a Ph. D in Education. In her dissertation, she focused on questions of democracy and student influence in teaching practices. She is the research leader for Critical Perspectives in Educational Research (KUF) and a member of the Editorial Board for Educational Science Studies at Mid Sweden University. Linda co-organised the Wild Pedagogies gathering with Michael. Currently, she is working on a project, “Locally relevant education for sustainable development, a didactic practical school research project in sparsely populated areas.” She is engaged in work concerning Bildung and Eco-Democracy in Educational Settings. Linda is also a member of the Eco-Research Group at Simon Fraser University in BC, Canada. [Linda Wilhelmsson | miun.se](https://linda.wilhelmsson.miun.se)

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Bob Jickling: Professor Emeritus at Lakehead University and has interests in environmental philosophy; environmental, experiential and outdoor education; and philosophy of education. In his most recent book, *Wild Pedagogies: Touchstones for Re-Negotiating Education and the Environment in the Anthropocene* he and others of the Crex Collective attempt to find openings for radical re-visioning of education. As a longtime wilderness traveller, much of his inspiration is derived from the landscape of his home in Canada’s Yukon.

Amy Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles: Professor of Education and Sustainability at Southern Cross University (SCU). She is the Executive Dean of SCU’s Faculty of Education, as well as the Research Leader of the “Sustainability, Environment and the Arts in Education” Research Centre. Professor Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles’s research centres on climate change, childhood nature, posthuman philosophy and child-framed research methodologies. She is particularly focused on the pivot points between education, science and philosophy. She has led over 40 national/international research projects and is presently the lead researcher on a 2024 Australian Research Council Discovery grant on climate change education on/with Country. She has published more than 190+ publications with her latest book entitled “Posthuman Research Playspaces: Climate Child Imaginaries” (with Rousell, Routledge).

Cite this article: Paulsen, M., Wilhelmsson, L., Blenkinsop, S., Jickling, B., & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, A. (2025). Wilding Pedagogies: Theorising, Practising and Imagining towards a Changing, Decolonising and Reconciling World. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* 41, 107–112. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ae.2025.10046>