

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Between the Factory and the Forest: An ethnographic exploration of three educational programmes seeking to provide young people with experiences of the wild

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by

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Abstract

This thesis is the result of empirical research looking at what happens when young people have experiences of wild places and wild instruction, within and alongside formal education. Three ethnographic accounts (Atkinson 2017) present original evidence from educational programmes seeking to provide young people with experiences of the wild. These ethnographic accounts include the voice of the researcher (revealing some transformation of researcher identity), whilst privileging the voices and testimony of young people, voices that remain under-represented within this area of educational research. This commitment aligns with the researchers' position, which is explicitly outlined as being 'human-centred' (Gill & Thomson 2012; 2017).

The accounts reflect perspectives about our current institutionalized education systems and our relationship with the wild world that may have significance outside of bounded contexts.

Attempting to understand these perspectives has resulted in four cautious proposals. Firstly, that structured (pedagogic) wild experiences may possibly contribute to the alleviation of mental health problems (amongst other significant benefits). Secondly, that these experiences (and benefits) are connected to an emerging pedagogy *for* the wild. Thirdly, that nature disconnection (Richardson 2018), and severing (Morton 2017) can be transformed by intense, immersive experiences, especially those based on traditional, indigenous practices (Berry 1999). Finally, that if included within the pedagogical process with intention then the wild world has the capacity to act as guide and exemplar. These proposals appear to require particular relationships between "educator and educatee" (Freire 1971), alongside a pedagogic sequencing that includes: skill acquisition; acclimatisation; and periods of preparatory solitude; sequencing that results in extreme boundary-crossing practices that may in turn provoke experiences of altered consciousness resulting in enhanced empathic appreciation of both the human and the wild world.

What was witnessed during this research presents examples of "educational alternatives" (Hope & Montgomery 2016) that seek to extend freedom and autonomy, sometimes radically so, to those participating. These accounts also present "another way of being" (Hage 2012), one that is perhaps urgently needed by those currently situated *between the factory and the forest*, and by those seeking to discover alternative ways of addressing the twin challenges of education and the flourishing of all life into the future.

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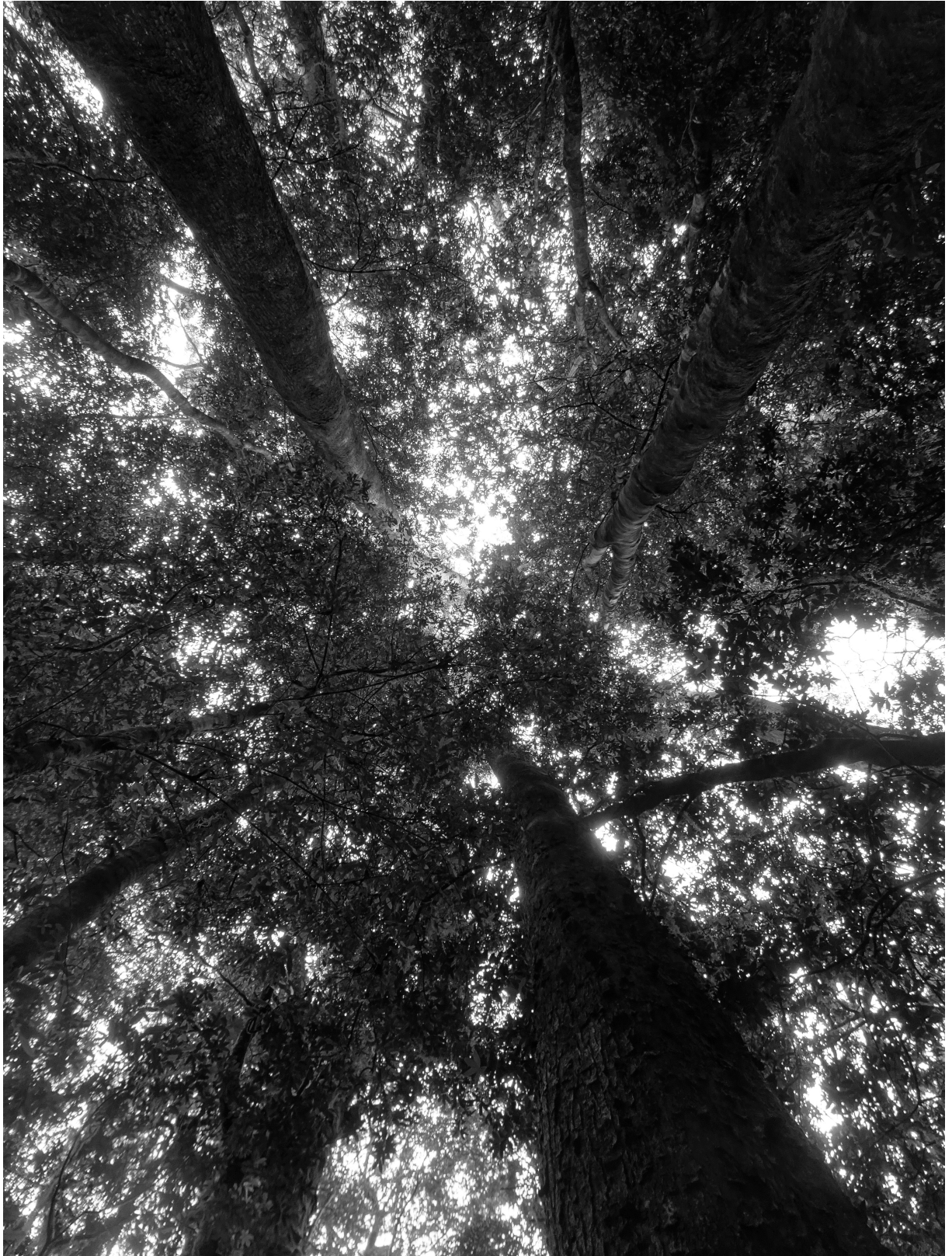
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I am particularly grateful to the young people who trusted me with their testimony and for the evergreen generosity of the wild.

Dedication

In health and happiness this work is dedicated to *all* my relations



All important ideas must include the trees, the mountains, and the rivers.

Mary Oliver

Chapter 1

Towards a pedagogy *for the wild*

The girl standing by the campfire is talking about her time in the woods and how it saved her life. Above the fire a light wind stirs the leaves in the canopy overhead.

The girl is speaking of being terrified. Not terrified of the wood, with its dark understorey and its boundless edges, but terrified of the four walls of school, terrified of the thousands of people there, of the huge classes. She says that her time here, in the wood, has saved her, and it seems clear to those listening that she means it.

Acknowledging that the young people listening around the fire are experiencing problems of their own, the girl describes something that surprised her about her time in the wood and how it altered her situation back in the world of school and exams.

She tells those listening about a magical thing that happened on the last day of her GCSEs. Her teachers, believing that she was a hopeless case, told her that she was likely to get an ungraded mark in her exam in Geography. She begins this story, a story with a surprising, and uplifting conclusion, by tracking back through her time at Secondary School.

The girl talks about suffering from extreme anxiety and depression. A year ago she says that she was completely lost. Even now there is a distant, yet discernible tremor in her hands and body when she speaks. Yet she claims that it is the wild wood itself that taught her the most important lessons of all. She says:

I learnt how to be myself out here, I learnt how to live, how to exist, how to talk to another person without being paralysed in fear, how to be part of a group and not fear that I'm being judged, you know, even though I say it again and again, I think this course saved my life, I don't know where I'd be if it wasn't for it, housebound or not here at all, and it's just, like the life skills and the things that aren't really taught but you just learn... you know you can go and just sit down and relax, you can run around, you can scream, there's nothing saying you can't be a part of it, you can't be who you want to be, you know, you can be a part of anything that's going on here, you know, you are part of all this life, and all this life here is doing its own thing, no one's telling the trees to grow how they are, no one's setting any rules out here, so you can come out here and be just as wild as anything else here really... (Ellie - research participant)

How did this transformation happen? Was it really the wood, this wild place that drew it out and if so is it possible that this experience could be available to more than just this girl, in just this wood?

An overview ahead of the enquiry

This research seeks to find out what happens when young people have experiences of wild places and wild instruction, within and alongside their formal education.

The extent to which children and young people are excluded from the wild world and the extent to which young people are experiencing issues relating to their mental health have been striking discoveries uncovered through reviewing related literature from the field and amplified on entry to the field itself, through meetings and conversations with young people who are suffering and experiencing a disconnection from the wild world.

These discoveries relate to the key idea that binds this thesis together. School, as an expression of institutionalised education in the UK (and possibly beyond), may be responsible for the deterioration in the relationship between young people and the wild world. Yet it may be that educational transactions have the capacity to transform these fractured relationships despite the deleterious effects of domestication, enculturation and enclosure.

I was motivated and inspired to carry out this research through recent key educational and environmental writings and through my longstanding personal experiences as a teacher alongside my abiding appreciation for the wild world. Reviewing these intertwining areas of interest led me to locate the main issues and debates in this subject area. Several important papers relating to the direction of my thesis came to light within this context with the following judged to be critical in shaping the enquiry:

- *What if teaching went wild?* (Weston 2004)
- *Re-wild the child* (Monbiot 2013/2018)
- *Education as the domestication of inner-space* (AbdelRahim 2014)
- *Rethinking Education: towards a global common good* (UNESCO 2015)
- *Exam factories?* (Hutchings 2016)
- *Self-willed learning: experiments in wild pedagogy* (Jickling 2016)
- *Six Initial Touchstones for Early Childhood Environmental Educators* (Jickling, et al 2018)

These papers possess an overriding concern regarding how to help people reconnect with the wild world. Along with Weston (2004) some scholars are proposing an educational practice that takes its inspiration from the wild, with Jickling, et al (2018) attempting to formulate a philosophical model for this practice under the title ‘wild

pedagogies’, whilst AbdelRahim (2014) argues that there simply can be no pedagogy in, or of the wild.

As a result of this wide reading into education, young people and the wild, and my investigation into, and subsequent refining of, the emerging concept/philosophy of ‘wild pedagogy’, a series of potential subsidiary questions have taken shape. Through a series of three in-depth ethnographic case studies this work seeks to find out the following:

- What is the educational value, if any, of wild experiences?
- What might be learnt through wild experiences?
- How might young people benefit from wild experiences?
- Do wild experiences promote social or cultural confidence or agency and if so, in what ways (for example personal development, transformation or leadership)?
- Do wild experiences impact on the ability of young people to engage in formal education, and if so, how?
- Could providing young people with wild experiences promote deeper relationships with the natural world?
- Is a ‘wilder pedagogy’ possible or even desirable?

On closer inspection of the literature it appeared that there were limited examples reporting the testimony of children and young people speaking about their experiences of programmes that sought to provide access to a wilder pedagogy. This is reflected in limited research that is pedagogic in this area, research that is oriented to children’s experience and that builds on the testimony of children and young people in order to work towards an understanding of their experience of these kinds of practices.

Through the sustained testimony of children and young people, and close attention to *how* things are working within the programmes under scrutiny, this research will address these areas of concern. The vignette that opened this study is part of one such testimony and it is these voices and experiences that will be privileged throughout.

The study is felt to be important as, despite the seemingly terminal trajectory of the enclosure of school and denuded environmental relationships (or perhaps because of them), a wilder pedagogy *is* emerging, one that is cautiously being enacted and experimented with across the UK and beyond and one that appears to have the possibility to transform relationships between young people and the wild world, with potential repercussions for the health and wholeness of both.

An overview of the following chapters:

Chapter 2 commences the study by introducing the biographical and conceptual position of the researcher. The chapter draws attention to the possibility that the social phenomenon of education should be analytically and ethically considered in relation to the current ecological crisis.

Chapter 3 is presented in three parts and explores the current situation facing young people in institutionalised education and their access to the wild world whilst exposing a potential link between education, enclosure and domestication. The chapter continues by discussing current opportunities for young people to engage in wild landscapes and wild practices whilst exploring the critiques of these opportunities. The chapter continues by defining the concept of wild in relation to the themes and intentions of the enquiry ahead of developing and evaluating the emergent philosophy and practice of ‘wild pedagogy’.

Chapter 4 defines the gap in this field of interest that this enquiry aims to tackle, crystalizes the research questions that have been generated over the previous chapters, considers the methodological perspective and position of the researcher and the ethical steps taken during the research and presents the methods used to undertake an empirical study in wild conditions. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how the experiences witnessed and shared in the field have been presented and understood.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 present three distinct ethnographic case studies exploring what happens when young people are engaged with organisations that seek to provide access to wild places and wild experiences. **Chapter 8** extends the case studies through the presentation of a critical encounter from one of the research sites that posed the question: what is knowledge for?

Chapter 9 discusses the case studies in light of the preceding chapters, interprets the educational practices associated with the case study programmes, whilst distilling this interpretation into a sequence of proposals. **Chapter 10** concludes the enquiry illustrating areas where the research has made a contribution to the field of enquiry, where limitations were encountered, and what next steps may be required.

Chapter 2

A personal introduction: towards a wilder, more-than-human education

Opening the presentation of this enquiry with a story fragment from one of the sites visited as part of my research demands explanation and justification.

The fragment has been placed at the start of the enquiry with the intention of providing the reader with an immediate sense of familiarity with the settings of the research, wild places and wild practices. It is also an attempt to foreground a *positive* discourse.

Placing a part of the story that should chronologically appear later in the research, whilst paying attention to the biographical story of myself as researcher, attempts to fulfil Giroux's plea for critical *and* positive discourse. That "instead of a narrative of decline, educators need to combine a discourse of critique and resistance with a discourse of possibility and hope" (Giroux 2008, pg. 6). This connects with Hage's (2012) call for "an 'alter-politics' – a politics that grows not from opposition to or critique of our current systems but one that grows from attention to another way of being" (Hage in Kohn 2013, pg. 7).

This concentration on "another way of being" has resulted in possibly the first sustained academic research of what is here described as 'rites of passage' experiences (Van Gennep 1909; Turner 1969) in the UK (the nature of which will be elucidated later in the enquiry). The reporting of the Sacred Fire Quest case study in particular is considered here to be a significant contribution of knowledge in this (re) emerging area and for the wider field that this enquiry sits within. These declarations require a biographical presentation of the perspective and position of the researcher in order to clearly state where and how this work originated and how it has been organised.

This biographical account, and the presentation of thinking that follows it, arises from what Clough and Nutbrown (2007) in their '*Guide to Methodology*' call 'radical reading'. They state that 'radical reading provides the justification for the critical adoption or rejection of existing knowledge and practices' (Clough & Nutbrown 2007, pg. 99). They see radical reading as

A process which exposes the purposes and positions of both texts and practices. What distinguishes radical reading is the notion of criticality. A critical account of anything seeks to be rational, but cannot fail to reflect the values and beliefs of its author; the most persuasive critical accounts reveal the full range of values at work in the analysis. (Ibid, pg. 26)

This practice, of radical, critical reading, encourages those entering into research to confront and reveal their own purpose and positionality. Positionality is defined by Clough and Nutbrown as “the ways in which researchers choose to conduct an enquiry, the nature of research questions and the moral intents”. These “are expressions of our positionality and will govern the ways in which we craft and change the research act itself” (Ibid, pg. 10).

Articulating this positionality helps to bring bias to the surface, for the one researching, and it is intended, for the one reading, in the process mitigating against the negative aspects of a compromised position. As a methodological tool it enables me, as the one embarking on research, to begin constructing and articulating ‘theories’ that will aid future interpretation of the research puzzle (Ibid).

Encouraged by Clough and Nutbrown (2014) to disclose the position that I have taken as a researcher the remainder of this chapter attempts to disclose how I have influenced the enquiry. This has been undertaken in order for the reader to be better equipped in making informed judgements regarding the overall process and the steps taken in order to moderate against researcher bias where possible. This will be particularly relevant later in the enquiry, especially during conversations between researcher and participants that will be presented within the cases study chapters (see pg. 123 for an example).

Freedom to Learn

So how did I begin to conduct my research enquiry, and what was my “moral intent”?

That the research was supported by a scholarship funded through the *Freedom to Learn Project* at the University of Hull, “an international, cross-sector Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) seminar series” (Fielding 2016, pg. 303) is important to state. This series was entitled: *Thinking the ‘Yet to be Thought’* and was in part inspired by Bernstein’s (1996) “belief in the intrinsic power of pedagogy to interrupt dominant paradigms, and in pedagogy as the space to think the unthinkable” (Hope & Montgomery 2016, pg. 308).

Hope and Montgomery, the lead researchers for the series describe “the central focus of the project” as “the exploration of educational alternatives, specifically those that offer greater degrees of freedom and autonomy to students” (Hope & Montgomery 2016, pg. 307).

This work then is one such exploration. It pursues the central aim of the Freedom to Learn project in that it seeks to “explore ways in which innovative and alternative approaches to pedagogy might provide opportunities to address inequalities in the context of education and in society beyond education” (Ibid, pg. 308). My research project is to be considered within this context, however I will seek to expand the notion of society beyond the human to include the wild world.

Sweet Silent Thought

Three years before embarking on the current research enquiry the University of Brighton published my first academic article, ‘*Sweet Silent Thought: how being alone supports learning*’ (Ford 2014) a distillation of my recently completed Masters in Education Studies.

During my Masters study I worked as a classroom teacher in a Further Education College for 16-19 year olds. *Sweet Silent Thought* was the result of an empirical research project undertaken with my students who participated in the enquiry as co-researchers (Freire 1972). The enquiry was an Action Research (Noffke & Somekh, 2009) case study (Yin 1989) and sought to find out how the introduction of a regular experience of being alone in a natural setting might affect learning and how learning takes place.

The project introduced a regular experience of being alone whilst in a nature reserve into the sequence of the timetabled curriculum. The students were embarking on a final creative production and would be exploring ideas, their value and their realization. The introduction of time spent ‘being alone’ remained a component of an overall body of teaching and learning experiences. It was not my intention for the students to be taught about solitude but rather to discover what would happen if they had a regular experience of it attached to their study.

The project concluded that this elected space, of periods of solitude and silence in nature, appeared to lead to an increased awareness of one’s environment, one’s self and one’s relationship with others. It revealed how time spent alone might be a crucial

element in cultivating empathy for the self and others, and the incubation of ideas (Ford 2014). As is often the case I concluded my writing with more questions than answers:

In concluding my Masters study I felt that there was more to discover about how time spent alone, and with others, in the wild world might support the growth and development of the whole person.

Person-Centred Education

My Masters study was underpinned by the theoretical framework of '*Person-Centred Education*' (PCE), an approach to learning and teaching that 'aims at nurturing the learner's development as a whole person' (MAES Programme Handbook 2011).

Person-Centred Education is increasingly recognised as a philosophical approach and is developing as an intellectual framework for application within alternative and mainstream education... There is a growing need for research and for building a knowledge base in this area of education. These concerns include questions about how to conceptualise whole-person learning and PCE, its pedagogical implications, and how to integrate the values of person-centred learning in typical day-to-day educative encounters. (Ibid, pg. 2)

Person-Centred Education as a philosophical approach is influenced and supported by the writings of John Dewey (1938), Martin Buber (1970), Paulo Freire (1972), John Holt (1984), Nel Noddings (1984), Parker Palmer (1998), and in particular the work of Carl Rogers (1980).

Rogers [1902-1987] was a psychologist and is often cited as the founder of the humanistic approach to psychology (Smith, 1997/2004). His Person-Centred therapeutic model became the catalyst for renewed approaches to education of which Person-Centred Education is one. Rogers' thinking and feeling about what it means to meet others humanely in education is simply too vast and generous to adequately cover here. Drawing on John Dewey's (1938) notions of experience, Rogers contributed several key concepts to the field of education including core-conditions (congruence, acceptance, and empathy), non-imposition, unconditional positive regard, and a renewed approach to relationships and facilitation (Rogers 1961; 1980; 1994).

By his own admission Rogers took 'a very strong stand' (Rogers 1994, pg. xxii) against what he saw as our collective lowering of expectations of 'what children can and do learn'. His compassionate work '*Becoming a Person*' (1961) and in particular '*Freedom to Learn*' (1994)

Believes in young people. It gives evidence that in a genuinely human climate, which the teacher can initiate, young people can find themselves respected, can make responsible choices, can experience the excitement of learning, can lay the basis for living as effective concerned citizens – well informed, competent in knowledge and skills, confident about facing the future. (Rogers 1994, pg. xxii)

The concept of Person-Centred Education can be traced back, past Rogers (1994), to the concept of ‘*Child-Centred Education*’ (Schofield 1972, pg. 56).

Schofield describes Child-Centred education as ‘a term of protest’ and as an emotional appeal informed by the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1979), Jean Heinrich Pestalozzi (1894), and Maria Montessori (1949). Child-Centred education was to have a significant impact on primary education in the UK after its inclusion in the *Plowden Report* (Doddington & Hilton 2007). Schofield explains that, “‘Child-centeredness’” means partly that the teacher becomes aware that he can learn *about* the child, and even learn *from* the child as well as teaching the child” (Schofield 1972, pg. 78).

Four decades later the needs of those entangled in institutionalised education are once again being defended and promoted beyond the Primary School setting, into Secondary Schooling through the work of human-centred philosophers and educators.

Human-Centred Education

Scherto Gill and Garrett Thomson have advanced the concept of Person-Centred Education in their work ‘*Rethinking Secondary Education: A Human-Centred Approach*’ (2012). Revising the work of Rogers the human-centred approach

Is different from some versions of person-centred education, which tend to stress the essential qualities of being a person, i.e. self-awareness and rational autonomy (Rogers 1979)... The concept of being human is richer in content and wider in scope than that of a person. Being human is an embodied way of being a person. (Gill & Thomson 2012, pg. 123)

Rethinking Secondary Education presents a thorough analysis of traditional and alternative approaches facing education. In it the authors “argue for a consistent view of education that includes the development of the whole person” (Ibid, pg. 43).

Person-Centred Education, Child-Centred Education and Human-Centred Education as a series of frameworks resonate with another educational concept, that of holism (Miller 2000).

Gill and Thomson declare that, “the human-centred approach has much in common with holistic and other alternative methods. At the same time, it advocates some of the elements from the traditional state educational system” in effect combining “the best of both worlds in a new vision” (Gill & Thomson 2012, pg. 148).

When stated in bold terms, the distilled essence of both the traditional view of schooling and the alternative holistic conception are unsatisfactory... Whereas the one stems from an Enlightenment rationalist tradition that is willing to employ economic procedures such as cost benefit analysis in the educational sphere, the other has its roots in Rousseau’s romanticism that is willing to forgo such rationality for the sake of being natural. (Ibid, pg. 148)

This binary analysis has echoes of the criticisms levelled at Child-Centred Education, that it is permissive and which John Dewey responded to in his work, *‘Education and Experience’* (1938).

Rogers has also been critiqued for “his emphasis on individuation” (Smith, 1997). Similarly Person-Centred and Human-Centred Education could be critiqued for remaining focused on the human whilst (albeit perhaps unintentionally) excluding the non-human, despite Gill and Thomson’s assertion that “education should, first and foremost, connect appropriately to things of value outside oneself, which is the primary path of self-development” (Ibid).

Paraphrasing Rogers the authors state that, “self-development is the opening of the self to the valuable aspects of life beyond oneself “(Rogers 1961). These aspects need not only be areas of formal study, but include connecting to other people, to the life of society and to social causes and moral issues, for instance” (Gill & Thomson 2012, pg. 69). For Gill and Thomson the whole-person remains the critical issue:

Human-centred education is based on three main principles: first, that education should treat the person in a human way, humanely; second, that education should be directed towards the development of the human person; third, that it should be concerned with the person as a whole human being. (Ibid, pg. 31)

However in their work Gill and Thomson do not make any direct reference to that which makes us *whole* beyond the immediacy of the human shaped environment.

Education, the ecological crisis and the pursuit of abstracted knowledge

Considering this *whole* appears to be of increasing relevance. In his recent work regarding racism the Anthropologist Ghassan Hage makes both a personal and a political statement when he says, “to argue that a social phenomenon is related to the ecological crisis is not difficult today. It is the single most important crisis that has ever faced humanity” (Hage 2017, pg. 1).

Not only is it always possible to demonstrate that any social phenomenon is related to the environmental crisis, it is also analytically and even ethically imperative to do so. The crisis makes of the planet a sinking ship. It becomes futile and even obscurantist to study anything aboard the ship on its own, as if the ship is not sinking. Likewise, it becomes equally imperative to show in what way what one is studying can help stop the sinking process. (Ibid, pg. 2)

In attempting to study the social phenomenon of education as this research aims to, it is therefore (in accord with Hage 2017) analytically and ethically imperative to present the phenomenon within the context of the current environmental crisis.

The Anthropocene could be claimed to be the broadest possible account of our current relationship with our environment. The Anthropocene is itself a contested term that attempts to define our collective entry into a new geological age, an age that is being transformed by human activity (Crutzen & Stoermer 2000). This term and its attendant conceptual framework form the broadest possible background context to the current study in that it occurs at the intersection of the key themes under scrutiny. It is possible, as Hage suggests, that it now occurs at the intersection of *all* disciplines and all contemporary concerns regarding current human activity.

Although this term has not yet been completely absorbed into public discourse, it is anticipated that it will become a common feature of our collective approach to reflecting on human actions long into the 21st Century (Lucas & Maslin 2017). In her unnerving study of the implications of the Anthropocene, the journalist Elizabeth Kolbert (2015) reports that, “right now we are in the midst of the Sixth Extinction, this time caused solely by humanity’s transformation of the ecological landscape” (Kolbert 2015, pg. 267).

A storm on thought

In light of this devastating trajectory the biologist and naturalist Edward O. Wilson recommends that, “we would be wise to find our way as quickly as possible out of the fever swamp of dogmatic religious belief and inept philosophical thought through which we still wander. Unless humanity learns a great deal more about global biodiversity and moves quickly to protect it, we will soon lose most of the species composing life on Earth” (Wilson 2018, pg. 3).

Wilson, who developed the theory of *Biophilia* (1984), makes this statement against the backdrop of his radical proposal that “only by committing half of the planet’s surface to nature can we hope to save the immensity of life-forms that compose it... we need a much deeper understanding of ourselves and the rest of life than the humanities and science have yet offered” (Wilson 2018, pg. 3). Wilson is clear that our commitment needs to be refocused beyond the human and back towards the wild world.

The assertions of Kolbert and Wilson above have potential ramifications for educational practice. Engagement with the concept of the Anthropocene (Bonneuil & Fressoz 2017) has been said to be a ‘storm on thought’ (Payne 2016), changing for us what really matters. If the account were accurate, that we are witnessing, and potentially causing, a mass extinction event along with the destabilisation of all life-processes, then it stands to reason that our education systems would require urgent recalibration, especially for educators seeking to “develop the whole person”. Here the background hum of the Anthropocene calls the very formulation, and direction of knowledge into question and re-acquaints us with the problem of dualistic, binary thinking, and of the possibility of an *outmoded* ontology (Payne 2016). This is of particular relevance when considering the aims and direction of contemporary education, of knowledge, and of learning.

Brennan (2015) urges modern education systems to overcome, what could be perceived as, a “foundational split between the human and nature”, a split echoing the binary conflicts of Rousseau and Plato. The continued “pursuit of knowledge as abstraction, that is decontextualized from place, from relationships and action, of knowledge as past rather than prospective, and of knowledge as private and individually ‘owned’ rather than understood as co-constructed in action” is for her a terminal trajectory. Brennan quotes Vygotsky to aid her point.

That the school has been locked away and walled in as if by a tall fence from life itself has been its greatest failing... (Vygotsky in Brennan 2015, pg. 3)

The stakes for education, and for those “locked away and walled in” could not be higher.

The following chapter seeks to explore the current situation facing young people in institutionalised education and their access to the wild world. This exploration exposes a potential link between education, enclosure and domestication. The chapter discusses current opportunities for young people to engage in wild landscapes and wild practices whilst exploring critiques of these opportunities.

Chapter 3, Part 1

What impact is institutionalised education having on children and young people and is it impacting on their relationship with the wild world?

This chapter explores the current situation facing young people within institutionalised education (UNESCO 2015) and exposes a potential link between education, enclosure, domestication and health. The chapter then discusses current opportunities for young people to engage in wild landscapes and wild practices whilst exploring the critiques of these opportunities.

Dying to learn

Despite growing knowledge of a potential sixth extinction, the planetary loss of biodiversity and fragmentation of relationships with the natural world, education (as enacted) appears to be mostly silent on these issues appearing to have staged a return to traditional, authoritarian modes and procedures rather than actively engaging its patrons with an increasingly uncertain future of which institutional education itself seems to be contributing (Hutchings 2016; UNESCO 2015). Despite alternative avenues being open, such as Forest Schools for some early years children (DEFRA 2018), there appears to be a significant lack of opportunity for young people (especially those around tertiary age) to become engaged and connected to the wild world whilst attending school in the UK.

Climbing walls not trees

In 2016 a research survey indicated that many children and young people were spending less time outdoors than those incarcerated in the prison system.

Three-quarters of UK children spend less time outside than prison inmates... revealing the extent to which time playing in parks, wood and fields has shrunk. A fifth of the children did not play outside *at all* on an average day. (Carrington 2016, pg. 1 – italics my emphasis)

The report went on to reveal that only 10% of schoolchildren have any access to what is referred to as ‘outdoor learning’ (Ibid). This statistic echoed another significant report, titled ‘*Natural Childhood*’ (National Trust 2012), stating that

Fewer than one in ten children regularly play in wild places... Children spend so little time outdoors that they are unfamiliar with some of our commonest wild creatures. One in three could not identify a magpie; half could not tell the difference between a bee and a wasp; yet nine out of ten could recognise a Dalek. (National Trust 2012, pg. 5)

In 2011 the UK Government had published the ‘*Natural Environment White Paper*’ setting out an agenda to “see every child in England given the opportunity to experience and learn about the natural environment” (Gov 2011, pg. 64). This had extended ‘*The Importance of Teaching*’ (Gov 2010), with the promise that the Government would “free teachers from unnecessary statutory duties creating more opportunities for different routes to learning, including learning outside the classroom” (Gov 2010).

However in response to these promises the ‘*Natural England Commissioned Report - Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment*’ (2016) recently uncovered

clear social inequalities in how children are accessing natural environments, showing a clear link between the frequency at which children visit the natural environment and both their ethnicity and socio-economic status. (Natural England 2016, pg. 31)

Despite the Government’s goals it appears that children and young people continue to spend the majority of their waking lives attending school and college focused on abstracted, disembodied subjects and work related attainment (Pring 2009; Fielding & Moss 2011). It appears that current education systems and structures therefore must also have some responsibility for fostering these limited opportunities to experience and embrace nature (Weston 2004; AbdelRahim 2103; Jickling, et al 2018).

A recent study titled ‘*Exam Factories? The impact of accountability measures on children and young people*’ (Hutchings 2016) conducted by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) suggests that the experience of school and its associated “accountability measures, have had a number of negative impacts on children and young people” (Hutchings 2016, pg. 66) These have been found to include “an increase in stress and mental health problems linked to school work or exams, low self-esteem and disaffection” (Ibid), all factors that shall be seen to be affecting children and young people with increasing regulatory and severity. What is happening?

Inside the ‘Exam Factory’

The recent UNESCO report ‘*Rethinking Education*’ describes education practices as continuing to resemble “the factory-model initiated in the nineteenth century” (UNESCO 2015, pg. 47) despite education (and the world) undergoing “a radical transformation” (Ibid) beyond the factory walls.

W. Kenneth Richmond, writing in 1975 outlined the most pernicious myths that he felt were fuelling both educational theory and practice. He proposed that

the first is the myth of education as an agent for people processing, the theory (which has never worked in practice) that human beings, like raw materials in any industrial process, can and need to be converted into finished products by being subjected to graded treatment in special institutions designed for that purpose. On this reckoning, schools are to the education industry as factories are to the industry at large. (Richmond 1975, pg. 3)

Educationalists John Taylor Gatto (1992; 2000), Guy Claxton (2010) and Nikhil Goyal (2016) are just a small sample of those who currently employ the metaphor of the factory to engage in a critique of current educational practices. Eric Fromm had earlier suggested that, “schools are the factories in which these overall knowledge packages are produced” (Fromm 1969, pg. 49). ‘*Beyond the Exam Factory*’ (More Than a Score 2017), recently published by a coalition of teachers’ unions, academic researchers and specialist associations is another example. Despite these numerous, and historical challenges, it is plausible that very little has taken place to avert the power and influence of these myths despite claims regarding progress to the contrary.

Over forty years after Richmond’s work attention continues to be drawn to these twin myths of education. Adam Unwin and John Yandell (2016), writing from their experience as secondary school teachers, open ‘*Rethinking Education: Whose knowledge is it anyway?*’ with a familiar puzzle, asking if schools should still be considered as either ‘beacons of hope or factory production lines?’ (Unwin & Yandell 2016, pg. 13). Resisting simplistic or binary answers the authors go on to say that

Schools are deeply contradictory places. They offer possibilities of emancipation and development, of learning to become more fully human – and they are places of coercion and belittlement, places where human spirits are crushed (Ibid, pg. 13).

Bringing the contradictory into view the authors' use a transcript of a reflective conversation between a teacher and a former pupil that, despite now being historical, echoes statements made by the young people that will later in this enquiry testify against their current experiences of schooling.

I think a teacher's a person that wants to put intelligence into someone like a bloody factory animal. (Medway 1980, pg. 30 in Unwin & Yandell 2016)

In their work Unwin and Yandell highlight the often-cited experience of school as an "instrument of repression, of domination and the denial of individuality, of agency or motivation" (Ibid).

Like many critics of systematic schooling Unwin and Yandell make an attempt to explore and expose the historical genesis of the school system uncovering origins that are profoundly disturbing and mostly continue to go unquestioned and unchallenged. They cite the expansion of the British Empire in the 1800s placing particular focus on the publication of a series of textbooks which provided, so the authors claim,

The basis for a centralised homogenous curriculum – one that paid no attention whatsoever to local circumstances, cultures or histories and promoted a view of the world that placed Britain, Christianity and the English language at the normative centre. The textbooks, like the schools in which they were used, were instruments of imperial domination. (Ibid, pg. 18)

It is of course possible that systematic education as 'imperial domination' has its roots elsewhere and that this may be traced even further back in time.

An unresolved argument at the heart of education

Many textbooks now concerned with the study of Education open with a binary conflict said to be at the heart of educational philosophy and ideology, that between the ideas of Plato and Rousseau (Bartlett & Burton 2012; Matheson 2004 et al). Although it may not be immediately transparent, it is possible that those engaged in institutions as teachers have adopted one of these positions without critically investigating it. This will be returned to during the enquiry.

Plato's *Republic* (2012) is claimed as a text of primary importance that outlines the dominant Western approach to education and schooling (Flanagan 2006).

Plato was the first to write about education in a systematic and reflective way. He set the agenda for education provided or controlled by the state. His education programme was firmly located within a broader political programme, not as an optional component, but as an essential ingredient. Public education policy and planning in the Western world have followed Plato's agenda for nearly 2,500 years! (Flanagan 2006, pg. 22)

In opposition to Rousseau's ideas of natural man and freedom (1984), Plato promotes capitulation to the governing State. His Republic is also essential for an appreciation of how Western political thought and action has been shaped by Greek philosophical writings. The historically acquired importance and value of Republic is attributed by many to the rediscovery of classical thought during the Renaissance of which there are many critics (e.g. Snyder 2010) suggesting that this re-engagement attributed far too great an emphasis on rationality of the mind over the body and senses.

The author, and advocate of the wild, Jay Griffiths (2013) provides a link between Plato's *Republic* and the advance of education as an "instrument of imperial domination" (Unwin & Yandell 2016). She says of Plato,

So ghastly is his Republic that it could be interpreted as satire. But, generally, its ambition has been taken with deadly seriousness as a founding text on the education of boys. The purpose of The Republic is to school its youth to be good soldiers engaged in unending war to take the resources of neighbouring lands. It is a handbook for the education of imperialists. (Griffiths 2013, pg. 192)

Recalling the image of the factory Griffiths takes issue with Plato's ratiocination and recommended treatment of the child and even new-borns.

Babies, says this founding father of our culture, should be removed early from their mother's milk and sent to segregated factories according to class. (Ibid, pg. 193)

Other contemporary works go further in their critique than Griffiths (e.g. Chomsky & Zinn in Edwards 1998) by singling out canonical works such as Plato and Shakespeare as promoting, justifying and reinforcing a right-wing anti-democratic picture of the world sustained and promoted by current governments and their agents.

Historian Howard Zinn explains Plato's standing as one of the 'untouchables' of modern culture by the fact that he advocated blind obedience to government, and thus has long been in favour with governments and educational systems working to instil the 'right' attitudes in the young. (Edwards 1998, pg. 39)

The above critiques can be seen to have some resonance when considering that many high-profile UK politicians (including many holding the office of Prime Minister) graduated from a course in Philosophy, Politics and Economics at the University of Oxford during which they were instructed in Plato's *Republic* as a key, canonical text (Beckett 2017; University of Oxford 2017).

As a canonical work there is a vast amount of literature exploring the writing of *Republic* and as such any overview here cannot do justice to the volume of additional voices many of which have challenging things to say about Plato and his *Republic*. However it does seem more relevant than ever that we are able to investigate and express our doubts over the perceived 'rightness' of Plato's position that have come to shape so many aspects of current educational practice.

Problems with learning as it is associated with institutionalized education

It is important not to overplay the metaphor of the school, or of education as resembling the factory simply as an arresting critical image. However it is possible that beyond the history of systematic education some connection to the industrial design of the factory remains. In order to look closer at this, and at children and young people's current experience of systematic institutionalised education, it is essential to critically investigate our terms, as there may be more nuances to the comparison as it is extended beyond metaphor.

Crucially Richmond (1975) warned against the conflation between school, schooling and education and these terms are notoriously contested throughout the literature regarding education. The recent UNESCO publication '*Rethinking Education*' (2015) usefully sets out a broadly agreeable set of definitions. They are abridged here, as they will be useful throughout the enquiry:

- *Knowledge* is central to any discussion of learning and may be understood as the way in which individuals and societies apply meaning to experience... As such, knowledge is linked inextricably to the cultural, social, environmental and institutional contexts in which it is created and reproduced.
- *Learning* is understood here to be the process of acquiring such knowledge... What knowledge is acquired and why, where, when and how it is used represent fundamental questions for the development of individuals and societies alike.

- *Education* is understood here to mean learning that is deliberate, intentional, purposeful and organized. Formal and non-formal educational opportunities suppose a certain degree of institutionalization. (UNESCO 2015, pg. 16)

Knowledge, learning and education seen through these definitions raise important concerns and real problems that could be said to affect real people in concrete situations.

Education, learning and growth

Throughout this research I will be referring to learning as related to personal growth and experience (Dewey 1938). For Dewey education is therefore

Simply a process of growth, the continuing reconstruction of experience. Human growth is not determined by any outside or independent aim or end. Educational progress consists in developing new attitudes towards, and new interests in, our experience. Education is a process of reorganizing our knowledge, our expertise and our experience in order to confront changing circumstances. (Dewey in Flanagan 2006, pg. 149)

Dewey wrote clear-sighted explanations of experience and growth as he saw them being directly linked to learning and education, suggesting that the “curious mind is constantly alert and exploring, seeking material for thought. Eagerness for experience, for new and varied contacts, is found where wonder is found” (Dewey 1910, pg. 1).

This definition implies that learning is something that creates conditions for personal growth and moves both individuals and societies to become better equipped to lead fulfilling, satisfying and good lives (Rogers 1979). As historian and educator Elizabeth Lawrence states, “Education is the concern of everyone; its effects touch our lives at every point” (Lawrence 1970, pg.9).

The UNESCO report goes on to make the case that “the educational landscape of today’s world is undergoing radical transformation with regard to methods, content and spaces of learning” (UNESCO 2015, pg. 47). As previously alluded to UNESCO recognize education as retaining elements of “the factory- model initiated in the nineteenth century” and that “the model of mass education born of the industrial revolution equated learning – almost exclusively – with schooling” (Ibid). The report is critical of the conflation that is nevertheless perpetuated.

The schooling model, moreover, continues to associate learning essentially with classroom teaching, when in fact a lot of learning (even in traditional educational settings) takes place at home and elsewhere. (Ibid)

Despite claims that a transformation of the education system is taking place globally (or certainly is required) the UNESCO report concedes that, “nonetheless, the physical space defined by the classroom as the main locus of learning remains a central feature of formal education systems at all levels of learning” (UNESCO 2015, pg. 48) echoing earlier explorations of Empire and Plato’s *Republic*.

For those attending institutionalised education provision in the UK, especially when directed by a centrally located Government and linked to organisations that design and ratify qualifications, a typical day can last between six and eight hours. The majority of this time is spent indoors engaged in atomised, subject specific, instruction with examinations the principal method for displaying subject knowledge. Breaks between subject instruction amount to little over an hour and are for the most part spent within the grounds of the institution, predominantly indoors.

It will be suggested, that this confined, regulated experience of education as schooling may have repercussions for the child, young person and perhaps for a wider context, that of all life.

What are young people experiencing within current institutionalised education?

First it is important to focus on the direct impact of systematic educational settings on those attending them. A review of the most recent surveys conducted with children and young people suggests a bleak picture of how time spent within “the physical space defined by the classroom” (UNESCO 2015) in schools and colleges is perhaps incubating extreme levels of stress and mental health disorders.

The children’s charity Barnardo’s recently conducted a survey with children aged between 12 and 16 years. They concluded that “almost half of children aged from 12 to 16 in England feel sad or anxious at least once a week with worries about their future and school their biggest concerns” (Barnardo’s 2018). The report continues to suggest that

by the age of 16, seven in ten (70%) report feeling sad or anxious at least once a week with nearly a quarter (22%) having negative feelings as much as once a day. (Barnardo’s 2018)

The children and young people surveyed “cited the main causes of stress as being school for 65%, their future for 42%, problems at home for 31%, being bullied for 25% (not including online) and their weight for 26%” (Ibid). For school leavers approaching the transition from Secondary education to Tertiary it appears that school had become a major factor in their experience of stress. “By the age of 16, stress at school was a worry for 83% of children in England and 80% were worrying about their future” (Ibid). The report indicates “schools have a key role to play as they can be stressful environments for children, especially around exam time” (Ibid).

Canaries in the cage

Alongside the reporting of stress, the incidence of children and young people experiencing issues relating to their mental health appears to have risen dramatically in recent years (YMCA & NHS 2016).

Whilst beginning this enquiry I talked with an experienced leader of an organisation seeking to enable greater access to the wild for young people and adults. She said, “Our young people are suffering from the pressure and the confinement of school. Their mental and physical health is deteriorating, fast. They are like canaries in the cage and we need to start listening to their song” (Personal Journal 2016).

These comments chimed with my experience of working with young people in Further Education settings for over a decade. Anecdotally I would have claimed that every year I was seeing an increase of students arriving from Secondary school into my classrooms with serious mental health issues, ranging from anxiety to suicide ideation. The World Health Organisation (WHO) in a recent report appears to confirm this tragic trend. “Around 20% of the world's children and adolescents have mental disorders or problems” (World Health Organization 2018). According to the WHO a mental disorder comprises

A broad range of problems, with different symptoms. However, they are generally characterized by some combination of abnormal thoughts, emotions, behaviour and relationships with others. Examples are schizophrenia, depression, intellectual disabilities and disorders due to drug abuse. (WHO 2018)

According to the WHO mental health is ‘defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community’. (Ibid) In reporting on mental health the WHO states

About half of mental disorders begin before the age of 14. Similar types of disorders are being reported across cultures. Neuropsychiatric disorders are among the leading causes of worldwide disability in young people. (Ibid)

Is it possible that the stresses and pressures of school that are alluded to above are having an impact on the mental health of those exposed to the stress and pressure of school and college? A recent report conducted by the NHS England (2015) revealed that

- 9.6% or nearly 850,000 children and young people aged between 5-16 years have a mental disorder.
- This means in an average class of 30 schoolchildren, 3 will suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder. (NHS England 2015, pg. 25)

It highlighted that “the most common diagnostic categories were conduct disorders, anxiety, depression and hyperkinetic disorders” (Ibid, pg. 25). The NHS report also states that, “Over half of mental health problems in adult life (excluding dementia) start by the age of 14 and seventy-five per cent by age 18” (Ibid, pg. 9).

Another recent survey conducted by The Prince’s Trust (2018), titled the ‘*Macquarie Youth Index*’, reports that young people’s sense of happiness, confidence and wellbeing continues to decline year on year.

Whilst the conduct and reporting of these surveys are surely useful in bringing certain characteristics of systematic education into the foreground of public, and political discourse they cannot be said to be representative of *all* children and young people. Nor can they be said to represent the complexity of experience of those that they claim to represent. Experience is more complex and, crucially, individual voices are often not aired in these reports providing limited access to understanding and appreciating those pictured.

The voices of young people speaking about the conditions of institutionalised education

In their path-breaking work, *'Rethinking Secondary Education'*, Gill and Thomson (2012) include the voices and perspectives of young people as they relate to the issues of education and adolescence directly impacting them.

Speaking with a wide range of young people, the authors' reported that, "in general most of the secondary school students felt that the institutions they were in were very impersonal. Some said that students were considered merely as numbers in an institution rather than as individuals. They felt that they were not listened to, or respected for their opinions". (Gill & Thomson 2012, pg. 239)

An extended quotation provides a rich illustration of the sense of uncertainty and trauma that can be encountered in school and college:

Oh God... it felt like a struggle all the way through... it is being under attack and kind of having to like shove your way through every day in like... just thinking... oh God, I can't wait until I can go home. I feel... a lot of my time spent there... I just felt really resentful against all of the things.... It felt like the school really didn't give a damn about what we thought, it was almost like this great big meat processor... it felt like you were put through a machine, so that you're kind of ground out as this end product and it doesn't really matter what happens to you on the way and it doesn't really matter how you feel... (Gill & Thomson 2012, pg. 238)

With worrying echoes of earlier arguments regarding imperial domination, "some students regarded schooling as 'training you to be obedient', 'to stop questioning' and 'how to put up with things' ... I think a lot of state learning, a lot of learning is training you to be obedient and training you to stop questioning why you are doing things and to just do them..." (Ibid).

Gill and Thomson raise important proposals for "combining the personal development of students with good academic standards" (Ibid) but can the situation and system of institutionalised education really be improved, remedied or reformed?

What if schools are actually successful because they do what they were originally designed to do?

If "over half of mental health problems in adult life (excluding dementia) start by the age of 14 and seventy-five per cent by age 18" (NHS 2015, pg.9), is it possible that

institutionalised education is itself responsible? Is it possible that reports of ‘conduct disorders’ within these settings (Ibid) are symptoms of exposure rather than undesirable presentations of behaviour?

The comparative anthropologist Layla AbdelRahim is more vehement than most in her critique of systematic education and in her efforts to expose what she calls “the ontological roots of education” (AbdelRahim 2013, pg. 7). She goes on to say:

Without a serious examination of the very foundation of education, all attempts to “improve” schooling remain mere cosmetic touches. Politicians and other administrators of “human resources” cash in on their characterisation of the school system as having failed yet claim it to be salvageable project if only they could get elected and received more funds. (AbdelRahim 2013, pg. 5)

Citing the often repeated refrain of school improvement and reform she turns the notion of the ‘failing school’ (Ball 2008) on its head, provocatively proposing

to look at the question of “failure” of schools from a different angle: what if schools are actually *successful* because they do what they were originally designed to do? What if at their inception, their purpose was to formulate the human being as a violent predator and hence both the violence and the depression in school constitute a response to civilised requirements? (AbdelRahim 2013, pg. 7 - italics my emphasis).

AbdelRahim argues that education in the Global north *is* working and this situation cannot simply be reformed (Ball 2008). She suggests that institutionalised education, in many, if not most settings, is working in conjunction with societal structures to dominate and domesticate, stripping those within of their autonomy and natural freedom to experience and raise personal questions about what is learnt, when it is learnt and how.

This domination and domestication, she suggests, seriously limits the ability of those exposed to it to ask critical questions and to see beyond the prevailing culture presented within these contexts, to determine and pursue opposing aims and values. Crucially it may be contributing to the health disorders of those exposed to it whilst limiting opportunities to directly relate to the wild world. This may be an intentional consequence of training those exposed to the system of institutionalised education to view the wild world as a remote resource to be domesticated and dominated in its turn.

Education for domestication

That education could contribute to individual and collective domestication is not a recent argument. In 1971 UNESCO published *'Unusual Ideas about Education'*, an opinion paper by the radical educator Paulo Freire. The paper encapsulated and progressed Freire's theory of *'Cultural Action for Liberation'* which ardently argued that the activity of "education cannot be neutral" (Freire 1971, pg. 1) and that "it is fundamental for us to know that, when we work on the content of the educational curriculum, when we discuss methods and processes, when we plan, when we draw up educational policies, we are engaged in political acts which imply an ideological choice" (Ibid, pg. 2). Freire proposed that systematic education functions only as an instrument to maintain the infrastructure in which it is generated. "When education is oriented toward 'cultural preservation' its task is to adapt new generations to the social system it serves, which can and must be 'reformed' and 'modernised', but which will never be radically transformed" (Ibid, pg. 3).

It remains an unsettling argument, that those involved in the practice of education 'whether it is obscure' to them or not, are potentially agents of subjugation to the status quo rather than the catalysts for critical or generative encounters with the world as it is or is yet to be. Freire was explicit in his critique provoking us to recognise that "the role of education, in that it is a social 'praxis', will always be in the service either of the 'domestication' of men or of their liberation" (Ibid, pg. 1).

In her exploration of the "ontological roots of cultural systems" AbdelRahim (2013) goes further than Freire in critiquing the 'role of education' in the 'domestication of men' by exploring the tension between the civilised and the wild, proposing that "cultures of domestication differ drastically from cultures of wildness" (AbdelRahim 2013, pg. 2).

Rooted in symbiotic relationships, wild cultures conceive of beings as free to be who they are, existing for their own purpose and recognising that co-operation will enhance their lives and make everyone thrive. Domestication, on the other hand, entails the appropriation of the purpose of life of those the domesticator defines as 'other' for the benefit of the (human) owner. (AbdelRahim 2013, pg. 2)

When AbdelRahim speaks of wild relationships she could be describing an alternative vision of education:

Wild relationships are based on the principles of diversity and life. Wilderness is the space where living and non-living beings exist for their own purpose, where the purpose for being remains with the being herself. Rooted in the principles of symbiosis, reciprocity and mutual aid, wilderness does not need an organised system designed to alter the behaviour of others. (Ibid)

AbdelRahim's arguments are engaging and challenging. Her use of the concept 'wild' as a critical tool will be expanded on. For regardless of perceived educational and cultural 'progress', school life continues to be dominated by primary concerns regarding 'behaviour' and 'standards' (Bennett 2017).

Alongside an explicit behaviour shaping agenda led by current government, more subtle forms of behaviour shaping such as external control, subjugation, coercion, dependency and enculturation may be witnessed within the teacher led encounters of our schools and colleges (AbdelRahim 2014). This may ultimately result in an invisible, subtle yet ultimately detectable process of domestication. The effects of this domestication may have serious implications for both the integrity of the individual (Fromm 1969), of their capacity to think, critique and create (Hood 2015) whilst also damaging the wider community, beyond human society into the ecology of the environment, and the wild system of life itself.

It is my concern that this invisible process of domestication is responsible for a variety of societal problems. Instead of making things better for all, as is claimed, the process of domestication within formal education is ironically resulting in a narrowing of experience and original responses whilst heralding a potential catastrophic environmental breakdown between the individual, the human collective and the wider, wilder, more-than-human world.

If we pause to take into account the broad context of the Anthropocene, with its lessons for us regarding the negative consequences of our human centred actions, we might ask ourselves how directly our current practice of systemic education impacts on our anthropocentric behaviour. Does it provide us with limited opportunity to explore the more than human world beyond us? Is it our schools that are in some way responsible for this breakdown and could time spent experiencing the wild, within and alongside our formal, disconnected education enable us to de-centre our human outlook and become more sympathetic, or develop more 'solidarity' (Morton 2017), towards to the more-than-human world as a result?

As we shall see the notion of the wild and of wilderness as settings for both the philosophy and practice of education is of considerable interest at the fringes of

contemporary mainstream educational theory (and practice). It can be said to act as the catalyst for the enquiry that seeks to find out what happens when young people have experiences of wildernesses, wild places and wild instruction alongside their formal education.

Chapter 3, Part 2

Wild as an emerging philosophical position and analytical tool

This section attempts to define the concept of wild in relation to the themes and intentions of the enquiry ahead of developing and clarifying the emergent philosophy and practice of wild pedagogy.

Wild Possibilities

To some extent our ideas about the wild, the wilderness, and by association wild children, are shaped by our cultural stories and fantasies (Kingsnorth & Hine 2009).

A recurrent image, when thinking about wild places and young people, is that of the child turned savage, of a return to an unwanted feral state, of a breakdown of our collective civilised values and culture (Newton 2002).

A recent dramatization of these images, outlined in *'Back to the Wild'* in The New Scientist (Kemp 2015), asks afresh the provocative question: “what would happen to a group of children if they were abandoned on an uninhabited island and left to create their own way of life unsupervised by any form of existing society?” The scenario raises uncomfortable questions. What would these children do and why would they do it? How would they behave? What and how would they learn? How ‘human’ would the children become?

Similar questions surrounding the puzzle of wildness and human development have long captivated philosophers (Locke 1690), educators (Itard 1802), writers (Golding 1954), anthropologists (Levi-Strauss 1966), and moralists (Pinker 2002), with each subsequent enquiry providing fuel for further speculation. These enquiries have generated wide-ranging debates about language acquisition (Chomsky 1965), noble savages and natural man (Rousseau 1755), the emergence of religion (Frans De Waal 2013), cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977), disadvantaged children (Montessori 1936), capacities for destructiveness (Fromm 1973), and the biology of personality (Hood 2015) embodied by the infamous ‘nature versus nurture’ debate - alongside many others.

These have come in some way to define the area for the casual audience. However there is a growing body of contemporary work and practice that focuses

exclusively on the wild and challenges commonly held beliefs and assumptions regarding it – especially its perceived benefits.

From our comfortable vantage point the '*Back to the Wild*' thought experiment is a useful introduction to the enquiry. It shows how embedded the concepts have become to our appreciation of education and enculturation. It also provides us with an opportunity to enlarge our perspective regarding what it means to be human, what our current relationship with the natural world is, and, most significantly for this enquiry, encourages us to consider if immersion in a contemporary wild setting or wild state could prove in any way educationally advantageous or promote developmental growth (Dewey 1910).

Re-wilding the child

Turning the image of the child turned savage on its head, the journalist and advocate for re-wilding, George Monbiot suggests instead that it is precisely this entry into the wild and a wild state that would grant children greater freedom, health and happiness.

When children are demonised by the newspapers, they are often described as feral. But feral is what children should be: it means released from captivity or domestication. Those who live in crowded flats, surrounded by concrete, mown grass and other people's property, cannot escape their captivity without breaking the law. (Monbiot 2013/2018, p. 3)

Monbiot claims that the previously reported 'negative impacts' of enclosure might be alleviated by time spent in the wild. Critiquing current experiences of schools, and again invoking the image of the factory, he claims that

Children are being treated like geese in a foie-gras farm. Confined to the classroom, stuffed with rules and facts, dragooned into endless tests: there could scarcely be a better formula for ensuring that they become bored and disaffected. (Ibid)

A recent movement calling for a nationwide 're-wilding' of our natural world (Tree 2018; Barnes 2018; Baker 2017) has come to the forefront of debates about our relationship with land use and its direct relationship with our material and emotional prosperity. Monbiot has perhaps been the loudest advocate of 're-wilding' and of re-wilding education in particular. His recent work '*Feral*' (2014) makes an impassioned plea for "re-wilding the land, sea and human life".

Monbiot explores the diminished inheritance our children currently have with the wild claiming that, “Of all the world’s creatures, perhaps those in greatest need of re-wilding are our children” (Monbiot 2014, pg. 167). Echoing the concerns of Louv (2009) he perceives a connection between the paucity of children’s contact with wild nature, the curtailment of freedoms and the rapid destruction of habitat and species extinction. In ‘*Feral*’ he boldly states that he “would like to see every school take its pupils, for one afternoon a week, to run wild in the woods” (Monbiot 2014, pg. 170).

Between 2012 and 2013 Monbiot published a series of articles focusing on education. Two of these articles, entitled ‘*Rewilding our Children*’ (2012) and ‘*Rewild the Child*’ (2013), utilised personal experience and in-house evaluative reports published by topically related interest groups to promote the case for granting children access to wilder experiences. Monbiot summed up these articles and his personal beliefs succinctly by claiming that “hope for humanity lies in recognising their (our children’s) animal nature” (Monbiot 2012, pg. 1) and that “a week in the countryside is worth three in a classroom” (Monbiot 2013, pg. 1).

Enclosure

It is this freedom to be in the wild world that the naturalist Nick Baker promotes in his recent work ‘*ReWild: the art of returning to nature*’ (2017). Reviewing a publication by Natural England titled ‘*A Review of Nature Based Interventions for Mental Health Care*’ (Bragg & Atkins 2016), Baker comments

The fact that mental illness is on the rise, I suspect, may well be a symptom of the stresses and pressures of modern life. What better salve than the antidote of nature... simply being in nature reorders things, puts our own troubles into context, and gives us a rock to hang onto to. When we take ourselves out for a walk in nature, our ancestral heritage whispers in our ears and fills our senses with what we are designed to be able to cope with; we feel valid again, part of the bigger process of life and, with that, we have a genuine reason to be alive. (Baker 2017, pg. 265).

But what happens when the liberty to take even just a walk in the wild is being eroded by the enforced attendance of schools, the pressure of homework and the systematic eradication of the wild? Other voices have joined in the debate regarding children, education, schooling and the wild echoing the earlier arguments of Hutchings (2016).

The truth is, we are enclosing our children,” claims Mark Sears at The Wild Network an organization that works to increase wild play. “We are stifling their ability to be free, to be at their best as children and it is having significant impacts. (Sears quoted in Carrington 2016).

In his work Monbiot makes reference to the author Jay Griffiths whose recent anthropological study of childhood, ‘Kith – the riddle of the chidscape’ (2013), starts out from ‘a question about why so many children in Euro-American cultures are unhappy’ and contrasts this with an exploration into traditional cultures. Griffiths subsequently explores the child’s affinity with the natural world and takes issue with dominant models of formal education. A particular feature of her work is the idea of enclosure, a contemporary expression echoing the Parliamentary Act of 1809, when The Enclosures saw “common land fenced off by the wealthy and privatized for the profit of the few” (Griffiths 2013, pg. 15). Griffiths extends the concept of enclosure in her discussion of the interment of childhood freedoms.

If there is one word which sums up the treatment of children today, it is enclosure. Today’s children are enclosed in school and home, enclosed in cars to shuttle between them, enclosed by fear, by surveillance and poverty and enclosed in rigid schedules of time. These enclosures compound each other and make children bitterly unhappy... (Ibid, pg. 54)

Griffiths goes on to claim that

studies show that when children are allowed unstructured play in nature, their sense of freedom, independence and inner strength all thrive, and children surrounded by nature are not only less stressed but also bounce back from stressful events more readily. (Ibid).

Promoting wild experiences for children and young people Griffiths underscores the discrepancy between education and schooling when she says

I want to make one thing very clear: none of what I am saying is anti-education. I am writing in defence of wise and deep education, against which children’s vitality, self-will and curiosity does not need to mutiny. I loved my education: I did not always love my schooling. (Ibid).

Griffiths acknowledges here the tendency to conflate education with schooling (Richmond 1975). In so doing she makes a passionate plea for her advocacy of children

and young people being granted greater access to the commons of the world and of increased freedom of access to the wild as a place to learn, grow and be educated.

What is meant by wild?

Contemporary Western culture currently appears to be saturated with the word '*wild*'. Often it is used as a pre-fix, creating a heightened sense of excitement, otherness or adventure. There are popular videogames and Oscar nominated films that take '*wild*' as part of their title; *Into the Wild* (2007), *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), *Wild* (2014), *Wild Tales* (2014) and *Running Wild* (2015) are but a few examples. There are also widely available books claiming to be guides to '*wild*' food, '*wild*' swimming, and even '*wild*' cocktails. Alongside these guides there are '*wild*' therapies and '*wild*' courses that act as intermediaries between individuals or groups who are seeking a more direct experience of the natural world.

That the wild is being discussed and promoted at the level of celebrity is of interest. The television presenter Ben Fogle recently authored an article for the Guardian Newspaper titled: '*We need fewer exams and more wilderness in education*' (2015). As an advocate for the wild and for wild experiences, Fogle draws attention to what he calls "our exam obsession" suggesting education itself has lost its way.

As we have seen Fogle is not alone in his advocacy. It has been argued that our day-to-day experience is one where our lives are mostly managed and mediated by our governing society (Edwards 1998). If we entertain an inclination to go swimming it is most likely that we will do so in a commercially run swimming centre rather than a river.

Perhaps in response to the managed features of our lives an interest in wild experiences is re-emerging? Given the rise in popularity of wild and the key themes of the enquiry it is essential that we look closer at definitions.

Wild is, of course, a complex term and cannot easily be reduced to a single interpretation. Its meaning often relies on the interplay of related words and concepts, those such as nature and culture, concepts that are notoriously contested and misunderstood, and which this enquiry does not seek to definitively delineate.

The poet and environmentalist Gary Snyder (1990) progresses the binary, dualistic proposals of Levis-Strauss (1966) by tracing the etymological roots of the word wild itself with "possible connections to *will*, to Latin *silva* (forest, sauvage), and to the Indo-European root *ghwer*, base of Latin *ferus* (feral, fierce)" (Snyder 1990, pg.

9). Snyder explores and enhances the defining qualities of the word 'wild' by reversing accepted definitions. "*Wild* is largely defined in our dictionaries by what – from a human standpoint – it is not" (Ibid). Snyder proposes that the idea of wild "cannot be seen by this approach for what it *is*" (Ibid).

In order to advance any argument involving the conjunction of 'wild' with 'pedagogy' and its potential to act as a catalyst for thinking about education the definition of wild as self-willed is required. Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), perhaps the most famous advocate of the wild as educator, explored the meaning of wild in his journals.

Trench says a wild man is a *willed* man. Well, then, a man of will who does what he willed or wishes, a man of hope and of the future tense, for not only the obstinate is willed, but far more the constant and persevering. (Thoreau 2007, pg. 179)

Thoreau leant on a definition of wild from Richard Trench's '*On the Study of Words*' (1853):

'Wild' is the participle past of 'to will'; a 'wild' horse is a 'willed' or self-willed horse, one that has been never tamed or taught to submit its will to the will of another; and so with a man. (Trench 1853 in Thoreau 2007, pg. 179)

An earlier extrapolation of the word can also be seen to contain reference to wild as self-will.

WILD - is Willed, Will'd (or self-willed) in opposition to those (whether men or beasts) who are tamed or subdued (by reason or otherwise) to the will of others or of Societies. (Tooke 1829)

Subsequent definitions of 'wild' echo this notion of wild being rooted in the notion of self-will:

Wild, self-willed, violent, untamed, uncivilised, savage, desert. (Skeat 1888)

Wilderness then means "self-willed-land" or "self-willed-place" with an emphasis upon its own intrinsic volition. (Vest 1985)

...what counts as wildness and wilderness is determined not by the absence of people, but by the relationship between people and place. A place is wild when its order is created according to its own principles of organization—when it is self-willed land. (Turner 1996)

As we shall see current articulations of ‘wild pedagogies’ are concerned with the self-will and autonomy of the learner in relation to their environment. This contemporary approach has echoes of the educational philosophy of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1984) and his problematic concept of ‘natural man’ in a state of nature.

Natural man is free, for Rousseau, in three senses of the word ‘freedom’. First he has free will... but there are two other forms of freedom which men had, according to Rousseau, in the state of nature; one is anarchic freedom and the other personal freedom. The anarchic freedom was... absolute, since by definition the ‘state of nature’ is a condition where there is no government and no positive law.... The third form of freedom enjoyed by man in a state of nature... personal freedom in the sense of having no master, no employer, and no immediate superior. (Cranston in Rousseau 1984, pg. 32)

Notwithstanding historical issues regarding race and gender, Rousseau’s ideas regarding inequality as arising from ‘civil society’ are worth considering here. Is it possible that they might be encountered by those engaged in wild experiences? It is plausible that participants granted access to Rousseau’s ‘state of nature’ might experience a heightened sense of their own (currently enclosed) personal freedom. As Duerr argues “we should turn wild so as not to surrender to our own wildness, but rather to acquire in that way a consciousness of ourselves as tamed, as cultural beings” (Duerr in Oelschlaeger 1991, pg. 9).

Wild as a critical tool

The eco-theologian Thomas Berry [1914-2009] was explicit in his assessment of education as it related to what he perceived as the ecological crisis, presaging current critiques by several decades.

As concerns *education*, its purpose as presently envisaged, is to enable persons to be “productive” within the context of the industrial society. (Berry 1999, pg. 64)

In his work Berry regularly used the term ‘wild’ as a way of advocating for other ways of being in, and thinking about the world. An extended quotation from ‘*The Universe Story*’ (1990) serves to indicate Berry’s thinking and foregrounds his proposals.

Another word that names this reality variously referred to by chance, random, stochastic, or error is *wild*. The *wild* is a great beauty that seethes with intelligence that is ever surprising and refreshing for the human mind to behold. (Berry 1990, pg. 127)

Berry was possibly leaning on the notion of the stochastic earlier deployed by the anthropologist Gregory Bateson in '*Mind and Nature*' (1979). Bateson was concerned with systems theory and likened the processes of genetic change and of learning to the stochastic when he said

Both genetic change and the process called learning (including the somatic changes induced by habit and environment) are stochastic processes. In each case there is, I believe, a stream of events that is random in certain aspects and in each case there is a non-random selective process which causes certain of the random components to "survive" longer than others. Without the random, there can be no new thing. (Bateson 1979, pg. 139)

For Berry then a turning away from the stochastic, the random would disrupt the possibility of learning. Berry perceived of the wild as a creative cradle and one that was at once discernible by science and through the humanities. Recalling the above claim of Bateson he goes on to draw attention to wild will of life itself.

To say that mutations are a fundamental dynamic in the first cells of Earth is to say that rooted at the core of life is the wild freedom to wander, to grope, to change spontaneously, to run galloping as an animal, even as an animal dazed in search of something. The discovery of mutations is the discovery of an untamed and untameable energy at the organic centre of life. Not only is such creativity there, it is centrally there. For without this wild energy, life's journey would have ended long ago. (Berry 1990, pg. 127)

Berry's grouping of the terms "random, stochastic, error and chance" within his use of the term wild has the ability to refresh the reader and points towards the concept of spontaneity as a valuable condition for educators.

To understand the human role in the functioning of the Earth we need to appreciate the spontaneities found in every form of existence in the natural world, spontaneities that we associate with the wild – that which are uncontrolled by human dominance. We misconceive our role if we consider our historical mission is to "civilize" or "domesticate" the planet, as though wildness is something destructive rather than the ultimate creative modality of any form of earthly being. We are not here to control. We are here to become integral with the larger Earth community. (Berry 1990, p. 48)

Spontaneity was also highlighted in the work of Erich Fromm (1960) as a corrective to what he saw as the damaging influence of conformity. Linking the concept of spontaneity with freedom Fromm argued that, “positive freedom consists in the spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality” (Fromm 1960, p. 222), intimating that it may be through seeking wholeness that human beings achieve meaning.

Usefully Fromm draws attention to the etymological origin of spontaneity, thereby making a link with the aforementioned roots of the term wild and self-will.

Spontaneous activity is free activity of the self and implies, psychologically, what the Latin root of the word, *sponte*, means literally: of one’s free will. (Fromm 1960, p. 223)

Wild as a critical tool for thinking about the practice of education then is here seen as a celebration, rather than a rejection or refusal, of chance and of spontaneity. It is profoundly respectful of the self-will of the one learning and of the self-willed impulse in general. It opposes domestication and unnecessary control and conditioning, instead seeking the idea of the wild as an opportunity to think outside of the conditional binding of formal institutionalised education systems. Wild as a critical tool rejoices in liberty being extended and offered to all and especially those at risk of being denied freedom. It does not acknowledge the fixed boundaries imposed on it from without and exults in thinking its own thoughts having created space to hold the colonising forces of society at bay (for now). It considers a wild state of being to be an inherently healthy one.

This last notion, of the wild as inherently healthy, is currently gaining ground in several areas of cultural awareness, in particular agricultural practice. Recent research reported in a Guardian article entitled ‘*Wild Idea – Syrian seeds that may save US farms*’, recounts the evidence that “over time domesticated wheat, dependent on agrichemical boosters, lost resistance to diseases and pests. So breeders are reaching deep into the history of wheat to bring back some of those lost characteristics” (Shapiro 2018).

It would be unacceptable at this stage to suggest that these notions of the wild replace wholesale the current traditional methods of institutionalised education. Rather this enquiry seeks to find out what happens when these aspects of the wild are encountered and experienced by those perhaps in most need of them.

It is crucial to clearly state therefore how I am using the term wild within this enquiry. Taken from the arguments presented so far this is here stated as:

- Acknowledging, respecting and supporting the self-will of the one participating
- Permitting the ability to wander and wonder (aimlessly if necessary)
- Openness to the educative possibilities of chance and random encounter
- Acceptance of error as an essential building block of knowing and of freedom
- Inclusion of the more-than-human as a catalyst and potential agent of this knowing
- Active loosening of control and imposition
- Opposing domestication and conditioning
- Recognising and encouraging co-operation, reciprocity and mutual aid
- Respect for those participating as existing for their own purpose and ends

Where do these principles cohere with educational philosophy and activity and where might they assist in developing current educational values and aims? Could they be a useful tool for those engaged or engaging with wild impulses in educational settings?

What if teaching went wild?

In 2004 Anthony Weston published ‘*What if Teaching Went Wild?*’ a paper incorporating the aforementioned critiques of Freire (1971) that attempted to progress a proposal for a *wilder pedagogy*, a wilder teaching practice seeking to reconnect its participants to “more-than-human flows of knowledge and inspiration” (Weston 2004, pg. 31).

Weston, an environmental educator working in Canada, argues that, “almost by necessity, school cuts us off from the experience of a larger world, from natural rhythms, natural beings, more-than-human flows of knowledge and inspiration” (Weston 2004, pg. 31).

Exposing the sterility of the contemporary classroom, Weston draws our attention to the “rigorous geometry” of our teaching spaces and how they are “insistently filled with wholly human sounds” (Ibid, pg. 33) and “how thoroughly humanised most of the spaces are in which we live and work”. For Weston it is these “hyper-humanised’ settings that ‘subliminally work to convey a sense of the world as profoundly human-centred’ (Ibid).

Given these views of our place in the world, it is no surprise that we have come to the cusp of an environmental crisis. It is this sense of disconnection that makes it possible for us to so ruthlessly exploit the Earth and that reassures us that we ourselves are not threatened by the degradation of larger living systems. It is otherwise an almost inexplicable fact that we are so willing to foul our own nest: it seems that only a basic refusal to acknowledge that it is our “nest” could explain it. (Ibid)

John Dewey’s ‘great common world’

Weston’s *‘What if Teaching Went Wild?’* usefully reminds us of John Dewey’s educational philosophy and of the urgency of not separating learning from life, that we must not “separate school from what (Dewey 1907) called the “great common world”, either physically or intellectually” (Weston 2004, pg. 35). Weston, adapting Dewey, expresses concern that our culture has made “the very place where children are sent to discover the Earth the one place in the world where the Earth barely shows up at all” (Ibid).

Exploring these concerns encourages us to turn directly to the educational insights of Dewey, many of which are as pertinent today as they were when first published over a century ago. Directly reflecting on the intersection of the key themes, those of institutionalised education, the deterioration in the relationship between young people and the living world, domestication and enclosure, Dewey provides a powerful connective between education and the reconstruction of experience.

Writing over 100 years ago Dewey “attempted to indicate how the school may be connected with life so that the experience gained by the child in a familiar, commonplace way is carried over and made use of there, and what the child learns in the school is carried back and applied in everyday life, making the school an organic whole, instead of a composite of isolated parts” (Dewey 1907, pg. 106).

Even from this distance Dewey urgently reminds us that, “we do not have a series of stratified earths, one of which is mathematical, another physical, another historical, and so on. We should not live very long in any one taken by itself. We live in a world where all sides are bound together. All studies grow out of relations in the one great common world” (Ibid).

For Dewey “experience has its geographical aspect, its artistic and its literary, its scientific and its historical sides. All studies arise from aspects of the one earth and the one life lived upon it” (Ibid).

Starting out from where we are

'What if Teaching Went Wild?' recounts a series of actions that could be undertaken by the educator committed to challenging a 'deeply-felt sense of disconnection from the world' (Weston 2004). These actions are intended to make the familiar unfamiliar, to unsettle and ultimately *unlearn* our human-centred outlook.

What is it to "go wild"? It is to have a sense – quite literally a "sense", and a practical everyday sense too – that we co-inhabit this world with a diversity of other forms and shapes of awareness, right here and now. It is to recognise that even the shape of our own awareness often eludes us. Wild is that unsettling sense of otherness, unexpected and unpredictable and following its own flow, but still a flow that is, in some not-quite-graspable way, ours too. (Weston 2004, pg. 45)

Through his activities Weston seeks to break "the tamed atmosphere of the classroom community, levelling barriers between the artificial and the natural world, and promoting our common humanity outside of the classroom" (Hamby 2011, pg. 2).

Weston suggests that we can be brought into closer contact with our animal selves in the classroom, however for the full relationship to become articulated and reconstructed surely we must get out there, beyond the classroom and campus itself? This work, alongside the work of current environmental educators giving voice to a wilder pedagogy is an attempt to explore what might happen away from the boundaries of the classroom and into the wild and wilderness.

The formulation of a 'wilder pedagogy'

In his paper Weston makes reference to the work of Professor Bob Jickling, from Lakehead University, Canada. Recent work by Jickling moves Weston's call for a 'wilder pedagogy' forwards in an attempt to define this educative concern as an informal practice. Although there are few published works available, several papers have been produced in support of a recent symposium entitled: *'Wild Pedagogies Floating Colloquium'* (2014). Wild pedagogy has been attributed to Professor Bob Jickling but is here defined by Aage Jensen as

Both a methodology and a philosophy. (The "What", "Why" and "How" questions in education.) Wild Pedagogy as a philosophy is based on different eco-philosophers, ecosophies and nature philosophy which focuses on other

values, views and ethics in the relationship between nature and man, than the dominating mechanistic world view. The methodology can be described as a way of teaching and learning in nature or in a classroom, where the students as well as the teacher let themselves or are allowed to “go wild” and wiggle, not without intention but in order to develop a deeper understanding and relation to nature. (Jensen 2014, pg. 1)

These uses are the most recent development of a concern with both pedagogy and the wild. It is instructive to look closer at the work of Jickling in this context. ‘*Sitting on an Old Grey Stone*’ (2009), foregrounds a concern with both the wilderness and with pedagogy as philosophical orientations. It begins with a question: “why are students so happy when outside on a field trip?” and moves on to explore why it is that “significant learning experiences often seem to exist at the margins of mainstream education” (Jickling 2009, pg. 164).

Jickling employs the Romantic poetry of Wordsworth (1970), the critiques of Neil Everden (1992) and the deep ecological perspectives of Arne Naess (2016) to object to our continued reliance on the ideas of Descartes (1911), rationality, measurability and “Cartesian reductionism” (Jickling 2009, pg. 165). He critiques our educational frameworks, prefaced as they are on ‘objectivity’ whilst making a strong case for learning as a sensory experience. This is summed up with clarity by the line: “sometimes the witness of our experience precedes our understanding” (Ibid).

This statement is an articulation of a radical reframing of education where the possibility of non-directed experience may have profound implications for what and how we learn.

Self-willed learning

Jickling’s most recent work takes this appeal further by challenging what he sees as the domestication of pedagogy itself. ‘*Self-willed Learning: Experiments in Wild Pedagogy*’ (2015) presents impassioned arguments that ‘refresh the idea of wildness’ and ‘challenges the domestication of pedagogy’.

Usefully in ‘*Self-willed Learning*’ there is some reference, although limited in scope, to the voices of two teenage participants, who were invited to travel by foot and canoe through a new landscape, creating photographic images as they moved through the wild terrain. Echoing previous notions regarding feelings and experiences of wild settings the paper reports one of the participants responding to the question “what did you learn?” with

Going out and actually doing it and getting the feel of everything that's around you, and what it means to you, and how it affects you, and everything. (Jickling 2015, pg. 3)

'Wild Pedagogies: A Floating Colloquium' (2016) is perhaps the closest to a complete distillation of the practice, methodology and philosophy of 'wild pedagogy' as proposed by Jickling, Jensen and others currently working in the area. This work concentrates on "the stifling control, or taming, sometimes felt by educators" (Ibid) and helps to progress the contemporary problem of defining the wild and the wilderness.

Jickling himself leaves us with a series of questions that this enquiry is seeking to take further. "What is there about wild experiences that people value? What are the core elements? Are there elements important for everyone in education? What could self-willed pedagogy or self-willed education look like?" (Ibid).

Stepping off the well-worn path: is a wilder pedagogy possible?

In 2016 I published a version of this chapter as a paper in the journal *Forum* (Ford 2016 see Appendix 1). That paper sought to progress my theoretical position and principles (clarified above) whilst acknowledging and incorporating the ideas of Weston, Jickling and Jensen and staking a personal claim to the term wild pedagogy. I sent the resulting paper to Jickling and the publication of that paper appeared to act as a catalyst for additional ideas and publications by Jickling and others (Jickling et al 2018).

Subsequently I have worked alongside the informal group headed by Jickling to aid the development of the term through my insistence on a closer reading of the pedagogical aspects of the work, aspects that have until now been underdeveloped through the groups (understandable) focus on environmental education (Ford & Blenkinsop 2018). Keeping the child within view (Van Manen 1990), as will be elucidated in the following chapters has been of critical importance to this work.

Jickling has since published a short volume that distils the philosophy further. *'Wild Pedagogies'* (2018) again presents a compelling theoretical case for the theoretical framework but continues to be lacking in empirical evidence.

My critique of wild pedagogies (whilst staking a claim to the term) is that it remains a largely theoretical work and empirical gaps can be said to exist that require exploration if the term is to have any value beyond a theoretical position. The field research of this enquiry takes steps to close that gap.

A further critique of the wild pedagogies proposals is that the pedagogical aspect of the philosophy requires strengthening (e.g. an acknowledgment of the etymological roots and history of pedagogy, e.g. to lead the child, is underdeveloped). That I have participated in the clarification of this aspect will be explored and expanded on later in the presentation of the enquiry.

Maintaining scepticism and criticality regarding structure and pedagogy

Stephen Ball in his provocative *'Education Debate'* (2008) warns that “we appear to be moving inexorably towards ‘the learning society’, a society in which every adult possesses a personal learning plan, written down and monitored with a chosen mentor. In Bernstein’s terms (2001) these are the outlines of a totally pedagogised society in which the State is moving to ensure that there’s no space or time that is not pedagogised” (Ball 2008, pg. 203).

Is it possible that, however well-intentioned the programmes, and the formulation of a ‘wild pedagogy’ is, that it inadvertently seeks to impose yet another human centred structure over the autonomous agency of the child and of the natural world itself? It remains the hope of this enquiry that the intentions of wild pedagogy as a practice, and as a tool for interpretation, is one that acts to destabilise a human centred perspective, whilst engendering the self-will of those participating, and that these intentions may coalesce in the future into a blueprint enabling educational practitioners to progress these ideas further.

Following on from AbdelRahim it is possible to extrapolate that the violence perpetrated within institutionalised education may also have a cumulative and therefore deleterious effect beyond the individual and into the environment itself. Returning to the previous arguments of Hage, that “not only is it always possible to demonstrate that any social phenomenon is related to the environmental crisis, it is also analytically and even ethically imperative to do so” (Hage 2017, pg. 2), a new puzzle comes into view - is education itself an environmental threat?

Hage’s recent work *'Is racism an environmental threat'* (2017) proposes, “That practices of racial and ecological domination have the same roots” (Ibid, pg. ix). Hage puts forward that these practices “emanate from what is today the dominant mode of inhabiting and making ourselves viable in the world” which he calls “generalised domestication” (Ibid). Hage argues that

Our aim, therefore, should not be “anti-domestication” or anti-dualism”; rather to should be to oppose their dominance and monopoly. We thus need to aim for a recovery of the multiplicities of modes of existence that capitalist modernity has excluded and marginalised. Anthropological research has a particularly important role to play here. (Hage 2017, pg. 117)

Can pedagogy have a place in the wilderness?

In her polemical paper ‘*Education as the Domestication of Inner Space*’ (2014) radical anthropologist Layla AbdelRahim provocatively states “pedagogy can thus have no place in the wilderness” (AbdelRahim 2014, pg. 6).

It can only exist in civilised societies where the intention is to integrate children as future “resources” into an established hierarchy of consumption (of effort, of labour, and lives). Such “integration” requires a system of education that modifies children’s behaviour, needs, and desires. (Ibid)

AbdelRahim’s work sets out to expose the fallacy of education as progressive, exploring how, conversely, contemporary schooling (as it masquerades as education) is in actual fact successful in its function to acculturate, assimilate, enslave and domesticate. This is a singular perspective closely aligned to the nu-primitive concerns, and civilization critiques, of John Zerzan (2008) amongst others, yet as we have seen it is also reflected in the outlook of ‘wild pedagogy’.

These perspectives and their attendant arguments provide a stimulating, although profoundly unsettling examination of education. Whilst opening up many new areas of critique and analysis there does however appear to be a lack of definition and delineation of meaning throughout the work, particularly in regards to educational terminology e.g. pedagogy. Whilst AbdelRahim protests that there can be no pedagogy of the wild’ exploring the critical ground between the contrasting perspectives of AbdelRahim (2014) and Jickling (2015) may allow us to determine if ‘wild pedagogy’ could be a useful term to carry forward, and to work with as an educator?

Can a useful way forward for a ‘wild pedagogy’ be found?

Chapter 3, Part 3

What opportunities are there for young people to experience a wilder pedagogy?

Despite these varied calls for re-wilding across the literature little is reported about what might actually happen when children and young people are granted greater access to the wild and wildernesses in the UK (despite some research being conducted by environmental educators primarily based in the USA, Canada and Australia).

The documenting of the positive effects of immersion in the natural world felt by children has grown in recent years. Most significantly this has been the argument presented by Richard Louv in his polemic *'Last Child in the Woods: saving our children from Nature-Deficit Disorder'* (2009), and more recently within the realms of science and psychology (see Williams 2017 for overviews of current scientific research).

Having surveyed the reports of the current conditions of young people and proposals of those seeking to re-wild, what actual opportunities are there for children and young people to engage in wild experiences and wild places within and alongside their formal education?

Only 10% of children now spend time in wild places

As reported earlier, it appears that opportunities for children and young people to engage in wild experiences and in wild places within the UK are limited (National Trust 2012; Natural England 2016; Carrington 2016). Whilst there are some accessible programmes for children these appear to be limited in the main to early years education with diminishing access and availability as children reach adolescence, compulsory examinations and tertiary education.

Echoing the previous concerns of Monbiot (2016) The Sussex Wildlife Trust launched a nationwide fundraising campaign entitled *'Rewild a Child'* in spring 2018 with the plea, "Help put nature back into childhood. Because all our lives are better when they're a bit wild" (Sussex Wildlife Trust 2018).

The Trust, along with many other conservation interest groups and charities, make the claim that, "children's contact with the natural world is in decline. Only 10%

of children now spend time in wild places, compared to 40% of their parents when they were young” (Ibid). The Trust links this claim to an “increase in screen time, the pressures of school work, parental fears and a decrease in accessible green space” factors which “have all contributed to a decline in ‘wild-play’, leaving our children divorced from nature in their formative years” (Ibid).

If children continue to be disconnected from nature they will not value and care for it in the future. Children who spend less time in nature also suffer in their health and wellbeing and miss out on opportunities to develop physically and mentally. (Ibid)

Alongside identifying what opportunities exist for children and young people to engage in wild experiences and wild places it will be important to explore these notions of ‘value, care, health, and wellbeing’ and to investigate the idea promoted above that “imaginative play in woodlands... makes a connection with nature that can last a lifetime” alongside claims for fostering strong feelings towards and relationships with the wild into the future (Ibid).

A Green Future?

In the opening months of 2018 The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA 2018) launched ‘*A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment*’ appearing to echo some of the aforementioned concerns. The chapter, ‘*Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing*’, opens with a single sentence summary of the reported health benefits brought about by the natural world.

Spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or a visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of wellbeing. (DEFRA 2018, pg. 71)

Combining recent evidence on the ‘links between natural environments and human health’, commissioned by the University of Exeter and DEFRA and published in the report ‘*Urban green spaces and health*’ (University of Exeter and DEFRA 2017), the 25 Year Plan goes on to instruct the reader that nature “can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression. It can help boost immune systems, encourage physical activity and may reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as asthma. It can combat loneliness and bind communities together” (DEFRA 2018, pg. 71). How nature does this is not directly

outlined but how the Government is ‘helping people experience these benefits’ is. Despite suggesting that good work is being done the report sounds a note of caution whilst simultaneously drawing attention to inequality of access and resources.

However, there is more to do. The number of people who spend little or no time in natural spaces is too high. Recent data from the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment survey tells us that some 12% of children do not visit the natural environment each year. In the most deprived areas of England, people tend to have the poorest health and significantly less green space than wealthier areas. (Ibid, pg. 72)

The report itself links this deficit of nature access to the public sector appearing to place the responsibility on health and education services.

In healthcare and school settings, and despite some excellent examples of pioneering practice, the possible benefits of contact with nature to promote good mental health or support early interventions for mental health problems are often overlooked. (Ibid)

At first glance this statement appears to support the preceding argument that institutionalised education may be in some way responsible for denying children and young people access to the ‘great common world’ (Dewey 1907) but a closer reading suggests that the report feels that public services are not harnessing the potential of nature to restore or prevent mental health disorders rather than potentially contributing to them or actively preventing access to the natural world (e.g. failing to think truly systemically, see Orr in Jickling & Sterling 2017).

The report continues by identifying where this potential is being harnessed, focusing on the corporate over the civic.

A wide range of activity is under way to help people experience these benefits. A number of outdoor sports and leisure organisations, green space managers, environmental organisations and schools encourage people to participate in activities in green spaces. (DEFRA 2018)

As part of this ‘range of activity under way’ the relatively recent Forest School movement that has grown throughout the UK is mentioned in brief.

The forest school approach encourages children to explore nature and have a *relationship* with the outdoors. (DEFRA 2018, pg. 71 - italics my emphasis)

It is of particular relevance to this study to explore the history and practices of the Forest School as they intersect with the overall aim and overlap with the research sites in significant ways and operate at the edge of the work that will be explored in later chapters.

Forest school

Sara Knight, a Forest School practitioner and leading advocate, begins her article *'Forest School: A Model for Learning Holistically and Outdoors'* (2016), by exploring the following statement made by the Forest School Association (FSA):

Forest School is an inspirational process that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through regular hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees. (Knight 2016, pg. 268)

Knight explains that the term Forest School and its attendant practices were influenced by the Scandinavian “idea of Friluftsliv, a term coined by Henrik Ibsen in the 19th Century, translatable as ‘open air life’” (Knight 2016, pg. 268), ahead of presenting the FSA’s six guiding principles. The principles are reprinted here as a succinct overview of the pedagogic philosophy guiding the Forest School movement as they will be useful for the enquiry overall.

- Forest School is a long-term process of regular sessions, rather than one-off or infrequent visits; the cycle of planning, observation and review links each session.
- Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural environment with trees to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.
- Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for being, development and learning.
- Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
- Forest School offers the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
- Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice. (Knight 2016, pg. 268)

Whilst there appears to be no typical day for a Forest School group it is likely that ‘sessions will follow the interests and creativity of the children’, a certain amount of being ‘free to roam’ is anticipated with ‘fire-lighting’ and ‘constructing a shelter’

popular activities amongst children (Knight 2016, pg. 274). Knight explains that the ‘confidence, self-esteem and emotional intelligence’ are the ‘ultimate goals’ of Forest School and that these qualities are developed through ‘playing’ and ‘the personal relationship between the members of a group’ (Ibid, pg. 272).

Knight reports that “Forest School is popular with children with disabilities and with children who have special educational needs” and that it “is proving particularly effective when used with teenagers and young adults with autistic spectrum disorders” whilst “importantly, it is being used to support teenagers who have been failed by the current school system” (Ibid, pg. 275).

These claims are important to this enquiry, as Forest School appears to remain a marginal programme predominately available to those engaged in early years or those that are at risk of being excluded from mainstream education. More importantly in light of the arguments progressed so far Knight’s encapsulation of the Forest School movement appears conflicted, oscillating between a ‘learner-centred’ outlook and an interventionist strategy, a conflict which is summed up in this statement regarding those “failed by the current school system” (although who they are, and how they have failed remains unclear).

Enabling youngsters to reconnect with society, and to achieve some recognition for their skills in the outdoors will help those individuals to feel valued and worthwhile. In the long term it could also save society both disruption and money. (Knight 2016, pg. 276)

Whilst it is understandable that innovative methods may require moderation in order to work within the mainstream system it is regrettable that a programme aiming to develop ‘a relationship between the learner and the natural world’ (Ibid) could end up supporting the instrumental ends of institutional education and the concept of personal, cultural or ‘natural’ capital (a crucial term in this area of research which will be discussed later in this chapter).

In her article Knight makes it clear that there is a requirement to remain culturally sensitive to the development of the Forest School practice as it is transposed to the UK and elsewhere.

Critiquing the Forest School

Mark Leather builds on this point in *'A Critique of Forest School: Something lost in translation'* (2018) suggesting, "That its adoption in the UK must navigate cultural differences, acknowledging that Forest School is a social construction" (Leather 2018, pg. 2).

Utilising the epistemological position of social construction Leather argues that 'whilst many practitioners are trained to deliver' Forest School style activities, there is a 'lack of understanding of the underpinning philosophy' (Ibid, pg. 3). Lamenting the brevity of the philosophical underpinnings within Forest School training and associated literature, Leather also refers to the concept of 'friluftsliv' suggesting that it is 'different to outdoor education, suggesting a complexity that belies direct translation of the ideas' (Ibid). This is positioned in opposition to many UK practitioners suggesting that, "historically, British colonial imperialistic ideals have influenced cultural conceptions of nature and the outdoors, positioning them as something to be conquered and romanticized" (Ibid).

Leather continues his critique by progressing two further challenges, those of 'pedagogic dissonance' and what he perceives as the 'commodification of Forest School', a factor that has been repeatedly raised throughout my encounters with educators and instructors working in outdoor settings.

By 'pedagogic dissonance' Leather is referring to the possibility that 'play', a key feature of early years Forest School settings, "is problematic in educational settings because, amongst other things, "it may threaten adults' control, disrupt their choices, challenge their values or provoke concerns about risks and hazards" (Wood in Leather 2018, pg. 5) and may be difficult to acculturate amongst traditional teachers. Leather here promotes "the need for some support and structure in play" concerned that "although many of the claims that are made for play are supported by research evidence, there remain problems "in demonstrating to parents and other professionals that children are learning when they are playing" (Ibid).

By commodification Leather is concerned that "having a national model may... reify the Forest School experience, transforming it into a product that organizations can market and sell rather than allowing it, as an educational philosophy, to inform a range of approaches" (Ibid). Closing his article with an account of what he sees as the positive aspects of Forest School, Leather also raises the need for further research. This enquiry seeks to broadly meet this requirement for further appropriate research by conducting a

sustained series of ethnographic cases studies seeking to illuminate what happens to young people when they are engaged in, and with wild places, by reporting directly on their experiences.

(New) Forest School

Further exploring the origins of the Forest School movement is instructive for the enquiry. In *'Forest School: reclaiming it from Scandinavia'* (2010) the teacher Polly Shields finds parallels within the contemporary Forest School movement and “the history of a similar movement called ‘woodcraft’ which flourished almost a century ago, and which informed the pedagogy of a small progressive school (itself called Forest School) which existed in Hampshire in the 1930’s” (Shields 2010, pg. 53).

Shields reports that the original Forest School, situated in the New Forest of the UK, was a progressive setting where “lessons were optional and held in the open air; children were equal members of the schools self-governing council; the curriculum was project based, with an emphasis on freedom, self-expression and meaningful activity; and camping was a normal part of the school routine” (Shields 2010, pg. 53). Shields claims that whilst “some elements were similar to those of other progressive schools of the period, the emphasis on ‘woodcraft’ as a key philosophy was unique” to the time (Ibid).

The school itself was the conception of Ernest Westlake, himself influenced by the naturalist Charles Darwin and the ‘Recapitulation Theory’ of G. Stanley Hall (Shields, 2010) alongside the writings of Ernest Thompson-Seaton (2017). Westlake’s thinking about recapitulation and explanation of ‘woodcraft’ is quoted in Shields account.

Lack of this recapitulation gives the clue to what is amiss with modern life. This recapitulatory first-hand contact with nature; this simple open air life; the life of the wilderness, the forest, the hills and the sea, which together with his social life was the chief factor in the formation of early man, is what we know as woodcraft. (Westlake in Shields 2010, pg. 54)

Shields makes clear that whilst the ideas of Thompson-Seton had a profound influence on Westlake and others it may be that “Woodcraft’s most famous offshoot is the Boy Scout movement, established by Robert Baden-Powell in 1907” (Ibid), taking the ideas in another direction, that of “patriotism and militarism” rather than “the

importance of the natural environment in the formation of the child's personality" (Ibid, pg. 55).

As suggested by Leather (2018) the social construction of 'outdoor education' has its own history and practices. With this construction in mind it is possible to perceive how the notion of Outward Bound, and the organisations such as the Boy Scout movement, the Duke of Edinburgh, and the Princes Trust have come about, to utilise experiences in the natural world to integrate into society rather than bring about solidarity with nature for nature's sake.

Intriguingly adventure education and outward bound (Prince's Trust) have been evaluated (often by the organisations themselves) but not wilderness settings (organisations that have at their heart a concern for the wild) and young people.

Crucially for this enquiry Shields illustrates the competing worldviews historically influencing the outdoor and back to nature education movement that may have subsequently taken hold in the UK. Here her illustration of Thompson-Seton's motivation appears to provide yet another conflicted approach echoing the account of the recent Forest School movement above.

Thompson-Seton became motivated to work with young people in order to provide a positive response to the problem of vandalism he was having on his home in New York State; he initiated a weekend camp for the boys concerned, 'hoping to turn their anti-social traits into something more worthwhile'. (Ibid, pg. 54)

This enquiry rejects the prospect that the natural world should be utilised or harnessed as an instrument in the service of the human without the consideration of a truly reciprocated relationship or as Morton straightforwardly suggests "that we should love the non-human" not for what it can do for us, but "because it is fascinating" (Morton 2017, pg. 143).

'Step Up to Serve' and the National Citizenship Service

There are parallels of this tension, both towards the perceived benefits of nature and simultaneously of utilising the natural world to enable enculturation and service, to be found within the language and proposals of the aforementioned '*A Green Future*' (DEFRA 2018).

In Chapter 3, '*Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing*', the 25 Year Environment Plan proposes 'making 2019 a year of action for the environment' suggesting that young people should be directed to social action.

Evidence suggests that while many people are already keen to get out there and help the environment, we should aim for many more to do so. Among younger people alone, and across all kinds of social action, the government-funded National Youth Social Action survey of 2016, found that in a group of 10-20 year olds, 42% of young people participated in meaningful social action, whilst another 42% took no part in social action. (DEFRA 2018, pg. 80)

Whilst the report claims that it wants to help "children and young people from all backgrounds to engage with nature and improve the environment" it appears that this enforced social action has echoes of military service and Baden-Powell's Boy Scout movement.

The National Citizenship Service (2017) has recently been enshrined in law and forms part of an overarching Governmental strategy "to help tackle some of the biggest social challenges in our country" (NCS 2017, pg. 1). Branded as "the country's fastest growing youth programme in a century, *National Citizenship Service* (NCS) brings together 15–17 year olds from different backgrounds at a pivotal moment in their lives to improve social mobility, social cohesion and social engagement in our country" (Ibid).

The NCS appears to take its lead from 'character education' an idea rooted in the philosophy of Plato (2012). Its genesis and formation is intriguing and has implications for the enquiry that will be returned to later in this chapter.

The NCS is reflective of The Prince's Trust, and The Duke of Edinburgh schemes that have been available to young people and which have some synergy with the enquiry. Intriguingly there is a direct reference to Plato in the *NCS Annual Report* for 2017.

Worrying about young people is not new. It is believed that thousands of years ago, Plato despaired: "What is happening to our young people? They disrespect their elders. They disobey their parents. They ignore the law. They riot in the streets, inflamed with wild notions. Their morals are decaying. What is to become of them?" (NCS Annual Report 2017, pg. 3)

Despite claiming that the NCS is ‘more optimistic’ about young people it is hard not to perceive parallels with the previously discussed direction of Plato’s Republic within the Report that underpins the strategy of the NCS.

Whilst a focus on developing young people’s relationship with the natural world is foreshadowed in “*A Green Future*’ what the nature of this relationship might be, and specifically how it might be brought about is not taken into account within the ‘*A Green Future*’, ‘*Step Up to Serve*’, or the NCS documents. This should be a critical element in any plan to engage and develop the actions of young people directed at the environment. It is not clear that any young people have participated in the gestation of the report or the proposals, rather an assumption is made that they will be naturally inclined and concerned. Research reported in ‘*Examining Trends in Adolescent Environmental Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviors Across Three Decades*’ (Wray-Lake, Flanagan, & Osgood 2010, page 1) “failed to show substantial increases in youth’s environmental concerns since the early 1990s” and indicates that for young people the ‘stepping up to serve’ the environment is not a priority when faced with the competing pull of materialism and consumerism. Specifically the report found that

Our analyses of trends in youth attitudes toward environmental responsibility revealed that they tended to see government and people in general as more responsible for environmental problems than they themselves felt. (Wray-Lake, Flanagan, & Osgood 2010, conclusion)

Whilst this attitude appears to support the direction of the ‘*A Green Future*’ proposal, for example, it reflects a worrying trend of abdication of personal involvement. Could this be due to the conditioning reality of school and college as experienced by the majority of teenagers?

The urgent need for society to address climate change coupled with declines in young people’s concerns about the environment in general, and limited knowledge and investment in climate change in particular, call for educational and programmatic interventions to promote environmental consciousness in youth. (Ibid, pg. 1)

The report closes with an impassioned plea.

We *must* care about young people’s environmental attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, as they are likely to be carried into adulthood, communicated to offspring, and expressed in leadership decisions as younger generations replace their elders as society’s leaders. (Ibid, pg. 1)

Otto & Pensini's (2017) more recent article '*Nature-based environmental education of children: Environmental knowledge and connectedness to nature*', raises similar notions about the promotion of 'environmental' behavior suggesting that whilst "the promotion of environmental knowledge is viewed as a fundamental component of environmental education and a necessary prerequisite to ecological behaviour; however, it has little effect on actual behavior" (Otto & Pensini 2017).

Otto & Pensini's call for a "nature-based environmental education, which combines the acquisition of environmental knowledge with the promotion of an intrinsic driver, namely connectedness to nature, is proposed as a holistic approach to increase ecological behavior" (Ibid, abstract). They close their article with what is by now becoming a familiar refrain:

The importance of fostering both environmental knowledge *and* connectedness to nature as complementary drivers of ecological behaviour, as offered by nature-based environmental education, should be researched further as a highly promising approach to fostering ecologically-motivated individuals. (Otto & Pensini 2017)

Nature disconnection, connection and re-connection

The aforementioned publications consider children and young people (and adults, although this is seldom a focus) to be suffering from what is here being labelled 'nature-disconnection'. The concern with disconnection has given rise to a symposium that is acting as a vehicle for further research and attempting to impact on policy and pro-environmental behaviour. Dr. Miles Richardson, Head of Psychology at the University of Derby has founded the '*Nature Connectedness Research Group*' and Richardson has précised much of the current research considered to be included under this term. Richardson has reported on the above research by Otto & Pensini (2017) amongst others, and has in effect created a survey of recent 'nature connection' research alongside authoring his own publications on the subject.

In 2015 Richardson conducted a research assignment with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) that charted '*The Impact of Children's Connection to Nature*' (RSPB 2016). The report opens with the broad context that "there is an acknowledged need to reconnect people with nature owing to the benefits to human health and wellbeing the state of nature and the links to pro-environmental behavior"

(Richardson 2016, pg. 3). Richardson brings concerns regarding access, the decline of biodiversity, wellbeing and individual development together in the report.

Despite reporting compelling outcomes the report contains no first person accounts from children and although clearly well-meaning reads like many reports of this type, with specialized adults thinking on behalf of children rather than with them or alongside them, presenting the experience of children in numerical and statistical terms.

It is my intention to provide a corrective to this imbalance, foregrounding and privileging the testimony of young people whose voices are seldom heard or promoted within these contexts. It is seen here to be a critical element of how the enquiry will make a contribution to this area of interest, as despite a growing number of philosophical frameworks calling for change, very little firsthand empirical research has been reported.

Reporting on the most recent Nature Connections conference Richardson draws attention to mental health, the psychology of connectedness and meaning making in nature, bringing the preceding arguments together and attempting to move them forward. Summing up he says, “given the interconnected relationship we’ve seen between humans and (the rest of) nature it seems no surprise that with nature, and nature’s beauty, in decline, our wellbeing is in decline. There is hope though; as well as being good for our own wellbeing, nature connectedness explains a huge chunk of our pro-nature behaviours” (Richardson 2018, blog) whilst “recognizing and improving our relationship with the wider natural world can make a real difference” (Ibid). These statements echo his previous concerns published in the 2015 RSPB Report.

Embedding nature connection within our social norms is best started in childhood and the positive benefits to attainment provide evidence to support such an approach through school. Rather than frame nature as a resource and place for occasional outdoor learning, there is a need for a more embedded and nuanced approach to ensure greater connection to nature. Research suggests that this approach should ensure contact with nature that highlights the enjoyment and wonder of it, while recognizing our place within the natural world in order to build empathy and a sense of responsibility for it. (Richardson 2016, pg. 21)

This recent report goes on to state that, “further research is also necessary to identify how else nature can best be brought into a child’s life, in order to improve their connection to nature and achieve the associated benefits of well-being, educational attainment and pro-nature behaviours” (Ibid).

Three challenges for (environmental) education

Working as an interdisciplinary researcher and as a teacher with a limited experience of the practices of outdoor and environmental education I have sought out practitioners from the discipline with whom I can develop my understanding, sensitivities and arguments whilst being supported by field specific expertise and scholarship. Sean Blenkinsop (2018) is one such practitioner, an environmental philosopher working at Simon Fraser University in Canada.

As a result of our joint participation in the wild pedagogies colloquium I was invited to collaborate on a position paper challenging key aspects of environmental education. Blenkinsop's challenges are sobering and call for a radical rethink of pedagogical approaches for nature-connection. The resulting paper, '*The relational, the critical, and the existential: three strands and accompanying challenges for extending the theory of environmental education*' (2018), published in a recent edition of the Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education, "proceeds through three pedagogical strands – the relational, the critical, and the existential – that have been woven through the practices of many outdoor and environmental educators for the last sixty years" (Blenkinsop & Ford 2018, pg. 319). Reporting on the three strands is crucial in orientating this current work.

The paper continues by offering "a considered push with the goal of inspiring possibility and taking pedagogy further. Each push is described within the context of a Wild Pedagogies touchstone" (Ibid). Importantly for the work at hand the paper takes critical aim at several taken-for-granted aspects of environmental education undermining much of the current thinking surrounding the how (and potentially why) of bringing about 'nature connection' and its supposed benefits.

This idea of building relationship is foundational to a large swathe of outdoor and environmental education and the field has a great deal of pedagogical skill here. Yet, intriguingly in this day and age of diversity, it appears that the trajectory to environmental action might not require the obvious childhood connection (Malone 2015). It also appears that richly immersive childhoods aren't sufficient as there are multitudes of people who have had them and yet are failing to act in any significant way. (Blenkinsop & Ford 2018, pg. 321)

Blenkinsop argues that, "simply placing children into natural or semi-natural locations either on their own or under the guidance of a caring adult, whilst a significant step, does not appear to be enough to change their behaviour significantly" (Ibid). We can

take this statement to mean that despite being exposed to the wild world there may be no corresponding deepening of relationship.

Simply plunking children into natural or semi-natural places either on their own or with the accompaniment and guidance of a caring, nature oriented adult, whilst a significant step, is not enough to stem the tide of environmental degradation and destruction. (Blenkinsop & Ford 2018, p. 321)

This argument is compelling – yet one that creates a certain amount of pedagogical tension for me. It seems to agree with an article by Francis Gilbert (1999) arguing that ‘pupils cannot be expected to discover nature by themselves’ (Gilbert in Barnett & Scruton 1999, pg. 295) despite the papers apparent commitment to the heuristic which is placed at the heart of wild pedagogies (Jickling et al 2018).

Responding to the challenges of the paper and the expertise of Blenkinsop, that there may be other ways of bringing children, young people and adults into a substantial relationship with the natural world, and that the wild world itself may have the capacity to act as an agent in this relationship, are unresolved and are here worth further exploration.

The paper raises questions that have contributed to a sharpening of my own research questions. “First there is this question of relationship, of how it is developed, nurtured, and practiced over a lifetime. What can/does a mature adult relationship with the myriad denizens of the more-than-human world look like? What are the tools that are needed to sustain relationship and how are they supported and developed in learners?” (Blenkinsop & Ford 2018, pg. 322).

This exploration, of what happens, and what might happen, when young people enter into wild experiences and wild places, is claimed to underpin the whole outlook of this enquiry. What will be presented later from one of the case studies in particular provides a direct response to how this “relationship needs to be considered an active and ongoing practice, one that matures and deepens over time, one that must needs be nurtured and focused on, and not one that is easily forgotten, fallen out of, or laid to waste” (Ibid).

The specific nature of this example arising from my research, and going some way to suggesting a way forward for this work, this practice, can be considered to arise in a contemporary ‘rite of passage’ experience and is conceptually introduced here ahead of the account of the case itself.

Ritual, ceremony, vision quests - the indigenous wild

Thomas Berry suggested that those looking for ways of bringing young people and adults into a substantial relationship with the wild world should look to what he described as “the fourfold wisdom” to guide us into the future (Berry 1999, p. 176), the first of which he names as indigenous wisdom.

I return here to the arguments of Berry and lean further on his proposals, as he was open about his debt to Indigenous traditional knowledge, rituals and practices and the need for it in any contemporary transformation of education. As my own study intersects with this area, as I enter into the field of enquiry itself, it seems essential to provide a succinct overview ahead of presenting the case itself.

In ‘*The Great Work*’ (1999) Berry advocates for a re-visioning of the human presence on Earth and for a reimagining of how education might permit us to “understand where we are, and how we got here” in an attempt to move toward a “mutually enhancing mode of human dwelling on the planet” (Berry 1999, pg. ix). Yet where might we look to permit us to discover education and pedagogy that seeks to generate a mutually enhancing mode of human dwelling on the planet? Berry advocates for the indigenous.

Throughout his work Berry returns to the symbolism, rituals, and celebrations practiced by the first nation’s people of America, but it is clear he includes all indigenous peoples in this declaration.

Indigenous wisdom is distinguished by its intimacy with and participation in the functioning of the natural world. (Berry 1999, p. 178)

Specific instances of this intimacy and participation are provided across the body of Berry’s work.

The various tribes are renewing their vision quest. The sweat-lodge ceremonies are being performed once again, even in prisons, where there is a special need for this renewal experience.(Berry 1988, p. 186).

Berry concludes his plea in *The Great Work* by urging that “as the years pass it becomes ever more clear that dialogue with native peoples here and throughout the world is urgently needed to provide the human community with models of a more integral human presence on Earth” (Berry 1999, p. 180).

The concept of a vision quest, or a rite of passage as it is more frequently described, is difficult to summarise for an audience unfamiliar with its historical precedents and problematic due to its tendency to be culturally misappropriated. Yet it is to these contexts that I have been drawn and where I have sought to witness these potential models for encounter and transformation as suggested by Berry. Adequately covering the history and attendant concerns and critiques of the rites of passage or vision quest lie beyond the capacity of this current enquiry. However as one of the sites selected for research claims to incorporate a rites of passage ceremony it is critical to sketch an outline of this cultural practice ahead of presenting the detailed account from the field.

Rites of passage

The concept of ‘rites de passage’ was developed by the French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1909) and continues to be associated with the discipline of anthropology (Monaghan & Just 2000). Rites of passage appear to

Categorise those rites or rituals which mark the transition of humans from one stage of life to another... Under the category of rites of passage van Gennep also identified three sub-categories: rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation. (Hinnells, 1995, pg. 426)

The anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) was influenced by the work of Van Gennep (1960). Turner built on the ideas of separation and progressed the concept of the liminal, or threshold, as essential elements of these experiences. Traditional rites ceremonies often include time spent immersed in nature, with periods of enforced solitude, leading to transformative, possibly transfiguring and altered states of consciousness and reality. Rites of passage as associated with anthropology in more general terms hinge on notions of the bounded, of boundaries and border crossings between one state and another (Atkinson 2017). Rites of passage are generally

Seen as aids to assist the movement from one set of responsibilities to another, or to assist the group, family or tribe to come to terms with the transition or separation of one of its members and the anxiety such a transition may cause. This is especially the case when associated with death... (Hinnells 1995, pg. 426)

The poet Jane Hirshfield provides a useful summary of the ideas of Turner, rites of passage initiations and the liminal in her essay '*Writing and the Threshold Life*' (1998).

Turner describes the liminal as the time and space of transition integral to all rites of passage. Entering this condition, a person leaves behind his or her old identity and dwells in a threshold state of ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy. Only afterward may the initiate enter into new forms of identity and relationship, rejoicing the everyday life of the culture – but now as an adult or married person, as healer or holder of clan secrets. (Hirshfield 1998, pg. 204)

Critically for the current enquiry these rites typically take place in wild places and perhaps can be considered wild in terms of the activity that the participant may endure.

Possessing nothing, they descend into invisibility and darkness, and – symbolically or literally - abandon both the physical and the ideological structure of society for a wilderness experience. (Hirshfield 1998, pg. 204)

Broadly speaking the context of indigenous community rites appear to have historically been enmeshed within the wild world as suggested above by Berry. It is important to consider these rites experiences within this wilder context, as the experiences may be potentially oppositional in intention and perspective in contrast to the Western contemporary world of colonisation, consumption and control.

Hirshfield suggests that the intention of such indigenous, wild, experiences were prefaced on more than a reconstruction of the self.

More is changed during the threshold period than simply the understanding of the self: free of all usual roles, a person experiences community differently as well. The liminal is not opposite to, but the necessary companion of, identity and particularly – a person who steps outside her usual position falls away from any singular relationship to others and into oneness with the community as a whole. Within the separateness of liminality, connectedness itself is remade. (Ibid)

With this in mind a question arises: beyond the possibility of experiencing the direct human community differently is it possible that a participant situated within the liminal will experience an enlarged sense of community, one that brushes against the great common world suggested by Dewey?

This links clearly to the potential of wild experiences to engender learning, understanding and perhaps a growth of knowledge or a refreshed perspective. It is due to these potential educational aspects that many of those involved in this emerging practice (as it has mutated from its historical indigenous origins) desire scholarship, as

this work is under researched and very little is reported about what the tangible results may actually be for contemporary participants. There appear to be exceptional cases, with some historical accounts (Ross 1989; Herbert 1997) and a significant number of American adaptations (Plotkin 2007; Macy 2008) that may act as useful comparisons but nothing substantial in the UK where rites of passage work is now growing (for example Band of Brothers 2019).

Jay Griffiths draws attention to the relevance of the rite of passage, or quest, in a chapter titled '*The Woods and the Quest*' in her previously discussed work *Kith* (2014). Summoning many strands from the enquiry thus far Griffiths says, "Today's children are in many ways bereft of animals and nature, isolated and lonely, and they do not have the opportunities for the learning which happens in these positive solitudes which all quest traditions emphasise" (Griffiths 2013, pg. 270).

Griffiths concludes her chapter by claiming that there is a "there has been a resurgence of attention to that threshold in various brave commitments to help young people to make meaning of their lives" and points towards the work of the American rites of passage organisation, School of Lost Borders (Foster & Little 1992).

Through the work of, for example, Steven Foster and Meredith Little and the beautifully named School of Lost Borders, and so many others that deserve mention, young people may discover how to lose their child self and find their adult self, to understand their medicine and to know their gift. (Griffiths 2013, pg. 271)

I encountered *Kith* in 2014 ahead of embarking on this research, feeling convinced of Griffith's passionate plea for extending the relationship between children and the wild but unable to find the focused, persistent research or voices of the children participating to provide me with anything like a complete picture or to provide a sense of confidence in the practices (Stake 2010). The notion of the quest as an educative endeavour is one that is here claimed to remain unresolved and under-researched across the available literature something that the current enquiry seeks to resolve.

Nature in mind

The recent publication of '*Nature in Mind*' (2018) by the systemic psychotherapist Roger Duncan is to be celebrated as an attempt to draw several of these strands together. Intriguingly Duncan presages his enquiry through the work of Bateson

and in particular his “call to understand patterns that connect mind and nature” (Duncan 2018, pg. 2)

Duncan’s work includes sketches of the areas that will be presented later within this enquiry (including an overview of a series of evaluations made by Essex University regarding the Wilderness Foundation UK’s Turnaround project). However there remains a shortage of testimony from young people engaged in these practices (no young people testify as part of his account of vision questing) alongside a perceptible lack of criticality, which is perhaps an understandable side-effect of the desire to present the positive outcomes for those engaged in these somewhat obscure practices.

The chapter ‘*Soul encounter beyond the borders of language*’ presents the work of Foster and Little (1992) the architects of the School of Lost Borders and focuses on rites of passage, symbols, eco-therapy and notions of ‘soulcraft’ (Plotkin 2007). Importantly for this study there are three brief accounts of participant voices presented towards the end of the chapter. They are positive in tone, appear to be the accounts of adults however they are light on detail and have no further information or critical interpretation.

Duncan concludes his chapter by saying, “the therapeutic value of soul work within nature that can be experienced during soul encounter such as vision fast is less well understood” (Duncan 2018, pg. 74). His book finishes by commenting on the “renewed interest in reinstating adolescent rites of passage, often linked to the women’s movement and the men’s movement and some very beautiful work being done by groups who support young people through this threshold phase, through camping trips and solo time in wilderness settings, as well as community work (Duncan 2018, pg. 111)

Overlooked by the encouraging work of Duncan (2018) is the possibility of considering the process of the rite of passage as a possible form of social engineering, something that Turner (1969) was at pains to point out. With this in mind the recent work of Blumenkrantz (2016) as it connects with the UK’s *National Citizenship Service* provides an instructive example. In ‘*Coming of Age the Rite Way: youth and community development through rites of passage*’ (2016) the author David Blumenkrantz develops the traditional practices of the ‘rite of passage’ for a contemporary audience.

Intriguingly the recent UK *National Citizenship Service* (NCS) appears to be influenced by Blumenkrantz’s work, with his thesis on the subject “central to informing and encouraging Britain’s national citizen service as a rite of passage scheme” (Blumenkrantz 2016, pg. 241). The notion of a recent National Citizenship movement

appears to have been informed by writing about Rites of Passage but there has been no substantial research work undertaken or recorded by those responsible for the NCS. This is perhaps understandable as this interpretation of rites of passage may serve to act as an enculturation strategy, one that considers “the disappearance of such rites” to have “led to the disorientation of individuals and societies and may be the cause of disruption” (Hinnells 1995, pg. 427), something that the NCS seeks to correct.

Despite making its way into Government agendas for national citizenship service there is currently no rites of passage qualitative research into the experiences of rites of passage being undertaken in the UK. This raises several key issues for me. In particular that I wish to remain sensitive to the possibility that aspects of the transactions, experiences and programmes that I witness may attempt to correct, dominate, and acculturate.

This relates to another issue I have with wild pedagogies, as it coalesces into a series of prompts and pushes, is that it could be perceived as a re-writing, indeed an overlooking, of pre-existing knowledge and practices. Rather than come up with a set of new ideas arising from philosophical notions, would it not be wiser to first investigate what is already taking place, has already taken place as Berry insists?

Considering the responsibility and intention of the educator will be of upmost significance here. The following chapter seeks to further develop the theoretical position of the research in order to guide the enquiry and provide a clear rationale for the selection of the sites visited.

Before discussing the methodological position and procedures of the enquiry a brief summary of this chapter as a whole along that indicates possible research questions that seek to elucidate the possible gaps in existing knowledge is presented.

Summarising the review and possible research questions developed by this chapter that respond to the perceived gaps:

This chapter began by exploring the current situation facing young people within institutionalised education and their access to the wild world whilst exposing a potential link between education, enclosure and reported declines in mental health. The chapter continued by discussing current calls for children to be ‘re-wilded’ along with what appears to be limited opportunities available for young people to engage in wild landscapes and wild practices. This raises several potential questions: what might the

educational value be, if any, of wild experiences? What might be learnt through wild experiences? And how might young people benefit from wild experiences?

The chapter then drew attention to the philosophical concept of wild in relation to the themes and intentions of the enquiry ahead of developing and evaluating the emergent concept of 'wild pedagogy'. This included arguments for the inclusion of spontaneity, self-will, and autonomy.

This review also revealed that the Forest School movement, which is linked to this study, and often most closely associated with Scandinavia, has in fact a history of development in the UK (The New Forest School) and that the impulse to offer children and young people a Forest School style experience is, in part, guided by notions of character building and acculturation (e.g. to shape and correct behaviour as opposed to bring children into relationship with the natural world for its own sake). These were striking discoveries that put the research into context. It also raises the question of whether wild experiences promote social or cultural confidence or agency and if so, in what ways (for example personal development, transformation or leadership)? Do wild experiences impact on the ability of young people to engage in formal education, and if so, how?

Perhaps the most surprising thing uncovered through research into the rites of passage, was that a nationwide programme, The National Citizenship Service (NCS), a programme for young people initiated and supported by the central UK Government, could take its inspiration from indigenous practices, practices referred to as rites of passage, despite no overt admission that these elements were connected. The chapter concluded by discussing the development of connection with the possibility that indigenous practices, such as rites of passage, might have something powerful to contribute to the development of wild relationships? This raises the question of whether providing young people with wild experiences promote deeper relationships with the natural world, and if a wilder pedagogy is possible, or desirable?



Chapter 4

Into the Field, Mountain and River of the Enquiry:

Methods and Procedures

This chapter revisits the research questions that have been generated over the previous review and presents the methods used to undertake an empirical study in wild programmes and wild conditions.

Conducting the enquiry

As an educational researcher I am committed to finding out how things work in education (Stake 2010). By engaging in what Clough & Nutbrown (2007) call ‘radical reading’ my immersion in related literature, philosophy, existing research and reporting has led to a renewed interest in education as it intersects with the wild, an interest that extends from my previous Masters level research (Ford 2014).

Seeking to find out how things are working in this specific field, of education as it intersects with the wild, has led to the formulation of a central question, or aim guiding my research:

What happens when young people have wild (learning) experiences within and alongside their formal education?

Robert Stake states that, “your research question should be more important to you than your research method. What you are studying should be more important than how you are studying it” (Stake 2010, pg. 71). My central question and aim became a talisman in navigating through what often felt like uncertain and unsettling territory, both physically and philosophically.

As a result of the wide reading into education, young people and the wild, and my investigation into, and subsequent refining of, the emerging concept/philosophy of ‘wild pedagogy’, a series of potential subsidiary questions have taken shape as formulated in the preceding literature.

They are suggested as:

- What is the educational value, if any, of wild experiences?
- What might be learnt through wild experiences?
- How might young people benefit from wild experiences?
- Do wild experiences promote social or cultural confidence or agency and if so, in what ways (for example personal development, transformation or leadership)?
- Do wild experiences impact on the ability of young people to engage in formal education, and if so, how?
- Could providing young people with wild experiences promote deeper relationships with the natural world?
- Is a ‘wilder pedagogy’ possible or even desirable?

Pursuing the research questions

In order to pursue these questions and follow the wider aim of the enquiry I conducted three ethnographic case studies. These case studies were of educational programmes happening in wild places and in wildernesses. The educational programmes were provided by existing organisations that expressed commitment both to the wild and to education.

As has been discussed in the preceding chapters, this study, whilst significant in scope, cannot possibly hope to categorically make a claim on either of those terms – as they are and will continue to be contested beyond the scope of this research (research that remains predominantly empirical).

It is important to repeat that this study considers the term wild to be related to the etymological roots ‘will’ and ‘self-willed’ alongside notions of spontaneity and liberty, and that these interpretations of the word are validated by the view of traditional land based cultures that the term ‘wild’ is a construct of the Global North and that there is no such thing as the ‘wild’. Rather what the Global North defines as ‘wild’ is perceived by land-based cultures to be the wellspring of all life and “the sacred place where life begins” (Gwich’in Steering Committee 2019; Le Guin in More 2016).

Despite working in unusual physical and pedagogic settings it was possible to maintain some consistency of approach during the conduct of the research, both philosophically and methodologically.

When it came to conducting the enquiry and recording data these consistent elements included: methodological outlook and position, perspective, scale, depth, participant focus, researcher involvement, procedures of recording, style of reporting, and the overall interpretive approach.

Methodological outlook and position

Methodology is here understood to be the underpinning philosophical orientation of the researcher with the methods being the associated techniques and procedures for obtaining the research material, the so-called data or “thing given” (Van Manen 1990; Stake 2010).

It is felt to be essential that the methodology and methods of the project openly reflect the values of the researcher and the intended research. As Van Manen suggests, “the method one chooses ought to maintain a certain harmony with the deep interest that makes one an educator (a parent or teacher) in the first place” (Van Manen 1990, pg. 2). This congruence, between researcher and research, will be looked at in more detail later in this chapter.

The methodological outlook and position of the enquiry can broadly be claimed as qualitative in that it “relies primarily on human perception and understanding” (Stake 2010, pg.11). This outlook is informed by a commitment to human-centred education (Rogers 1994; Gill & Thomson 2017) and my recent thinking about the potential (and growing) need for a ‘more-than-human’ education (Abram 1996; Weston 2004; Morton 2017; Wilson 2017) as has been explored in the introductory chapters.

My rationale for using qualitative methods to gather data is due to my concern with being able to represent personal experience arising from the particular situation whilst respecting and exploring the perspectives of the participants themselves. This approach is consistent with the values of the ‘human-centred’ educator and researcher (Gill & Thomson 2017).

Perspective

In order to consider the research aim of ‘what happens’ during involvement with the programmes selected, it was appropriate to place attention of perspective on the micro rather than the macro. This entailed entering into programmes offered by organisations and the experiences of those directly engaged, rather than concentrating on the

organisations themselves, for example remotely reviewing websites and evaluations. “Qualitative researchers usually prefer the close-up view” (Stake 2010, pg.19). Considering the programmes as ‘cases’ assisted in maintaining a perspective where the programmes were seen as unique situations rather than general instances.

The scale of the research was small by design and by necessity. The programmes and contexts that I was accepted into as a research-participant are not yet part of the mainstream educational landscape. This limited public adoption ensured that the programmes were human-scale, a choice also underpinned by my methodological position, one that seeks to understand rather than generalise (Stake 2010; Zimmerman 2015).

Being immersed in the entire lifespan of each programme ensured that the research work was in-depth, and provided a rich amount of detail in terms of observation, conversation, access and multiple sources of evidence. This immersion entailed accompanying the participants through every possible moment of their involvement with the activity and their experiences. This was a lived commitment that provided a rationale for the studies being conceived of as ‘ethnographic’.

Ethnographic research design and reporting

Describing the procedures that I undertook during my research and the commitments that I made to those whom I accompanied and spent time in community with calls to mind the discipline of anthropology and the methodological term ‘ethnography’ as ways of knowing. Ethnography is a branch, a method, of anthropology (the study of human beings) and is closely connected with the term ‘participant-observation’ (Monaghan & Just 2000; Hendry & Underdown 2015; Engelke 2017).

The advent of ethnographic research is claimed by Hammersley (2014) to have its “historical origins in the ways in which human beings gain information about their world in everyday life. The more specific historical origins of ethnography lie in the writing of travelers concerned to inform their fellows about other societies” (Hammersley 2014, pg. 2). Whilst acknowledging that the conduct of my research, that is its methods, are indebted to certain features of ethnographic practice, it is these ‘historical’ (and potentially ideological) origins that I wish to critically distance myself from.

A defining characteristic of the ethnographer is time ‘immersed in the field’ often living exclusively with an individual, group or community. My work and conduct

then certainly has echoes of anthropology and of the ethnographic. Most informed readers would perhaps think that the study was ethnographic and perhaps technically it remains so. However I wish to resist associating with the term completely.

Tracing the etymology of 'ethnographic' and looking critically at the story of the term, the practice of drawing a picture of the exotic 'other' can itself be seen to contain echoes of empire and imperialism in its impulse to "make studies of the biological characteristics, languages and social lives of people whose lands had been 'discovered' by explorers" (Hendry & Underdown 2015, pg. 3).

Throughout all my site visits I agreed to participate rather than simply study, as one helping and supporting everyone involved, working alongside groups with my energies directed to supporting facilitation rather than inhabiting the role of a remote onlooker. At times this meant that I was removed from the action that I was most interested in witnessing, at others this meant being granted access to a much closer vantage point (for example collecting wood alongside those involved in the sites). This was an anticipated approach and one commonly known to anthropologists as 'participant-observation' (Malinowski, 1922).

What was unanticipated was the extent to which I would be compelled to hold the 'observer' in check whilst participating in, and of, the sites and experiences. This reached its culmination with the instruction that I set aside my research agenda in order to fully participate in the experience of the Sacred Fire Quest (hosted by the Helpers Mentoring Society) so that I might gain a more complete understanding of the experience from the inside rather than that of an interested third-party or onlooker. This complete immersion was insisted on if I was to facilitate and help others who may undergo the Fire Quest themselves and was a requisite for remaining in the field.

The most significant part of resisting ethnography it seems to me is the opportunity to generate and develop an ethical outlook with concrete actions that is wholly respectful of those that I encountered and entered into community with. This concern has been considered earlier in this chapter.

A defining characteristic of the ethnographer is time 'immersed in the field' often living exclusively with an individual, group or community. Although this was seen to inform my conduct it is not what motivated my search or activity.

The context of my proposed research necessitated (anticipated) the use of particular methods, or procedures for gathering datum, the thing given. These procedures were striking in their reflection of the methods of the ethnographic researcher. Martyn Hammersley, in his critical guide, *Reading Ethnographic Research* (2014), distils the

practice of ethnographic research down to its most common recurring features, reported here in full:

- a) People's behaviour is studied in everyday contexts, rather than under experimental conditions created by the researcher.
- b) Data are gathered from a *range* of sources, but observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones.
- c) The approach to data collection is 'unstructured' in the sense that it does not involve following a detailed plan set up at the beginning; nor are the categories used for interpreting what people say and do pre-given or fixed. This does not mean that the research is unsystematic; simply that initially the data are collected as raw in form, and on as wide a front, as feasible.
- d) The focus is usually a single setting or group, of relatively small scale. In life history research the focus maybe even be a single individual.
- e) The analysis of the data involves interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions and mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most. (Hammersley, 2014, pg. 18)

It is instructive to see how these features (everyday context, sustained observation, unstructured collection, single group, small scale, description and interpretation) resonate throughout the methods of my research.

This in-depth approach reflects the 'case study methodology' undertaken as the main method for capturing and analysing the 'wild experiences' of volunteer participants.

Case study

The sites of my enquiry were conceived of as a series of multiple 'cases'. Case study is here defined by Stake (2010) as "a bounded system". It is considered to be the method undertaken in order to portray "what it is like to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up and 'thick description' of participants lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for a situation" (Cohen et al 2005). It has been used in this study with the intention of gaining a deeper insight into the contextual factors that impact on the experiences of the individuals in particular locations during particular points of time.

Yin (1989) states that "case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" and that the case study method is

‘preferred in examining contemporary events, when the relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated. The case study’s unique strength is in its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence, documents, arte-facts, interviews and observations’ (Yin 1989, pg. 14).

The research proposed then fits the definition given of the case study in that it “is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within it’s real life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources are used” (Ibid).

Another compelling reason behind the selection of the case study method is highlighted as being the use of multiple sources of evidence.

The opportunity to use as many different sources of evidence... far exceeds that in other research strategies. (Yin 1989, pg. 96)

In regards to dealing with the data analysis, multiple sources of evidence support the development of converging lines of enquiry, a process of triangulation. Thus, any finding or conclusion in case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode. (Yin 1989, pg. 97)

Despite approaching the communities as bounded ‘cases studies’ as I became more immersed in the sites I became increasingly aware that the boundaries of activity, relation, knowledge and transformation were more porous than I had originally anticipated.

Focus and involvement

This up-close and in-depth experience with intimate group sizes reinforced my focus on the participants over my own experience. This was a philosophical and methodological choice and will later be claimed to be pedagogic (rather than auto-ethnographic for example), becoming an essential element of the methods and methodology overall (Van Manen 1990).

A loosely ‘ethnographic’ approach meant that as a researcher I became deeply involved in the life of the programmes being studied. This had implications for my identity and for the research outlook as will be reported (Atkinson 2017). Despite reservations, the language and terminology of ethnography and anthropology are drawn on during the study as they are often found to relate to the settings and activities in ways

that have not yet been adequately covered in educational literature (for example ‘Rites of Passage’ which currently remains an anthropological term rather than an educational one).

Procedures of observing and recording

The procedures of recording what I observed at the sites were also at times informed by ethnographic methods. These included the notion of the ‘participant-observer’ that will be explored in more detail in the following chapter as this approach has a critical history that requires exploration and challenge.

Procedurally I recorded notes of my observations and conversations by hand. These notes were then ‘written up’ on return from the sites and turned into ‘field texts’ (Van Maanen 2011). This was often the next day but sometimes this was not possible until after the completion of a programme. When I had the opportunity to record conversations I did. These conversations were then transcribed in their entirety. I sought to gather as much related material as possible from the sites themselves. This included promotional and managerial material created by the organisations themselves and photographs, videos, writing and songs created by the participants and instructors.

These methods can all be claimed as consistent with the outlook of the qualitative researcher and with the procedure of the case study. “Observation, interviewing, and examination of artefacts (including documents) are the most common methods of qualitative research” (Stake 2010, pg. 20). However despite the procedures of recording being consistent overall they were limited by the nature of the programmes themselves and this introduced discrepancies. For example during one of the programmes I was ‘not permitted’ to make any physical notes at all. The impact of this will be explored later in the enquiry.

Style of reporting

I endeavoured to maintain a consistent style of reporting that focused on the descriptive (Opie 2004; Atkinson 2017) over the emotional (yet included room for the emotional). “The best qualitative research is seldom about how people feel; it is about *how* things happen, *how* things are working” (Stake 2010, pg. 63). As a researcher-participant, away from home and family, my encounters on the programmes did affect me as a person. As a result of this immersion I attempted to separate my description (of the

actors, activity, settings) from my own personal experience, which I also took care to record. However as Rogers (1980) reassures it is not always necessary to separate out feeling for a congruent ‘academic’ account to emerge.

My voice

My voice permeates the accounts and the enquiry overall. This is not accidental but rather an intentional choice in order that I might make my thinking visible. This is consistent with contemporary ethnographic research practices discussed by Atkinson (2017). This personal voice is at times sustained in several sections where it is felt that my direct experience aides the process of analysis and interpretation.

Reporting on my own experience makes it possible to glimpse moments that were on occasion not directly observable or accessible. For example I personally undertook the Sacred Fire Quest, an experience that is conducted in solitude and beyond observation. It is anticipated that the sharing of this practice from my own position, brings the experience closer into view for the reader, bridging the gap between the participants private experience with the structure of the practice itself.

Looking at the study from a distance I can perceive where I crossed and witnessed the crossing of borders and boundaries to find myself amongst the “small but significant number” of ethnographic researchers who “have submitted themselves to initiation ceremonies in studies of local belief systems” (p. 86).

Such a process of commitment and immersion can allow the ethnographer to comprehend, by direct experience, the physical sensations that accompany rites of passage (such as separation and isolation, bodily preparations). By seeking out conversion themselves, the ethnographers are able to gain access to otherwise esoteric, private mysteries. They are able to document the physical and personal experiences that the rites occasion. (p. 86)

Alongside the participants, the ‘esoteric, private mysteries’ that I witnessed and accessed during the process of the research enquiry impacted on my personhood leading to moments of personal transformation and revelation.

This impact is another critical justification for revealing the entanglement of my experience with the sites and actors themselves. With this in mind I have attempted to remain as visible in the research reporting as possible whilst resisting promoting my

own voice, returning to the voices of the young people as a means of guarding against being overwhelmed by my own shifting and evolving position.

The ethnographer Keith Basso (1996) recommends working towards understanding what was witnessed and recorded during time in the field by portraying the uneven process of moving from encounter, through puzzlement, towards clarification, and elucidation, as a chronological process (which in ethnographic terms it is). This formula is harnessed in the presentation of the accounts from the field and later through a discussion of the overall enquiry by way of an exploration of a critical incident from the field and works to include both my own voice as researcher alongside the more pressing concerns of the participants.

Interpretive approach

My interpretive approach is informed by a commitment to appreciation of experience, and a desire to understand, and this outlook could be said to be leading my enquiry. It is this commitment to understanding, as opposed to explanation or assessment that I wish to pursue throughout the enquiry (Hendrick von Wright in Stake 2010). It is a methodological and pedagogical choice, to seek the understandings of others by listening to and interpreting the informal appreciation of experience. It is a choice that is not wholly led by personal interest or investment but also as a result of the perceived needs of the enquiry. “Qualitative research tends to be an effort to generate descriptions and situational interpretations of phenomena that the researcher can offer colleagues, students, and others for modifying their own understandings of phenomena” (Stake 2010, pg. 57). As a result of this commitment I have endeavoured to share my writing directly with the organisations and participants whenever possible.

Multiple sources of evidence

Another powerful reason behind the selection of the case study method is highlighted as being the use of multiple sources of evidence. “The opportunity to use as many different sources of evidence... far exceeds that in other research strategies” (Yin 1989, pg. 96). In regards to dealing with the data analysis, multiple sources of evidence support, “the development of converging lines of enquiry, a process of triangulation. Thus, any finding or conclusion in case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if

it is based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode” (Yin 1989, pg. 97).

Despite pressure from the organisations, I resisted providing immediate assessment of the sites maintaining instead a commitment to participant meaning and understanding. Here I was emboldened by Rogers’ assertion that, “assessment studies are not heuristic, do not lead forward. They offer almost no clues to the elements we need to know to improve (therapy) or to understand its process” (Rogers 1980, pg. 311).

Selecting the organisations, the programmes and the participants

As has been illustrated in the previous chapters there appears to be few opportunities for young people to engage in wild learning experiences within or alongside their formal education. At first it was speculated that there might not be many settings where this work could be encountered and explored. However overtime a list of significant possibilities grew.

Selecting organisations, groups and instructors who were engaging participants in wild places and or wild experiences led to organisations who have placed the preservation and conservation of the wild and the natural world at the centre of their activity. This in turn led me to The John Muir Trust and the Wilderness Foundation UK. Seeking organisations, groups or instructors who were working specifically with teenagers in wild settings led me to The Circle of Life Rediscovery programme, The Helpers Mentoring Society and Wild Child. It was critical that these sites were based in the United Kingdom as this was found to be where research in this area is underdeveloped.

I attempted to find organisations and places that were offering ‘wild’ education programmes, programmes that were situated in the wild or wilderness, and that declared ‘the wild’ world to be at the heart of their mission. It was essential that suitable organisations hold an established record of safe practice, ethical conduct and public presence. Once selected the task was then to find the highest quality programmes that were explicitly ‘educational’ in their scope and remit offered through the organisations. Where possible I sought to work with organisations whose educational mandate had at least an echo of a ‘humanist’ approach that would be congruent with my position as a researcher and pedagogue.

I freely acknowledge that there were many other ways that I could have gone about doing this work, other sites that could have been chosen and other questions that

could have been asked. This transparency, and researcher reflexivity, is seen as a strength of the enquiry's design. For example I chose not to do 'action research' as I had for my previous Masters level research as this would have not enabled me to look at things that were already happening and in so doing perhaps bring to light positive stories of alternative approaches to education.

Looking at wild educational experiences

Seeking to study what happens when young people participate in wild experiences within and alongside their formal education led me to finally select and explore three main organisations, entering into one or more of their programmes.

Despite the wild being an unusual and under-represented area of educational practice (and as previously demonstrated, educational research) there appears to be a steadily growing number of organisations that are offering 'wild' educational experiences (in wild settings, and with wild agendas) to young people, some of which are beginning to gain national and international recognition.

Significantly these offers appear to be focused on young people around tertiary level (approximately 14 to 18 years of age), most often at the point where young people transition from the end of Secondary School into a College or Sixth Form setting. This loosely reflects the age of those undertaking traditional 'rites of passage' experiences as has been alluded to in previous chapters.

As we shall see, the explicit intention of these experiences appears to move beyond the current model of the Forest School (where time outdoors is often spent as an adjunct to the more pressing concerns of the classroom see: Leather 2018), seeking instead to engage young people (and adults) in what may be loosely coined 'nature-connection' or 'nature-reconnection' by immersing them in practices that would not be accessible or appropriate for early years children (who currently remain the predominant focus for Forest School practice).

These 'nature-connection' practices included for example: fasting, sleep deprivation, working with dangerous tools, and spending time alone in remote places (amongst other activities), all of which appear to be more concurrent with a 'rites of passage' model or sequence and would be unlikely to be accessed by infants or early years children.

In addition I also visited a fourth site as I was completing my cycle of visits to the main programmes under study. This was 'Wild Child', an independent organisation

who offered an exclusively male ‘Boys Rites of Passage Summer Camp’. This visit was intended to act as an opportunity to look at and reflect on ‘continuity of experience’ (Dewey 1938), ‘plausibility’ (Clandinin & Connelly 2000), and ‘confidence’ (Stake 2010) as it impacted on interpreting the study overall. I was unable to participate in the fullness of the sequence of the Summer Camp, which lasted a week, but was able to visit as the programme reached its conclusion where I had the opportunity to witness the boys prepare to leave camp, talking and listening to their accounts of the experience.

The final selection of organisations that were studied in depth were as follows:

- The John Muir Trust.
- The Wilderness Foundation UK.
- Helpers Mentoring Society.

More detail regarding the sites proposed for investigation

Opportunities for young people to engage in wild experiences alongside their formal education in the UK are currently uncommon, but they do exist. With this limitation in mind three sites have been accessed as locations for research: The John Muir Trust UK, The Wilderness Foundation UK and Helpers Mentoring Society. It is not intended that these multiple sites be used to make comparisons against one another. Rather they have been carefully selected as representing a continuum of experience from relatively formal and structured (The John Muir Trust Award), relatively informal and unstructured (The Wilderness Foundation UK) to relatively informal and highly structured (Helpers Mentoring Society).

The real names of organisations, not pseudonyms, have been used throughout the reporting of the research. This choice has been made with the explicit agreement of the organisations as it was felt that it would be quite easy to locate the organisation through the description of activity given that there are so few organisations undertaking this kind of work in the public eye.

The John Muir Trust and The Wilderness Foundation UK are charitable organisations based in the UK that seek to provide young people access to programmes that will encourage valuable experiences of the wild. Both organisations publish evaluative reports detailing the outcomes of their programmes. These reports indicate that a core activity of the organisation is educational with specific groups targeted as potential participants. Importantly for this enquiry, as it is connected to The Freedom to

Learn Project, these include economically and socially disadvantaged young people. In the case of the Wilderness Foundation UK there is a focused programme called ‘TurnAround’ which is:

Designed to help vulnerable young people in social care. The Wilderness Foundation UK offers wilderness experiences and is involved in various social programmes to demonstrate how wilderness exposure facilitates the education and health of both individuals and the wider society. (Peacock, Hine, and Pretty 2009, pg. 1)

Crucially for the enquiry this is where a connection between wild experiences and formal education is to be found. These programmes are not designed to be experienced in the absence of other learning situations but rather to act as complimentary to the participant’s current experience of education and formal learning. In addition these sites have been selected for embracing and encouraging the agency and autonomy of those participating, with activities and programmes allowing for a range of interests, abilities and involvement.

The following is a brief overview further outlining the organisations and their selection. Each organisation and programme will be presented in more detail during the individual case study presentation chapters later in the enquiry.

The John Muir Trust Award Programme UK

The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme focused on wild places. It supports people to connect with, enjoy and care for nature, landscape, and the natural environment - wild places. It does this through a structured yet adaptable scheme.

The John Muir Trust Award has been selected as a site because:

It’s for people of all backgrounds and ages – groups, families and individuals. It’s non-competitive, inclusive and accessible. The John Muir Award was set up to promote educational, social and personal development through engagement with wild places and involvement in conservation. To encourage an active environmental approach within organizations and ensure that social circumstances don’t exclude people from opportunities to experience wild places. (John Muir Trust 2019)

The Wilderness Foundation UK

The Wilderness Foundation UK presents itself as “a registered charity dedicated to preserving the world’s last remaining wild places, through providing education and growing understanding of the importance of wilderness” (Wilderness Foundation UK 2018). The Wilderness Foundation UK has been selected as a site because:

For over 30 years (they) have been connecting individuals with wild places through our varied programs, focused on personal development, transforming lives, respect of diversity and simplicity of experience. (Wilderness Foundation UK 2018)

The Helpers Mentoring Society

The Helpers Mentoring Society is an organisation with roots in the USA describing itself as “social enterprise delivering educational programs internationally to teach the cultural practices, helping people to live with hope and purpose so that all life thrives” (Helpers Mentoring Society 2018). The Helpers Mentoring Society has been selected as a site because:

The main focus of the organization is to provide the transformational experience and teachings of Advanced Connection Practices. These transformational experience and teachings are to heal the "Disconnection Sickness" (our deep sense of separation from self, nature, and each other) which afflicts our modern existence. (Helpers Mentoring Society 2018)

A continuum of ‘wild’ experiences

That these ‘wild’ experiences appear to take place on a continuum requires explanation. As shall be seen from the reporting of the sites, there does not appear to be a one-size-fits-all approach to these experiences, with organisations pursuing/adopting similar outlooks or philosophies rather than identical practices and educational transactions. Whilst there appears to be some overlap of intention (and techniques and tools), there remains a difference in approach and actual experiences offered, especially of the wild world and what might be considered as wild pedagogy. Whilst it is problematic to categorise these differences it is perhaps relevant to describe the continuum as existing from *wild and unstructured*, *wild and semi-structured*, to *wild and highly structured*.

The John Muir Trust programme may have been closest to the Forest School model in terms of tools and activity yet the pedagogic structure was almost entirely transparent/opaque (to the participants and at times to the associated, supporting instructors). All activity was unforced and unsolicited, always entirely by invitation, with the instructor encouraging complete freedom of choice within the allotted time spent together, even (and especially) if that meant that participants refused to engage with suggested activities.

The Wilderness Foundation UK participants spent time within a designated wilderness setting, on occasion briefly alone, as well as spending time indoors and outdoors alongside rural workers. The experience oscillated between structured encounters led by an Expedition Guide and unstructured, fluid time together in the wild. It was most comparable to current provision of outdoor excursions and adventure settings e.g. The Duke of Edinburgh Award and the Prince's Trust, having some loose association with each.

The Helpers Mentoring Society programme could be claimed to be the 'wildest' of the experiences whilst simultaneously being the most structured pedagogically, with participants entering into a 'rite of passage' experience. This experience included fasting, experiencing sleep deprivation, spending their entire encounter outside, in a remote setting, with significant time spent alone (minimum 12 hours) unguided, through the night, in the dark, immersed within the wild world with little or no comfort or luxuries apart from the tending of a personal campfire.

My commitment to the organisations, programmes and participants

My intention was to witness and participate in the whole life of the programmes being offered through the selected organisations. I was able to meet this intention not missing any sessions.

I spent one whole day every week for ten weeks accompanying a programme associated with the John Muir Trust. There was one main instructor who led the programme with a loose group of adult instructors also supporting when required. The programme was directed at disadvantaged young people and from an initial group of 9 a total of 6 young people aged between 16 and 21 participated in the whole programme.

I spent ten consecutive days accompanying a programme run by the Wilderness Society. There was one adult leader (the Chief Executive Officer of the Society) who led the programme accompanied by an expedition guide, along with a previous graduate

from the programme. The programme was directed at urban youth with little or no access to the countryside and a group of 6 young people aged between 14 and 17 participated in the whole programme.

I spent four long weekends of three days each with the Helpers Mentoring Society. The weekend programmes were led by a single teacher, but were also supported by a wide group of adult facilitators. The weekend programmes were directed at young people at the threshold of adulthood with up to twenty young people participating over the separate weekends. These young people were mainly aged between 14 and 18. These weekend programmes were also attended by groups of adults undergoing the same programme.

Sampling strategy

Everyone who participated in each of the programmes is represented in the presentation of the Case Studies. This inclusion is made possible by the scale of the programmes and the number of overall participants and seeks to enable reporting on the complexity of the programmes and experiences felt to be under scrutiny. This has been adhered to where possible however it has not been entirely possible with the programme offered by the Helpers Mentoring Society. This is due to the specific setting and practices of this programme that will be reported on in more detail within the case study.

The young participants ranged from the marginalised, through those embedded and coping with the system to those being home schooled or in independent, home-schooling settings. Predominantly this area of work in the United Kingdom is currently associated with young people who might be considered to be positioned at opposite ends of a spectrum – with most young people becoming involved in this type of experience through either lack of opportunity (deprivation) or its opposite, excess of opportunity (privilege).

In the attempt to find out how things were working I sought to witness the widest range of young people engaged in these ‘wild’ experiences, from those excluded from the school system, through those enmeshed in the state provision of education, to those that were outside of that system, perhaps home-schooled or in independent settings.

As young people on the edge of entering the workplace these positions cannot be attributed to the young people themselves but rather to the socio-economic and cultural factors surrounding the family and society in general. This is further complicated by the

frequency with which these experiences are paid for, especially where they take place alongside a formal curriculum.

Through discussions with all the main providers that I encountered (alongside reviewing similar provision - where it exists), it is a concern that those young people who are most able to 'cope' with their current experience of school and formal education are the least likely to have access to this kind of alternative learning encounter.

For example it is a frequent strategy in the first Key Stages of Secondary Schools to offer Forest School style sessions to those pupils identified as disruptive and/or disengaged from mainstream study programmes, whilst the majority of pupils not presenting as disruptive continue to attend formal lessons without being granted time outside of the curriculum, let alone literally outside (see Knight 2016).

With this in mind however it is not possible to draw easily demarcated lines separating one group, or individual, from another where they were encountered in the research settings that I participated in. Several young people who could be identified as privileged, and who were paying for their 'wild' experience, were also at standard Secondary Schools struggling with the demands of national examinations.

How I prepared to find out how things worked within these 'wild' educational settings

Becoming involved with the organisations and sites always required a thorough demonstration of my candidacy. These demands included that I provide an outline of my potential advocacy for the style of work being engaged in, along with published examples of that advocacy.

The programmes that I entered into can be considered relatively obscure in regards to educational practice (in the sense that they are not readily accessible or visible, widely reported or promoted) and there appear to be reasons for this.

I was always treated with the up-most caution on first making contact and had to work hard to gain trust and entry to the sites, and maintain that trust.

Gaining this trust took a variety of shapes for each organisation, from undergoing bespoke in-house training (John Muir Trust Leadership Training), successful completion of online certification (Wilderness Foundation UK Safeguarding Young People), CRB/DBS checks (all), evidence of prior engagement and writing (all),

to the successful integration and participation within a live setting (Helpers Mentoring Society initial visit).

Despite these (understandable) obstacles to entry being well documented across the research literature associated with qualitative methodologies (Stake 2010; Ely 2006) no amount of reading or pilot study can support the feeling of adequate preparation. In retrospect much of the undertaking was fraught, tacit and unpredictable, perhaps wholly prefaced on my own dispositions, temperament and presentation.

These tensions were somewhat mitigated by my background as a teacher, as a parent and as one who was attempting to develop a research methodology that was pedagogic in outlook and conduct. This often meant that my relationships with the children and young people were the most straightforward and judgement free. However ensuring the safety of the participants remained of paramount importance.

Confidentiality and anonymity of participants

All participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the activity and my position as a researcher. All participants were guaranteed a pseudonym (although many wanted to be named in the research). This was to ensure that privacy was respected and participants could feel at ease to discuss potentially sensitive experiences without any potential for feedback or identification.

The ethical concern and obstacle is connected to my awareness of potential for the power relationship to be unbalanced between participant and researcher. I sought to engage the participants in ways that minimized the issue. I made it clear to the participants that they did not have to take part and in no way would non-participation imbalance their experience.

The University of Hull ethical guidance recommends that researchers do NOT make guarantees to participants that they will be canvassed for their opinion on the data reporting however I have taken steps to revisit participants seeking their approval and their revised input.

What data would be captured and how?

The more time I spent in and around the sites that had invited me into them, the more I noticed that the sites was almost pre-literate, and exclusively oral, with speaking and listening the default rather than writing and recording. There were virtually no

documents, no notebooks, no pens, pencils or paper, and very little demonstration of mobile phones being used (this was especially true of the young participants who reported feeling relieved at being encouraged and able to dis-connect).

The juxtaposition between the bureaucratic nature of school and these sites was brought home to me when I asked the participants of the John Muir Trust programme to complete consent forms for the use of the material generated through our interactions. There were sighs from all present and what at first seemed to be a complete reluctance to engage with this reminder from the bureaucratic world. I recorded in my field notes:

I handed out my Research Agreement Forms with a personally addressed letter of explanation, one form for interviews, one form for parental consent, and one form for consent to use of images. There was a little sighing about what appeared to be the sheer volume of paperwork. This is most likely due to the simple fact that whilst we have been in the woods there has been no paperwork, no written or reading work of any kind. This is interesting in itself. (Personal Journal)

However

The following week upon arrival Lucas, Chris and John were waiting at the entrance and as soon as I approached they all handed me their consent forms, without me even having the chance to say hello. I took this to be a signal of approval from them. (Personal Journal)

Occasionally participants would have a notebook (exclusively adults), yet despite personal journaling being alluded to and encouraged it was rarely visible. The John Muir Trust as an organisation, and representatives of the Helpers Mentoring Society, would draw attention to 'journaling' as a potentially beneficial activity. However the John Muir Trust had recently stopped printing their bespoke journals for Trust participants as it was felt that they were being underused and neglected as a part of the process. It has been reported that "young people revealed how uncomfortable they felt about expressing themselves through writing" and diary style documents (Thomson & Holland in Delamont 2012, pg. 315).

In '*Storytelling and Wonder – On the Rejuvenation of Oral Culture*' the eco-philosopher David Abram sets out a vision for what he calls '*restorying*' (2005) and suggests that as a culture "we are making a grave mistake in our rush to wire every classroom, and to bring our children online as soon as possible" (Abrams 2005, pg. 1).

In conversation with Working Without Walls instructor Luke we alighted on the potential for stories as a medium with which to explore and possibly capture experience. Luke's experience in this context and his own personal struggle to catch rich information that would satisfy his employer and their funders opened up a dialogue between us as to how I was going to go about capturing this material. I had been asked this several times before, by Luke's Line Manager, by Marina when she asked me outright what methods I would be using, and at the Wilderness Foundation UK. All organisations wanted 'research' from me and they had all struggled with issues surrounding 'assessment, science, and proof'. Empathising with the challenge ahead Coralie, Education Officer with the John Muir Trust, sent me a recently published document addressing 'evaluating outdoor work'.

Stories were felt to form a significant part of the context, a part of the patchwork (Stake 2010), the technology and the craft of the camp, of being by a fire and having moments of quiet togetherness. They are also a congruent technique associated with ethnography (Basso 1996). Witnessing, hearing and constructing stories would therefore become an important element of how experiences of the programmes would be shared.

Interviews and conversations

Uncertainty remained about selecting or creating the appropriate vehicle for participants to share their experience with me (and each other). Despite feeling committed to the telling of stories I had on occasion encountered limits with this as a direct method rather than as a consequence appearing to be native to the settings themselves.

All the young people participating in what could be considered the more conventional sites, John Muir Trust and the Wilderness Foundation UK, without exception responded positively to the request to discuss their experience in the shape of a recorded interview. This was prefaced with my request for help, a genuine plea that appeared to dissolve any tension. From my experiences I would like to claim that people want to help, especially where they have been shown compassion, interest and treated with dignity and as equals.

The interviews themselves veered from unstructured to semi-structured to highly structured (Opie 2004). I asked every participant to share their experiences of school and an account of their experience within the wild place. Lines of enquiry then shifted depending on the setting and the experiences that had been shared in. The interviews,

despite having an imposed formality, often broke off and followed discursive patterns and tangents where appropriate, with me wanting to follow the lead of the one sharing, although this often morphed into a mutual dialogue.

The interviews without exception were moving and humbling with the young people sharing openly and often shedding light on puzzles that I was having trouble articulating or solving. Placing my trust in the young people was repaid countless times. This approach is in keeping with the thinking that supports Narrative Enquiry, that “learning takes place with other children, with a teacher, in a classroom, in a community, and so on” (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, pg. 2).

Listening and hearing

Seeking to find out how things work in these settings required attending to both participant and instructor as relatively little is known about or has been recorded about these practices either from the testimony of those immersed in the experiences (student, participants) or of those said to be responsible for constructing and conducting the experiences (teachers, instructors).

It is worth considering that the etymological origin of the word ‘interview’ is recorded as early 16th cent. (Formerly also as *enterview*): from French *entrevue*, from *s'entrevoir* ‘see each other’, from *voir* ‘to see’, on the pattern of *vue* ‘a view’ (Etymology Online Dictionary).

This notion of seeing each other is reflected by Carl Rogers, in his presentation ‘*Experiences in Communication*’ (Rogers 1980). Here Rogers’ candidly shares much of what he feels he has learned about communication in his work and life assuring that “these are personal learnings growing out of my own experience”.

Some of my experiences in communicating with others have made me feel expanded, larger, enriched, and have accelerated my own growth. Very often through these experiences I feel that the other person has had similar reactions and that he too has been enriched, that his development and his functioning has moved forward. (Rogers 1980, pg. 7)

Witnessing, participating and accompanying

The stories that were shared with me during my encounters with young people (and adults) were precious. Those that had struggled in school to make eye contact, to speak

out, or to feel that they had anything of value to share were speaking openly to an adult about intensely personal experiences and feelings.

It appeared that the young people actively wanted to talk to me, to share their stories. They wanted to be heard, to speak up and shine a light on what had happened to *them*. Through this process of being seen, sharing and being heard, new understandings of their own experiences appeared to be taking place. The power of being witnessed, of being paid close attention to, appeared to be congruent across all the sites I became involved in and was confirmed by my visit to a fourth site, the Boys Rites of Passage Camp.

This ‘power of witness’, of being seen and honoured, came to inform much of my conduct. Towards the end of the John Muir Trust programme I had the realisation that my presence was one of a conduit, that perhaps all courses should have someone present who could directly ‘attend’ to the experiences and voices of those there.

The Wilderness Foundation UK provided the opportunity to witness what happened when these intense experiences of wildness took place over an extended period of time. This prolonged exposure to wild places appeared to encourage appreciation of previously overlooked encounters and processes. The intense closeness appeared at times to provide access to a combination of independence and interdependence. It was possible to work together in a meaningful way, looking after each other by cooking, cleaning and talking whilst including the space for silence, reflection and solitude. The trust that developed within the group was endearing and moving. The consequences of looking after each other were felt in the shifting of personal outlooks and actions. Listening to the whole group identify beautiful things about each other at the closure of the week was genuinely moving.

Entering into the community of the Helpers Mentoring Society was the most challenging of all the experiences that I witnessed and participated in. As an activity it was completely unknown to me ahead of the encounter. As a researcher I had many of my assumptions and preconceived notions overturned. As a human being I was pushed toward, and at times beyond, my physical and psychological limits.

However recounting the story of these places, people and activities is not straightforward. Remaining critical or even marginally detached became at times challenging. As I was swept up in the process of participating I was granted access to the experiences directly yet on occasion lost sight of my original purpose, my explicit search, which at times dissolved into a private one.

It was here again that a persistent concern with pedagogy as methodology and method assisted in grounding my search, in particular by returning to the intended educational practices displayed.

Preparing to investigate the educational practices of the programmes

Although published at the turn of the millennium, Richard Pring's *Philosophy of Educational Research* (2000) remains a challenge to those engaged in educational research. Pring sets out to draw attention to, and enlarge the readers understanding of what he calls, 'educational practices'.

An educational practice consists of a range of transactions between teachers and learners. Such transactions are *educational* because they are guided by certain aims and values. The aim is that the students should learn. The values relate to the manner in which those transactions take place and to the worth of that which is to be learnt. Educational research, therefore, must be centrally, though by no means exclusively, focused on those transactions – on the ways in which learning is encouraged, nurtured, planned, and brought about, and on the values which are embedded within them. (Pring 2000, p. 119)

However the need for a particular educational practice can be said to always be contingent, and is often a matter of a result of power relationships e.g. is the belief or aim held by those doing the teaching, or by those doing the learning?

Such reflection must be philosophical in nature – that is, getting clear about the object of the research, namely, 'educational practice', assessing the nature of the claims made about such 'practice' and what would count as evidence for or verification of them, showing the limitations of 'method' in researching such practices. The mode of enquiry is determined by the nature of the 'object' being enquired into. (Pring 2000, pg. 157)

With these challenges in mind it appears vital to the work of the educational researcher to constantly recollect that the object of research is itself 'educational practice' and to constantly return to the specific instance of the educational practice under investigation.

Introducing the Case Studies and approaching the data analysis and interpretation

It is crucial that I explain how the experiences witnessed and shared in the field have been presented, how they will be analysed and how they will move toward interpretation. The following chapters present, discuss and analyse the data gathered throughout the research project. It attempts to distil what was learned from the case study.

Ely (2006) describes the data analysis construction as, “finding some way to tease out what we consider to be essential meaning in the raw data; to reduce and re-organize and combine so that the readers share the researcher’s findings in the most economical, interesting fashion. The product of analysis is a creation that speaks to the heart of what was learned” (Ely 2006, pg. 140). How the young people’s experiences of the activity (the data) were reported, analyzed, understood and interpreted requires explanation and justification.

On completion of my participation, observations, conversations and interviews I made initial notes. I personally reviewed and listened carefully to all the recorded data to ensure quality and made notes on my first thoughts. I transcribed interviews verbatim to ensure that my response was conducted in a way that supported my thinking about the enquiry. I then re-read the transcripts making notes on my thoughts and impressions. I re-read the interviews whilst listening back to the audio recording to ensure that I could catch and interpret meaning and inference. I then read the interview transcripts alongside my observation notes to get a sense of the data from the cases as a whole. I read them again so that they could be organized and sorted in ways that allowed meaningful sections, and ideas to come to light (Atkinson 2017). I then gathered these sections together whilst reading relevant literature in order to interpret and make sense of the research data as suggested by Ely (2006).

These tentative findings were then elaborated in light of the existing materials and I began to expand them to address the questions posed in meaningful and coherent ways as Stake (2010) encourages. I revisited the raw data to look for anomalies or inconsistencies. It was concluded that data from each site would be presented first as an overview of the programme. This would include my participation in, and observation undertaken during the programme, and conclude with a review of the recorded conversations of the participants that critically engaged with the research questions and the theoretical elements that bound the enquiry together (Stake 2010; Ely 2006).

It is important to add that description is regarded as a critical element in ethnographic research design and analysis (description being the unit of analysis). In keeping with this ethnographic discipline other cases studies are presented and organised specifically to draw attention to *what* happens when young people have wild experiences within and alongside their formal education whilst illuminating *how* these experiences are shaped. It is this *how* that is felt to be of crucial significance for ethnographic reporting and research (Atkinson 2017).

Ethnographic analysis, therefore, is not aimed simply at demonstrating *that* realities are socially produced, but – much more fundamentally – on *how* that is accomplished. (Atkinson 2017, p. 41)

It is perhaps this *how* where the research makes its clearest contribution, closing the gap in empirical evidence whilst locating the educational transaction (as insisted upon by Pring 2000).

Chapter 4, Part 2

Thinking methodologically and acting ethically

This chapter considers the methodological perspective and position of the researcher and the ethical steps taken during and after the research.

Questioning the relevance, politics, ethicality and practice of research

Konai Thaman, UNESCO Chair of Education, urges those embarking on research to be resistant to “research methods courses in universities which assume that research and research methods are culture free and that researchers occupy some kind of moral high ground from which they can observe their subjects and make judgments about them” (in Tuhiwai Smith 2008, pg. i).

My own research was taking me beyond the edge of my prior personal experience and into practices that might most appropriately be referred to as indigenous, teachings and experiences that were deeply connected to aboriginal knowledge systems and perspectives. This was especially true in regards to my involvement with the Helpers Mentoring Society and was not something that my previous instruction in research methodologies and methods in education had prepared me for. How then should I resist my cultural “moral high ground”?

Whilst engaged in my research I found that I was spending prolonged periods of time outside with others and alone, where we were meditating on stones, working with fire, and crossing paths with wild animals, all of which was bringing about an altered state of consciousness and introducing new concepts of what it means to know, and crucially, about how to act on that knowing. These experiences and encounters challenged the foundations of my culturally transmitted and received knowledge.

Specifically several of these encounters were with a teacher who sought to act as a cultural bridge between the West and a First Nations people, the Lakota, the original people of the open plains of the continent now called North America. The Lakota are perhaps most widely known for their current efforts to protect the watershed at Standing Rock in Dakota from the construction of a crude oil pipeline (Solnit 2016).

Naomi Klein, the author and environmental campaigner, has written an account of this very recent (yet ancient) cultural conflict in her article ‘*Lessons from Standing Rock*’ (2017). Reporting from the encampment she writes

Brave Bull Allard, who is the official historian of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, said that, most of all, “the encampment had become a school – for Indigenous youth seeking to connect more deeply with their own culture, to live on the land and in ceremony, and also for non-Indigenous people who realised that the moment called for skills and knowledge most of us don’t have”. (Klein 2017, pg. 224)

My encounters, albeit on another continent, were also introducing me, alongside a small group of young people and adults, to *ceremony* and to *skills* and *knowledge* that we did not possess. Alongside paying attention to how things were working in the places I had chosen as sites for my research, and alongside tracing the experiences of those participating in these sites, I was also learning about, and from, rocks, fire, plants, water, animals and stars. I was having my prior system of knowledge shaken and reshaped.

Resisting the ‘authentic, essentialist, deeply spiritual’ Other

Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Director of the International Research Institute for Maori and Indigenous Education has demanding things to say to those embarking on research.

From the vantage point of the colonised, the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked with European colonialism: the way in which scientific research has been implicated in the worst excesses of imperialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonised peoples. (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, back-cover)

Smith’s work ‘Decolonising Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples’ (2012) issued a startling challenge to my approach that is quoted here in full.

The arguments of different indigenous peoples based on spiritual relationships to the universe, to the landscape and to stones, rocks, insects and other things, seen and unseen, have been difficult arguments for Western systems of knowledge to deal with or accept. These arguments give a partial indication of the different world-views and alternative ways of coming to know, and of being, which still endure within the indigenous world. Concepts of spirituality which Christianity attempted to destroy, then to appropriate, then to claim, are critical sites of resistance for indigenous peoples. The values, attitudes, concepts and language embedded in beliefs about spirituality represent, in many cases, the clearest contrast and mark of difference between indigenous peoples and the West. It is

one of the few parts of ourselves which the West cannot decipher, cannot understand and cannot control... yet. (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, pg. 77)

The last sentence is a devastating critique of the work of the researcher and positioned my work in complex terrain. Was I unwittingly seeking to ‘decipher’ and ‘understand’ the ‘values, attitudes, concepts and language’ of those I was accompanying in order to inadvertently take ‘control’ of this knowledge, through paper writing, publication and academic grandstanding?

In the purification lodge, an indigenous ceremonial practice, I had been asked what knowledge was for. Out in the wild I had been instructed in the spiritual arguments brought about by “stones, rocks, insects” (Ibid). Not wanting to control or own this knowledge it would be essential to find a way to confront this disturbing problem.

Recollecting the challenges of AbdelRahim (2014), the imperial project of the factory, the enclosure of the wild, and the impulses of a wilder pedagogy itself I am brought back into contact with the primary concern of what is happening to children and young people and their access to the wild, their self-will, liberty and the wild world itself.

Could the concept of pedagogy itself help me to resist the “worst excesses of imperialism” and those associated with educational research? Could the concept of pedagogy also provoke me into seeing the treatment of children and young people as echoing those of the colonised?

Developing a methodological and ethical outlook that responds to the sensitivities of the enquiry, the concerns of the researcher and the participants

This enquiry seeks to find out what happens when young people engage with wild places and in wild instruction alongside their formal education. Despite exploring an unusual aspect of educational encounter (wild settings and practices), it remains primarily concerned with young people and their experiences. It is therefore crucial that the experiences of young people are strongly represented and visible throughout the empirical presentation of the enquiry. In this sense and with this commitment the enquiry claims to be pedagogic. This claim requires explanation.

Pedagogy is a notorious term in the field of educational theory and practice (Smith 2012). In a contemporary sense the term is often used to denote the procedures of formal instruction, where pedagogy is often conceived of as “a science of teaching

embodying both curriculum and methodology” (Brian Simon in Lawton & Gordon 1993, pg. 139). Van Manen suggests to researchers that:

Being attentive to the etymological origins of a word may sometimes put us in touch with an original form of life where the terms still had living ties to the lived experiences from which they sprang. (Van Manen 1990, pg. 59)

Etymologically and historically then ‘pedagogy’ has the roots of its meaning in, “to lead the child”, from ‘*pais*’, a Greek word for child, and ‘*agogos*’, to lead, or drive (Oxford Etymology Dictionary). The foundation of the term however reveals a more challenging origin in the form of a concrete image – that of the household slave.

In an article exploring the origins and current applications of the term pedagogy, Smith (2012) reminds us of the links with European Social Pedagogy and that it is best thought of as being concerned directly with the child and those that set out to lead, and instruct the child in relationship and in ways that have the potential to challenge the current colonisation of children and young people.

In an effort to continually renew my commitment to the child I have here begun to perceive of pedagogy as a methodology and method, as a study (‘*logos*’) of the way (‘*hodos*’) to discover how better to act as an educator and researcher (Hall 2018).

Keeping the child visible in educational research

Throughout studying the way to conduct my research and my work as a classroom teacher I have embraced the challenges of Max Van Manen (1990), and in particular his methodological approach to educational research outlined in ‘*Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*’ (1990).

Van Manen is forthright in his critical stance toward educational practices that are divorced from what he sees as addressing “the question of how to apply the measure of pedagogy to the standard of one’s own work”.

To be unresponsive to pedagogy could be termed the half-life state of modern educational theory and research which has forgotten its original vocation: that all theory and research were meant to orient us to pedagogy in our relations with children. (Van Manen 1990, pg. 135)

Van Manen urges us to maintain a strong and orientated pedagogical relation, likening “the products of much educational research to a puzzle – each puzzle carrying the same

caption: “Can you find the child?”... Where does all this theorising and research still connect with the life-worlds of children?” (Ibid, pg. 139).

In modern forms of human science research in education, children may once again be recognisably present; however, their representation often betrays a lack of true pedagogic commitment to them. The children may be there as objects of our human science interest in them – but they are frequently not concretely and morally present in that they force us to reflect on how we should talk and act with them and how we should live by their side. (Van Manen 1990, pg. 139)

Maintaining a strong and oriented relation

As has been presented this conceptual appreciation of the activity of ‘pedagogy’ as an active way of understanding and relating to the world of the child will be of crucial importance when considering contemporary expressions and articulations of pedagogy, especially where the word ‘wild’ becomes a pre-fix.

Van Manen also has useful things to say regarding the ‘educational researcher’, their identity and the practice of writing and investigating the final research text in particular: “writing as a form of pedagogical commitment”.

Van Manen suggests “four conditions” that might act as “evaluative criteria” for the construction of pedagogical texts. “These conditions for research/writing may be summarised as follows: our texts need to be oriented, strong, rich, and deep” (Van Manen 1990, pg. 151). The following direct quotations support the development of, and critical engagement with, pedagogical texts.

- To be *oriented* as researchers or theorists’ means that we do not separate theory from life, the public from the private. We are not simply being pedagogues here and researchers there – we are researchers oriented to the world in a pedagogic way.
- A *strong* pedagogic orientation requires that one reads any situation in which an adult finds himself or herself with a child as a pedagogic situation, as an answer to the question of how we should be and act with children.
- A *rich* and thick description is concrete, exploring a phenomena in all its experiential ramifications. The educator, as author, attempts to capture life experience (action or event) in anecdote or story, because the logic of story is precisely that story retrieves what is unique, particular, and irreplaceable.
- Rich descriptions, that explore the meaning structures beyond what is immediately experienced, gain a dimension of *depth*. Research and theorising that simplifies life, without reminding us of its fundamental ambiguity and

mystery, thereby distorts and shallows-out life, failing to reveal its depthful character and contours. (Van Manen 1990, pg. 151)

When summarised these four quotations support the overall design and reporting of the current enquiry. They support the position of educational researcher as also being a pedagogue and that this infusion is unwittingly severed in a misguided attempt to create an unrealistic critical distance from the encounters. That wherever we witness an adult considering, making choices for, or working alongside a child this provides an answer to the question: “what happens when young people have wild experiences”.

Developing a set of ‘pedagogic’ principles to guide the research activity

How does this interpretation of pedagogy support the development of my approach and argument, of my ethics? What does it mean for the researcher, the research, and for those that are being researched?

These ways of thinking, orientating and writing through the conceptual framework of pedagogy that have been presented promote further questions whilst ensuring that the questions remain close to the source of the concern itself – the child and their experience of education. These questions have developed from the thinking and work of those committed to the lived practice of pedagogy.

As part of my Post Graduate Training Scheme (see Appendix 2) I undertook a self-directed ethical investigation where I created a set of researcher principles. Whilst these principles were sound in terms of research activity I have developed a further set of guidelines in light of the preceding arguments that make clear my pedagogical orientation.

A reminder of Van Manen in short:

- Keep the child and young person in view.
- Maintain a strong and oriented relation.
- Generate rich and thick description, stories that explore experience in all their complexity.
- Avoid simplification and do not shy away from ambiguity and doubt.

Pedagogy as a Methodology and Method Principles:

- Reflect the activity of story through the presentation of story.
- Resist the urge to take the knowledge of others and use it for own ends.
- Co-author with those involved in the work where possible.
- Bear witness to the experiences of those often overlooked or underrepresented.
- Accompany, help, listen, and talk with those engaged in the activity.
- Care for those that you accompany.
- Bring learning to life where possible.
- Work towards understanding *together* rather than consider as a separate activity.
- Disseminate thoughtfully (in a way that coheres with Tuhiwai Smith's example of how knowledge is power (beyond the account of the PhD itself this would mean co-authoring with instructors and participants or not at all).

The importance of an ethical statement that includes this outlook will be essential for navigating the unfamiliar landscape of the encounters and programmes of the field studies. That the enquiry was carefully planned and subject to a rigorous ethical review requires explanation. Opie (2004) provides a definition of research ethics that makes it clear why all researchers should be concerned with this fragile area of conduct.

Any research that involves people has the potential to cause damage. Ethics has to do with the application of moral principles to prevent harming or wronging others, to promote the good, to be respectful and to be fair. (Opie 2004, pg. 25)

Researcher Statement

The following statement concludes this chapter and arises from my attention to the ethical integrity regarding my choice to pursue a Person-Centred / Human Centred Education educator / researcher identity and how this choice has continued to shape my ideas and concerns in relation to structured education.

- Safety of participants and of researcher to be built into research design.
- Relevant and appropriate methods used as required by nature of enquiry.
- Diligent record keeping of all related research material.
- Transparent reporting of findings.
- Clear indication of authorship and levels of involvement.

- Voluntary consent of all participants.
- Participant right to withdraw at any time without any coercing taking place.
- Confidentiality for all participants at all times without being requested.
- To guard against plagiarism and fabrication through peer review.
- To freely share research findings as appropriate.
- Social duty of research to inform public wellbeing.

The following chapters present three distinct ethnographic case studies exploring what happens when young people are engaged with organisations that seek to provide access to wild places and wild experiences. A subsequent chapter then extends these case studies through the presentation of a critical encounter from one of the research sites that posed the question: what is knowledge for?

Chapter 5

Ethnographic Case Study 1 – The John Muir Trust

This chapter presents a distinct ethnographic case study exploring what happens when a group of young people were engaged with The John Muir Trust through a weekly programme called Working Without Walls that over the course of three months sought to immerse the participants within woodland and “re-wild them”.

Introduction to Working Without Walls

Sitting around a fire, deep within Sussex woodland, are five young people, Chris, John, Lucas, Mia and Simon. This is the first time they have met together in the wood as a group. They will meet together nine more times before they will move on to other encounters and experiences. One will return to school for final exams, another will prepare to progress to College, with the rest harbouring hopes of volunteering and finding meaningful work placements when the time comes. There had been others at the very beginning, but these had fallen away slowly, some gaining work, others not being able to shake free from the circumstances that brought them to the wood in the first place.

Their meetings in the wood are weekly. They started in January, during hard frosts, when the ground was so cold it was difficult to start a fire, and they will finish just ahead of Easter and the vernal equinox. The days begin in the early morning and finish in the early afternoon during this dark part of the year allowing the young participants to leave the wood and travel home whilst it is still light.

Whilst in the wood they will gather kindling, start fires, climb and fell trees, talk together, whittle, make tarpaulin shelters, think laterally, wander, spend time alone, hear and tell stories, walk barefoot, use charcoal to create bowls, drink pine needle tea, take photographs, be interviewed, sing songs, paint each other’s faces with mud, play many games, and receive certificates for their conservation work.

What follows is an account of the programme undertaken over ten weeks from January to April 2017.

Day 1, Week 1, January, the first day of the programme

It is a bright winter's day. Weak sunlight shines through the pine trees to the understory and the hard frost on the ground.

Two of the young participants arrive at the entrance to the wood, Chris, who has been offered an apprenticeship with the local charity that underwrites the course, and John, who has not been on any courses like this before. John looks pale and wary. He is not equipped for the below zero temperatures and despite being offered extra clothes, refuses them. He speaks very little and wears a fixed smile for most of the day.

The time they will spend together in the wood loosely forms a ten-week course called Working Without Walls, a local expression of the John Muir Award that is offered to young people, in this instance through a regional charity, Education Futures Trust (EFT). The charity is based within an area of the UK that suffers from high levels of socio-economic deprivation and seeks to provide courses and services that focus on “improving the life chances of children in the local area” (Message from the CEO, Education Futures Trust 2018) although the charity also aims to work within the wider context of the community as a whole.

The Working Without Walls course is promoted as “a survival course with a conservation focus” (Education Futures Trust 2018) aiming to “build resilience and self-confidence for participants and which promotes connections to and an understanding of our rich local environment” (Ibid). The promotional material goes on to say:

This course additionally promotes volunteering as a life-enhancing opportunity, and each participant is supported to identify an on-going placement. The John Muir Discovery Award in conservation can be gained through this project. All participants complete a reflective work log each week, and receive feedback from the course tutor. Courses run for 10 weeks at local accessible outdoor venues throughout the year. (Ibid)

Yet the experience of the programme is more complex than the promotional writing suggests with a mosaic of intentions and an interlocking set of invested parties pulling the course, its instructors and participants in different directions. There appear to be considerable tensions between the direction of the John Muir Trust, the overarching objectives of EFT, and the intentions of Luke Funnell the course designer and leader.

Conflicts of funding and philosophies

At the end of the course I wrote a journalistic article about the experience that was re-written and published by The John Muir Trust (see Appendix 3). In it I had written: In spring 2017 Luke took the unusual step of inviting a well-known bank to “leave the high street and step into the wild”. The aim: to create a social enterprise - making and selling woodland tools and products - that could support both the economic and mental health of young adults considered to be at risk of disengaging with their community. As well as providing funding for the course through the NatWest Skills and Opportunities Fund staff from the bank were on hand to offer advice and guidance to the young people. This proved to be every bit as valuable as the financial support as they developed their woodland skills, produced items for sale became more financially savvy and considered their opportunities for future training and employment. (Ford & John Muir Trust 2018)

The full story was more complicated.

John Muir, the John Muir Trust and the John Muir Award

How does the John Muir Award support this wild work in the wood? The John Muir Award is the educational strategy of the John Muir Trust Organisation. The John Muir Trust was formed in 1983 “to safeguard and conserve wild places in the United Kingdom” (John Muir Trust 2019). The organisation and the Trust take its lead from the Scottish born environmentalist John Muir (1838-1914).

John Muir is perhaps most well-known for his involvement in the creation of the National Park Service in the United States of America (Battle 2017, pg. i). Muir was a prolific writer who revered the natural world and was moved to resist the excesses of the industrial revolution that he saw as threatening the wild world he had come to love. His prose focused on celebrating and promoting this wildness.

The tendency nowadays to wander in wildernesses is delightful to see. Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilised people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life. (Muir in Battle 2017, pg. 8)

The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme focused on wild places inspired by the legacy of John Muir and his commitment to conservation in particular. It supports people to connect with, enjoy and care for nature, landscape, and the natural environment – wild places.

However the John Muir Award as an organisation and qualification does not host courses itself. Rather it is a small charity that supports third party organisations access the philosophy of the John Muir Award and provide direction for the successful achievement of their programmes and qualifications. EFT's Working Without Walls is one of these third party programmes that integrate the John Muir Award into its structure.

Any tensions felt by Luke about how these strands fit together remain largely unnoticed by the young participants. As we walk into the wood together, carrying bags and equipment between us, I strike up a conversation with Chris. He says he's "happy to be back out here" and that he's helping Luke teach at a local Primary School whilst he completes school himself.

After arrival I am asked to help put up the toilet, something that Luke claims all participants have enquired about, declaring an interest in where they will go to the toilet if they need to. Most do go to the toilet during the day whilst we are together. One of the girls who only joins the first two weeks, Adrianna, says that "there is no way she is going for a shit in there" and that she "will hold it all in until she gets back home". There is a sense amongst the young participants that the wood is somehow dirty.

Despite the unhurried nature of Luke we are constantly active. Attention is drawn to the beauty of the light slanting through the pines and the ice frozen on the trees. Chris is charged with lighting a fire and John is asked to help him collect firewood. It appears that Chris would prefer to do it on his own and showcase his ability rather than guide another in the process. Luke then walks off through the wood to meet those that are travelling by bus and don't know the way. Mia, who looks terrified, arrives a little later with a female instructor.

Campfire

We sit by the fire and have the chance to gaze out at the low sun shining through the tree canopy before continuing with chores, conversation and tasks. One of the striking things is how Luke puts the participants first, constantly checking if they are comfortable, warm, or hungry. His quiet praise for small achievements is also a constant

yet feels utterly genuine and well judged. Observing him in action I'm certain he is making a difference to the participants even in the short space of a few hours.

During the day I become more aware that my position as researcher is going to be a complex to navigate. Working as a classroom teacher for over ten years my overriding tendency is to support, help and facilitate those that I am working with, or involved with. I had absorbed a great deal of information about the participants during the day. Mainly this was by way of intuitive observations and candid conversations. It means that I will not return in week two as a remote observer but as someone bearing extra food for those who might not be able to afford to bring any, having done research into conservation opportunities for young people and with a birthday cake for Chris.

Day 2, Week 2, January

There is a thick mist hanging over the wood this morning and several participants comment on the temperature during the day.

Mia is visibly cold whilst we are at the higher encampment being instructed in tree felling. She did not want to participate and refused all offers of encouragement both from peers in the group, and also from the additional adult instructors, Peter, Julia and James who are accompanying the group for the first time this week.

James is a tree surgeon. His skills are called on to enable the group to handle the equipment necessary for the intended work being carried out in the woodland. This work is couched in the language of 'conservation' and this concept is linked directly to the John Muir Award that the participants are undertaking. Although Luke mentioned John Muir for the first time this week it is unclear how much the participants know about the award or John Muir himself.

No structure?

During an impromptu conversation James made a startling comment about the organisation of the course. He said "to begin with I wondered if this was going to work with Luke, the course, there was no structure, or no structure that I could see, but it does, it's amazing".

Later, when he was talking about recording video interviews with participants when they reach the end of the course, he mocked wiping tears from his eyes as he recollected the revelations that the participants made. "If you had watched them

during the course you would outwardly think, ‘Oh this course is not doing anything for them’, but then there they are, during the interviews at the end, telling you how profound the course has been and how much it has helped and changed them”.

With this in mind it is interesting that Luke appears to provide very little direct instruction. Does he have a distinct philosophical or practical model for this work?

Hearts, Heads, and Hands

Within the John Muir Award Information Handbook (John Muir Trust 2015) there is a page that outlines an educational model. In simple and direct language the model is suggested to those who “may want to consider this holistic approach as you deliver or take part in the John Muir Award” (John Muir Trust 2015, pg. 22).

The ‘Heart, Head, Hand’ model proposes that an experience-based programme of activity should encourage people to Care, promote Understanding and give opportunities for practical Doing.

Underneath an accompanying illustration is printed a reference to a Scottish sociologist claiming that this approach is “based on an educational model promoted by Patrick Geddes” (Ibid, pg. 22). Geddes was amongst those influenced by the European educationalist Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1894).

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi’s (1894) observations and insights into how children learn have had profound consequences for pedagogy as a philosophy and as a practice. Pestalozzi’s work as a schoolteacher and his written accounts of the child in the process of growing and becoming were unprecedented at the time of his writing over one hundred years ago.

It is interesting to recall that over one hundred years ago Pestalozzi was advocating for nature as co-teacher. “What is there first in the child himself, and secondly in the environment and conditions which are forced upon him, which Nature herself employs in the education of mankind, from which we may learn the principles of education?” (Pestalozzi 1912, pg. 160).

Perhaps as a result of his commitment to the child Pestalozzi claimed that it was, “not art, not books, but life itself is the true basis of teaching and education”. This clearly has echoes of social pedagogy as proposed earlier. Presaging the critique of the factory model Pestalozzi reflected that

We leave children up to their fifth year in the full enjoyment of nature; we let every impression of nature work upon them; ... they already know full well the joy of unrestrained liberty and all its charms. And after they have enjoyed this happiness of sensuous life for five whole years, we make all nature round them vanish before their eyes; tyrannically stop the delightful course of their unrestrained freedom, pen them up like sheep, whole flocks huddled together, in stinking rooms; pitilessly chain them for hours, days, weeks, months, years, to the contemplation of unattractive monotonous letters... (Pestalozzi 1912, pg. 160)

Pestalozzi's ideas regarding the 'hand, head and heart' are useful to explore as it appears that the John Muir Trust (through the work of Patrick Geddes) may have unconsciously adopted these concepts, using them to underscore their own educational philosophy.

How important is it for the participants or the instructors to know the John Muir Trust philosophy? The young participants know nothing of Pestalozzi, Geddes and very little about John Muir. This appears to also be true regarding the leader of the course and the supporting instructors. It raises the question of how important or relevant is an understanding of educational theory, even when it is explicitly included in the John Muir Trust guidebook for course providers and when it is anticipated that those providing course will undertake bespoke training with the JMT.

Working Without Walls has been designed by a young outdoor educator called Luke Funnel as part of his contracted work with an East Sussex educational charity. Intriguingly Luke hasn't undertaken the John Muir training, although he has undertaken a Level 3 Forest School Training certificate and has a great deal of experience as a youth worker. Luke's design of the course understandably appeared to be influenced by his Forest School training. Yet there were compelling reasons for thinking that he was shifting this work in a new direction, towards what he described as "re-wilding".

Second camp

After tree felling the group moves to the second camp, a site situated deeper within the trees and lower down, positioned on a ledge looking out across a stand of tall conifer trees. It is more intimate, less spread out, making it easier to hear each other across the fire.

Mobile phones were less visible and less frequently in use this week. Mia used her mobile phone to conduct research into ideas for a craft product that could be made

with the skills and materials available to the group. This was in advance of a visit from a NatWest representative in the coming weeks.

Lucas demonstrated much fuller involvement this week. He left the day with his clothes, a grey tracksuit, muddy and wet. He didn't seem to care or even to have noticed that much. He embraced every activity and at times pushed beyond what had been suggested. He also seemed to be totally absorbed by the visit to the camp by the robin. Luke said that the robin was a resident of the camp and that he felt that a wild creature visiting and getting that close to us, to human beings, was always a good sign.

Day 3, Week 3, January

A cold January day, overcast with showers of rain. Of the eight young people who are enrolled on the course only four attended this week. Two of these are returning participants who are invested in the course in a way that the others are not yet. This is not to say that their experience is any less valid than the others. How did these young people find their way here to this wood and this work?

It seems that the young people are each here for different reasons. For most it is the result of an intervention of some kind, whether by school, parents or by third party social workers, Key Workers, or organisations that work closely with young people attempting to support their mental health and wellbeing.

Chris joined the Working Without Walls course for the first time when he was fourteen years old, just over two years ago. He had been excluded several times from school and was candid about his experience within the system.

It started when I joined the school, the first couple of months went alright, then I finally found my feet and thought, yeah, I don't like this, then started messing around, got excluded for two weeks, went back for a week, got excluded, just nonstop in and out of school, then I got put on part-time which was half a day in school, that didn't work, so then I got put on a behaviour contract, which is when they give you a certain amount of points, and if you fail that you've got to find a new school, which then I almost failed it, and then they, the school come up with, this off site provision, which is where people go with challenging behaviours. (Chris)

John turned eighteen whilst on the course, although he only told one of the course instructors about his birthday after the occasion. When I asked John what had brought him to the course he explained to me that it was to help his "anxiety and depression and get used to being around people again".

I have social anxiety and I was kind of worried about what people thought of me and judged me and that led to me being depressed and hating life. (John)

Lucas had already turned sixteen and was attending College studying mechanics alongside retaking his Maths and English qualifications. When I asked him about why he had joined the course he said

I had a key worker and she asked me about this course and I thought to myself that it weren't going to be right for me but, and then I thought in my head it would be. (Lucas)

Mia was seventeen and was no longer attending College due to ill health and anxiety. Much of the time Mia would sit by the fire without speaking. When I asked her why she was on the course she said, "Cause, I'm not at college anymore and I need something to do, that was like, helpful". She explained further about the experiences that led her to being outside the formal system of school.

I never really got along with school, I hated school, like the whole time I was at school I begged to be home schooled, but it never happened, and then I got some new problems from being at school, and then when I found out I didn't actually have to be at college I decided to leave, cause I was really ill in October, so I couldn't really carry on with it anyway. (Mia)

Simon, the oldest in this group, is already twenty years old and had "been diagnosed as being on the Autistic Spectrum" just as he was completing Secondary School. Simon was invited to join 'Working Without Walls' because of his growing involvement in the outdoors and his recent experience volunteering with local conservation groups.

This course is one of many things that I've gotten involved with recently because I'm trying to find the focus, I'm trying to give myself a life, I don't have one at the moment, it's just volunteering, which although is good, isn't taking me anywhere. So the prospect of this course was I could use skills that I already had, develop new ones, and meet new people which is always a barrier for me, I'm a bit of a loner, almost a recluse I'd say. (Simon)

The remaining members of the group are new to the course and have in the main very little experience of this type of environment. Of the remaining two that attended this week, despite the weather, Simon is the eldest and the most engaged in regards to the outdoors and the environment in general. He has pursued other voluntary courses with

an outdoor focus and is keen to find opportunities to take this beyond an interest and into paid work.

It has been noted that Simon's performance in all the games that have been played he has emerged as the winner on every occasion. These have been games of stealth. It is as though he is able to disappear and indeed this is what he did whilst the group was engaged in what Luke called a 'bimble': a meander without direction or goal.

After ten minutes when the group was called back and Simon did not return. Andy, James and Peter went in search of him and returned a little later. Simon declared he had lost track of time, a result that Luke suggested often manifests during these kind of activities and when spending time outside in general.

Luke had given the games a context. He said "that our intention is to re-wild you, to get you in touch with your animalistic selves. We play games together to get closer to nature, to help (heal) that sense of disconnection from nature that we as adults see in our society."

Day 4, Week 4, January

A fine day with a little warmth offered by the sun and the now ever-present campfire. Luke began the day speaking openly to the group about how he wanted to tell them his story, his quest story, and stories about how he came to be working this way in the wood but that he wasn't ready and that he hadn't told anyone really. He revealed that he felt scared to tell his stories to the gathered group that it made him feel vulnerable. "I want to, but I don't want to talk about myself, it feels arrogant and this isn't about me. I think it's important not to pretend to you that we as adults don't feel afraid or vulnerable, or that we don't find these things challenging as you might do".

Teaching story

After this Luke said that he did want to tell his quest story but that he was not ready yet, but that he would like to tell a story, an origin story. He then told a story, a Native American teaching story, about the creation of fire. Whilst Luke was telling this story the robin that has been visiting the camp arrived, as if on cue, and accompanied the duration of the telling.

The group were captivated by Luke's story and the way he had told it. There was silence and focus during the story with the welcome distraction of the robin hopping between us as we worked with the images of the story.

Playing games

After the story was finished Luke reintroduced John Muir and the importance of conservation, of valuing nature and protecting it. Simon said a little about John Muir, that he was responsible for the National Parks of America. Luke coaxed Chris into sharing what he knew about John Muir with the group. He seemed reluctant but he did offer a fragment about Muir going blind after an accident. Luke then suggested that we get moving and play some games.

We walked up through the wood to the clearing where Luke introduced the game 'Bat and Moth' and we formed a circle. Of the young people only Simon and Lucas participated. Mia accompanied the group but did not take part in the game directly. John also joined the group at the clearing where games are played. Like Mia he formed part of the circle for the first game but despite direct encouragement he refused to take the role of either Bat or Moth. When the second game was introduced he refused to play and stayed alone at the top of the wood at the clearing despite being asked and encouraged to join in. Luke later went to meet him and talk with him and brought him back down to the fire as the game ended.

Business meeting

Luke then brought attention to Julia and the business aspects of the course (albeit reluctantly). Julia talks about the 'branding' of the product and how it could be linked to the group and their reasons for being involved, the story of the project and the group. She asks aloud "what is our reason for being here?" Chris is quick to offer his own response and offers, "to learn new things". When I ask him again he says, "Because I just love it". The question moves to Lucas who responds openly and is the most effusive that I have heard him in the group. He says "I'm here because I don't go out and I wanted to do this to help with my confidence with other people". John responded a little under duress. He said that it was "my anxiety, depression, to help with that, my therapy has just ended so this is the next step". I ask John is it helping? He replies, "yes, slowly. I think I have to be patient".

A wild visitor

The robin spent a long time around the camp today. I notice that the young participants are really taken with the closeness of the robin. Chris attempts to take photographs and even builds a rudimentary feeder for the bird. Lucas seems captivated by the bird stopping whatever it is he is doing to get closer, and offers his open hand. When I catch his eye he gives me a big smile, a smile of real delight. I think to myself 'this is true nature connection'.

I ask Luke about his methods on the way home and we talked about the lack of explicit goals, outcomes and learning objectives, how these young people had probably had an overload of that way of working in school and college and that this was not a pressure that they should have to experience here. Luke said, "I don't go into the day with that kind of objective, I go by how I feel, how it feels, what is and isn't working". When he talks about the progress of individuals he said, "I don't care if they play the games, if they don't do the activities. I care about how they are, what is happening for them as individuals, what their own journey is and how it is developing".

Day 5, Week 5, February

A cold yet bright day with a campfire already lit as we approach camp.

There are fewer participants this week despite being the week that a representative from the NatWest bank is visiting the site. Chris had arrived early and had already prepared 'graded' wood for the fire starting by the time we had arrived.

Shortly after our arrival Liam, the NatWest representative, arrived and talked a little about businesses in Brighton, about healthcare being one of the big areas of service in the area.

NatWest

Whilst we were all gathered at the camp Julia interviewed Liam from NatWest, which was intended to be of benefit for the group, but as the group were mainly instructors it was not really clear what the real use of it would be. There were no questions from Simon or Chris who looked pretty disinterested whilst he was talking. Julia and Peter asked questions on behalf of the group but again it was not clear why, other than that he was there and that it seemed the appropriate course of action.

The group then returned to the avenue to fell, chop, saw, process and cut off plastic guards around tress that were starting to mature. Luke made Scots-Pine needle tea during the time given over to lunch. Julia laughed and said it tasted of old carpenters floor sweepings. Luke vouched for its positive quality, and its high vitamin-c content.

Luke explained the process of bowl making to the group with some opting to trial the process. James said that the process of bowl making, because its time consuming, leads to conversation and people opening up – then he said “just look at Chris”, which was meant ironically as Chris had not said a single word whilst the activity was underway, he had barely spoken at all up to this point, and a silence fell on the camp with the occasional comment or murmur.

Luke spoke to me about his experience of the child and adolescent mental health service, CAMHS, and in his opinion their “pandering and indulging in negative reinforcement of behaviour and fears”. He intimated that he had surprised himself by thinking that it wasn’t enough just to listen and reaffirm the anxious traits of those seeking help that actually the negative patterns of anxiety required challenging and alternative approaches were needed.

Later Peter presented another challenge: “what’s the point though?” referring to the work being undertaken by the programme. He posited that “we need people to service the industry to prop up society, we visit nature, the wood, have a ‘profound’ experience and then go back. Peter then asked Simon, “Do you think it makes you feel better out here, less anxious?” Simon replied by saying, “not less anxious, no, my problems don’t go away but I stop thinking and that gives me a break from my anxiety about what I have left behind – I feel distracted – I feel that I’m anticipating something, aware, looking out for that thing that might happen”.

Whilst the group are talking and philosophising around the fire Chris doesn’t speak. Instead he set up a game, placing a tin cup at the edge of the clearing and began throwing small pine and larch cones, hoping to pot one in the cup. After a while everyone in the circle began joining in, alleviating the tension and demonstrating something that felt profound, but somehow unnameable.

Day 6, Week 6, February

In the morning Peter talks around the fireside sharing that he had been “thinking about this place like a cradle, as an incubator for the people that join that might help people flourish and bring what is already there to the surface, like joy in nature, care about

nature. I'm thinking about this in relation to our visit from NatWest, a nice person but what he represents is the archetype of capital, perhaps the opposite of what we are trying to achieve here".

At this point Simon said, "I didn't like him". I asked if he meant the man or what he represents. Simon replied, "both, he *is* what he represents".

Visit from a recent Working Without Walls graduate

I was surprised to see Ellie, an EFT apprentice, at the camp. She seemed very pleased to be here. Ellie joined the Working Without Walls course just over nine months ago when she was completing her final year at Secondary School. When we had first met we had discussed the fact that she was desperate to get back out to the woods again, the seat of much happiness and positivity from her perspective.

Luke took the group to the clearing to introduce some activities. The game itself was one that required interaction, support and communication. In pairs one player was blindfolded and placed in the crawling position. The second player was able to tap their teammate in order to give directions. The object of the game was to find balls on the ground and throw them at the other contestants to get them out. If an instructor was hit they were no longer able to provide directions leaving the other blind in the battlefield. Everyone joined in, including Mia. The game was enjoyable and the clearing was full of laughter.

Why am I here?

After these games Luke introduced another paired activity, suggesting that we remain in the pairs we were now in. He explained that he would like to give us the opportunity to talk with each other. He then provided each pair with an instruction card. On the front side it said only:

Why am I here?

On the reverse there were further instructions intended to aid our conversations. These were broken up into suggestions for past, present and future reflections. The prompts were as follows:

Past: What has happened?

Present: Where am I now? How do I feel now?

Future: What do I want? What do I want to change?

The young people were paired with each other: Chris with John, Simon with Lucas, and Mia with Ellie.

After a while everyone returned and Luke asked everyone how that had been and to share a little of the experience. Simon declared that he had liked listening to Lucas stating that he thought, “It was easy to talk but hard to listen”. Chris, who is not particular verbal or discursive, talked with more ease than usual. He said that it had been hard, but that it had got easier. In regards to his partner, John, he said “I feel I know him better”. Ellie spoke on behalf of Mia and said that they had enjoyed their talk and that there were a lot of similarities between them that they could recognise.

At this point Luke encouraged Ellie to speak to the group about her experiences with the course. She appeared pleased to have been asked and to have the opportunity to talk about her own experiences. When she was talking she presented an air of cautious confidence and spoke with clarity about her experiences. She spoke of being terrified of the four walls of school, terrified of the thousands of people there. She said that this course had saved her, that the scale and the quiet and the environment itself were what had assisted in her transformation. “I’ve learnt to be confident”.

Ellie’s experience of the pressure surrounding formal education and the solace and support she had encountered in the wild woodland was compelling. After she had shared her story with the group Ellie offered to record a conversation in an attempt to capture the detail of her experience and reflection.

In order to do justice to her account our conversation is here reprinted in full as it is felt to be such a striking example of how a sequence of wild experiences in a wild setting resulted in a tangible impact on engagement within the confined space, pressures and expectations of formal education.

Re-reading the conversation my bias towards the integrity of Ellie as a *whole-person* is rendered transparent. It also reveals my critical stance towards what I consider to be the worst aspects of formal education. These revelations are congruent with the methodological approach of the researcher and have not been adjusted or retouched.

Daniel: ...you talked about exams and things earlier on, when we were around the fire... and I can only imagine that there was tremendous pressure... during that phase, the culmination of school, the end of school...

Ellie: ...yeah, there was so much pressure around it, from both family and school, that you know, the school just wants the grades at the end of the day, the students aren't the main focus, it's the successes, the numbers, at the end of the day, that keep the school going, so there main focus is, oh, we're going to get these grades, and what can we do to get there, the pressure put on each student is so great, just because the school want to keep themselves in the good, and in the right, you know at home I come from a high flying family, my cousins are off to University, top students, my brother my academic, it's just the rest of my family is so... I got so much pressure at home to conform, and to be like they are, the academic type, you know, going off to college, to University, getting all the top grades, that I felt that I was never quite good enough, unless I achieved that, and just, obviously, just coming out here during my exams periods, gave me a good opportunity to escape all depressions and fears that I had round those exams and what else was going on in my life...

Daniel: ...the school wasn't supporting you, the growth of you, it was looking after the growth of itself?

Ellie: I think so yeah. Yeah I mean, individual teachers and staff members that I had known myself obviously supported where they can but there's no like trying to put that extra support in place to help me away from it, they just wanted to make sure, like everything they put in place was just to make sure I could do well in the exams, it always felt that as much as they on the outside looked like they were supporting, they were always, it always just felt like they were just trying to get the best out of me they could in those exams, and it always felt like at the end of the day, kind of, then as soon as they were done, that was it, you're forgotten about.

Daniel: So you, whilst all that was going on, the pressure cooker of exams and end of school you started coming here for the first time...

Ellie: ...yeah, I know...

Daniel: ...so that was about, just under a year ago...

Ellie: ...yeah, it was last June I came out here, after the May half-term...

Daniel: ...so, during your end of year school exams...

Ellie: Yeah, so that was my GCSE exams, I was doing them whilst I was here. I was leaving to go to exams sometimes, half way through the day...

Daniel: When we talked about it before, you, and it really struck me this so, you talked about how people had said, and you better tell me in your own words, in case I get it wrong, that people had said, you're going to get a U, you're not going to do very well but actually being here really transformed that...

Ellie: Yeah, so for my Geography exam I was told I was going to be put in, they had a big argument, they wanted to put me in for a lower grade paper, because they just told me I wasn't going to pass, that I wasn't going to do well, that I needed a lower paper just to get any kind of grade, and I actually did the best in that exam than I did in any others, and I was out here in the morning before doing it, so I think it says a lot for the environment for taking the pressure off me, and taking me away from it all, before I sat the exam...

Daniel: ...and what grade did you get?

Ellie: I got an A (laughs).

Daniel: How did that feel?

Ellie: It was amazing, it just felt like, like I'd just proved everyone wrong, yeah, just proved that actually, it's not that I can't do something, it's just the build up to it, it's the challenge, the step before hand, the actually exam, you know, I can manage that, I know the stuff, but actually the way someone is sent into an exam, can have such a massive effect on how they come out of it and yeah, I think that kind of proves it really that, it's not what happens in the exam really, it's what happens beforehand determines how you do, because I'd gone from a U to an A. So yeah...

Daniel: So, your experience tells you that being here on that day, helped you...

Ellie: ...well yeah, I know from previously doing the exam in the same situation that I had spent the whole morning stressing about it, I'd have the teachers around me going, have you remembered this, have you remembered that, have you done any revision, and stuff like that, whereas I came out here, and I was just allowed to forget it, completely forget what was going on what was going on that afternoon and just have fun, have a laugh, and enjoy myself, and learn new things, things that I never thought I would be able to do, I was lighting fires and felling trees you know, stuff I never thought I would be doing, and it was all so positive around me, rewarding, that I just had that positivity lingering in me a few hours later, when I was able to do things in school that I never thought I'd be able to do... (Ellie)

Earlier, after Ellie had spoken at the campfire to the group, Chris was encouraged to speak a little about his own experience of the course, given that he was also a graduate and had attended three separate courses since starting with EFT. He said that it had been "fun, that it had been a journey" and that "I didn't feel comfortable before, I feel comfortable here, and anyone who feels comfortable can make progress".

At this point he stood and addressed the whole group, at little on edge but with signs of confidence. He went on to say that "before I wouldn't talk in a group or make contact, I couldn't even make a fire, now I can". All this was said with a wry smile whilst standing in the circle addressing and making eye contact with all. It appeared that Ellie's experience was not necessarily an isolated one.

Day 7, Week 7, March

When all had gathered at the second camp and the fire had been lit, Luke introduced a new idea to the group. He produced a 'talking stick' (something which we had discussed on our car journeys over the previous weeks) and explained the significance, for him, of being able to 'check in' at the start of each day with the group.

The stick was a beautiful piece of dark twisted oak that looked like an oversized, gnarled corkscrew, smoothed by much handling. He explained that the process was therapeutic and an important emotional off-loading. He reinforced that negative emotions were just as valid as positive ones and that sharing without judging was important.

Luke began the sharing. He confessed that he was feeling stressed and anxious about the day and about the course in general, but that he was already feeling better "just being here, and sharing this". He passed the stick to Chris who said little, like all the young participants, but who felt secure enough to share, "I feel good, full of energy, and happy to be here". John, said only that he was "okay, that's all", but it was significant that he spoke in the group at all. Simon was more open and confident, he contributed that he was "feeling good, that it felt good to be out here and that he felt that I'm growing as person from having this experience". Mia, who is the least verbal and confident of the whole group said only, "fine", to which there was a supportive laugh expressed by the group. Lucas was last to take the stick and he nervously said he had nothing to say. Luke asked him "how do you feel?" and Lucas offered, shyly, "nice, nice to be here with everyone". I'm certain that I saw Luke wipe a tear from his eye at this point. Luke thanked everyone and then took us up to the clearing to begin playing the first games of the day.

During the whole process there had been a respectful hush. Everyone present seemed attentive. Perhaps this was an expectant feeling, that feeling of anticipation when you know you are being called on to speak, or perhaps it was a genuine interest, a moment of real listening and tuning into each other.

Going wild

At the clearing, in preparation for the game, Luke encouraged everyone to breathe and to shake out the stress. He said, "Being here is an opportunity to get away from, to be

free from the fast cars, technology, and screens that dominate our everyday experiences. We're wild animals underneath it all, we're wild creatures." He instructed us to take deep breaths and to literally shake our bodies. Everybody joined in, all except Mia, who looked pained and scared, embarrassed maybe. After these exercises Luke explained the rules for the following game: Capture the Flag. He spoke of "feeling like a wild animal when he plays the game, that it is the fastest way to get back to that feral state, it plunges you straight into feeling wild, in your body, you get down low, right down on the ground, it changes your movements, your very being".

Luke asked if we trusted our intuition. He challenged us to point to the direction of North. Nobody was able to with any kind of accuracy. Luke spoke about how it appeared that animals "just know where and when to migrate, where to find their food, their water. Is it magnetic impulses drawing them, is it simply time and exposure to the environment, or is it genetic? It seems we have forgotten what it feels like to trust our intuition, our gut feelings.

It was suggested, by Peter, that the sides be divided into young people versus the adults. The first game was over very quickly and was won by the younger group. Seeing them work together, especially Simon working with Mia, was surprisingly moving. It was exciting to see them moving through the woods, signalling to each other, working well in pairs, clearly determined to succeed, and allowing the playful seriousness of the game to take over. When they cornered me it was Mia who was the most vocal, shouting instructions for Simon to back her up. For a moment she appeared to be a confident young woman, enjoying playing a game and holding her own.

After the games we returned to the camp for some tea and to eat. Unsolicited Simon spoke of the enjoyment of the games and said that it had been a good group bonding game, "we had to communicate, to talk to each other, something that we have not really done at any point in the course so far".

Today there was no sign of a mobile phone, and there was no swearing. Around the campfire after a short discussion about the 'business' aspect of the course, where Peter seemed to concede that it should be kept simple and not interfere with the intentions behind being on the course, the young participants busied themselves with the continuing task of producing stakes and mallets.

Amid quiet conversations, Simon revealed that his mother was disabled and could not leave the house. John answered questions from Peter about music and revealed that he was learning bass guitar. Mia did raise some questions about the

business and revealed that she had written an overview of what the course was and what it does for those participating.

After all had left for the day, save for Peter and Chris, we hung around the fire and unwound. Luke started singing. He sang in a sweet, hesitant voice that became more strident as he went on. Later he talked about having been to a sweat lodge ceremony where he had taken in a question about his finding his voice. He told us that he had always had a problem speaking in groups and feeling that his words were valuable. In the sweat lodge he had sung at the top of his voice and from that moment had felt that he had found his voice and regained something that had been missing.

Coming back to the EFT office felt so alien. It was the busiest that it had been so far, with lots of people busy at computers and laptops, looking at graphs, tables, documents, emails, all individualised, alone in a way, you could feel the frenetic atmosphere in stark contrast to Capture the Flag or just sitting, communing around the fire.

Day 8, Week 8, March

Blue sky, sun, beautiful spring day, birds can be heard in the trees, bees can be seen around the woodland floor.

Lucas talked about his week with me on the walk in to the wood, about having taken an exam in English but not feeling that it went well, “we shall see” he said with a smile. It was not clear that he knew what kind of exam or qualification he had been put in for when I asked? He talked about being about to go up to Level 2 if he passed which must mean it was a Functional Skills qualification? Around the morning fire he spoke about having made some new friends and of having played out in the street, playing football. He said that he had kicked the ball and hit a car window and his mum had told him off as a result. Luke said, “That’s good, it’s a good thing that you were playing and got told off, that’s a good thing”. He intimated that being out and causing ‘trouble’ was actually a good way to be spending his time. This certainly makes sense in light of Lucas’s confessions about wanting to use the course as a way of gaining confidence and making friends.

John also said that he has been leaving the house a little more, even going to the cinema during the last week with friends. This sharing feels like a step in the right direction, as John has not expressed any interest in going beyond his room lately with little or no other experiences to share. He talks about the film he went to see and about

how embarrassed he felt as the other people there were really dressed up, “date night” he said. He told me that he felt under dressed and that he didn’t fit in.

Simon talked about spending everyday outside at the moment, about sitting in the wild primroses and being attentive to the sounds and sights of the forest. “I heard a crow mocking a woodpecker, I would never had seen it if I hadn’t been still. When you settle into a spot, nature forgets you’re there and carries on around you”.

I notice that Simon and Chris have started talking more openly with each other. This morning they start talking to each other about Birch paper, about how to light it, where to find it, about what they would like to grow themselves, about how they would like to take a cutting from a local silver birch. They talk also about how they have stolen the papery skin of the birch from a local tree that they both know. “It doesn’t hurt the tree and no-one else would want it”. Simon and Chris both have a tub of pre-torn birch ‘paper’ for fire lighting. I comment on the tub saying that it is a good idea to be prepared. Simon refers to it as his ‘tinder box’ and states, in a spoonerism, that it is for “fighting liars”. He latches onto his mistake quickly and corrects himself with “lighting fires’ yet there is something in his original slip that catches our attention and humour.

Simon said that he wanted to learn when Luke was talking about sorrel and how much of a sweet treat it was. “Now that’s the kind of thing that I want to learn”. This was while Luke was preparing nettle ‘tea’ for everyone made from nettle tips. He talked about their health benefits, about how stacked they were with vitamins and protein and about how much he loved them. Everyone tried the tea. Joe said that it tasted “strange”. Simon said that it tasted of “peas”. There was a sense of gratitude and generosity in the act of preparing and making that was warmly received.

Luke greeted us all around the fire. He quickly checked himself and noted that he was standing up and holding court so he quickly sat down saying “I don’t want to be teacher”. He went on to say that “out here you never stop learning, out here there’s always more to learn, to know, there are no limits to your knowledge”.

With little said about the business due to Mia being absent Luke took us up to the games clearing. When we were all sat he explained that he would like us to do an activity that was powerful and deep, one that relied on trust and also on personal independence. He made a claim for the experience in advance saying that it was important to travel to our edges. “The edges are where we grow. The most important thing anyone has ever said to me is ‘explore your edges’, take yourself to the edge or your comfort zone and push up against your edge, that’s where we grow, where we develop”. Whilst he was talking a brimstone butterfly flew through the canopy.

The 'game' was more of a personal challenge. It was a solo blindfold journey. We would be led out from the circle into the wood blindfolded with another acting as a guide. When we had gone a certain distance we were spun around so as to lose our bearings completely. Luke would then make his way to a spot in the wood where he would bang a stick against the tin lid of the camp's water pot. We were then to make our way to the sound unaided and sightless. Luke said "trust yourself, have faith". Chris, Simon, Lucas, Joe, James and myself all participated.

When we had all returned from the activity Luke asked us questions, attempting to gauge our experience. He had his notebook and noted down words or phrases. First he asked how we had felt when we were first alone, after being led out, before embarking on the challenge. Chris said, "Bored, boring, no-one to talk to but when the drumming started I felt excited". Lucas said that he had "felt frightened when alone". Luke affirmed his response saying that it was a common feeling. Simon said that, "it was alright. I'm often on my own so..." Luke then asked how it felt when it started. Chris said, "Fun, stabbed a few times by trees. I'm used to seeing with my eyes, so it feels like you're in a different world, I used my feet and hands". Luke then asked, "Did you feel safe"? Simon replied by saying "I enjoyed it. I just used my ears and oriented myself".

After the activity Luke set the young people an additional challenge. This one was a hunting and orientation collection game. It was decided that the young people would be paired up. Simon was paired with Joe, Chris with Lucas. It was hoped that this would also mean that they had to talk to each other. They were given forty minutes to find: pine and fir needles, birch bark, pine and fir cones, a feather, nibbled cone, and a forked stick for a catapult, catkins, larch cones, sweet chestnut husk and an acorn. Images were supplied on a laminated sheet. There were extra points if they found and recorded common orange lichen, oak moss, jelly ear fungus, birch polypore. This task created a serious level of competition that took me by surprise. This all was connected to the blind fold challenge and Luke's intention of taking the young people deeper into themselves in the hope of igniting a personal process.

During the afternoon James undertook filmed interviews with the young participants. This took place at 'the old man of the woods', a gnarled oak stump that was talked about during the first week and which has taken on a certain significance with the group overall. Mia, who had arrived unexpectedly, was surreptitiously filming with her camera whilst people were in and around the camp.

Lucas was really chatty during the afternoon. He almost ran up to me and began out pouring lots of personal information that I had not solicited in any way. He said that he had been “kicked out of school when he was fourteen for fighting with another kid”. He went on to say that he had then “had to find another school, where I was kicked out again for racism”. He said “I’m not a racist anymore” adding “I still get told off by my mum now and then. I joined the Air Cadets then, was I was fourteen, for a year, I didn’t like it, didn’t like being told what to do, I didn’t like all the pleats and creases in the clothes, I didn’t like the army, they would shout in my face”. He then began talking with serious intent saying, “I’ve got something I want to share, to tell someone, but not in front of people, I think Luke knows, I’m not sure”.

It was like I had become a confessional. It was an unanticipated side effect of my role as researcher that the participants actively wanted to talk to me, to be interviewed, to be heard, and to be listened to. It felt as though I was validating them and their experience. I was interested in what they had to say, I made it clear that what they said had value for me, perhaps this was the first time that they had been valued in this way, where they had power?

Luke said that he thought that this was massive, having someone there that was interested in them, and in their take on things. Around the fire towards the end of the day Simon spoke up and said, “I’m going to miss you guys”, almost reaching out for to embrace the group. Peter said that he felt Simon was gaining a “more spiritual understanding of the woods and of the natural world”. This is an interesting projection.

Mia was so relaxed toward the end of the session, working next to Chris, seated at his feet whilst he worked sawing. Mia was binding wood cookies; the team said they thought there a blossoming of closeness between them.

Mia also brought with her the written piece that she had authored about the group. It was passed around the campfire with those that read it commenting on its merits. It was well written and constructed. The biggest surprise was its content. It revealed the experience that Mia had been having despite keeping most of her feelings hidden. She had articulated the experience of the group and the environment in almost poetic terms at times, using suggestive and sensual imagery to describe the setting and the feelings encountered. It was an emotive piece, and one that felt as though it was validation of the course, the place, of Luke and of the group as a whole.

Talking about the group and some of the shared problems, Simon had said to James that he appreciated the non-judgemental group, had felt empathic with the anxiety of the other anxiety sufferers. “It was good to be with others who are ‘anxious’

as you can appreciate how they feel”, Simon also said that he liked the freedom to explore plants rather than be told, do it this way or that way, he realises now it is important for him to find his own way.

During the reflective conversation around the fire, Joe’s fire starting was seen as a breakthrough, and the celebratory atmosphere that had been created around that successful act had been significant, including the act of giving Joe a chocolate brioche, which he ate. The instructors had recognised this and confessed that they had found it hard to withhold their joy at this simple yet important step.

Day 9, Week 9, March

Heavy, constant rain.

The rain meant that we were hunkered down around the fire, together under the tarp. Whilst sitting, we started talking about how nice it is just to be, to have some time for ‘being’. Peter said a friend of his had suggested society had inverted the term ‘human being’. “I want to be a human... being, not a human... doing”.

Luke talked about Joe and that he, “had really opened up and talked, had been really chatty, talked about gaining his confidence, getting the bus, which he has a phobia about, getting work”. Luke said that he had also asked about me and about what my role was, whether I was working for the organisation or not, saying that he felt I was really easy to talk to.

Luke worked to construct a large tarp over the main camp area. The wind was blowing hard in the trees and you could feel the rain was coming, sense the dark clouds approaching. Simon lit the main fire with Chris supporting. Luke and Joe erected the toilet whilst others collected and graded firewood. Peter and I walked up to the village to meet Mia. On the walk back to camp with Mia we talked about dogs, having been barked at on route by a dog walker. Mia told us she had a sausage dog. Peter commented on a video that Mia had posted which was a promotional video that she had made in between now and last week.

As we were walking in the rain began, hard. Lucas kept saying that he wished it would stop raining, that he hated the rain, but there was something about it, a cosy feeling.

We made tea with James preparing a batch of Scots Pine ‘tea’ which many of the young people had, Lucas, Simon and Chris. There was much laughter about the

tarps collecting water and the near misses when peoples moved underneath and almost were soaked by a downfall.

At one point Chris asked what time it was. When he found out it was twenty past one he declared, “What! I thought time would go faster if we were all doing something, really engaged with something, I didn’t think it would slow down?”

Simon said to Luke that he had made him want to learn Bush Craft. Luke talked about how the term had been introduced by Ray Mears (2002) and that for him it represented a lifetime of learning. He advised Simon to follow the Ray Mears way that he feels is thoughtful and connected to nature and sustainability rather than the Bear Grylls (2014) approach to survival.

Whilst around the fire Luke handed me copies of two articles that had been published in a local newspaper that chronicled his yearlong survival training and weeklong quest. I was particularly interested in the quote, “No food, no phone, no sleeping bag, just one’s own mind and whatever nature can offer” (Observer 2016).

At the very end of the day, with energies waning, we gathered to play a final game of Eagle Eye. Julia took up the role of spotter and we moved deeper into the wood. Simon did an amazing move, sliding down behind a log and disappearing from view like a magic trick. This was greeted with much laughter from all in the game. Watching all the young people leave together, ascending the hill out of the camp, as if one bonded group, was a good feeling.

It seems as though progress was made, a tangible feeling of cohesion, joy even, spring maybe, but it felt that the change, that had been budding but on hold somehow, had ripened and blossomed somehow. This week everyone was on time, relaxed, working, talking together.

Day 10, Week 10, March, last day of the programme

Sun.

Chris, Simon, Lucas and Luke hovered around the fire and loose conversations were struck up. Chris talked about his future, moving on to study Horticulture at College in September three days a week, with the other two spent with EFT in a trainee style role. He spoke of forthcoming exams and how he needed to get C grades, particularly in English. He was troubled by the fact that he had done badly in his recent mock paper and hadn’t read any of the text books except ‘something and Hyde, about a man who changes when he drinks a potion.’ When I was trying to offer supportive

advice he said, “I don’t know how to write it down. I’ve got lots to say but don’t know how to get it more than bullet points.”

Chris and I struck up a conversation about ‘boredom’ and I asked him how it felt. He said that he “hated not having things to do, that it made him frustrated, drove him nuts, if I get bored I eat or sleep”.

Ahead of playing games Luke led a reflective exercise at the clearing. Seated in a circle he reminded the group that we had been undertaking The John Muir Award and talked about the four areas of the award that we had engaged with. He asked us to “be kind to ourselves after we leave the course”. He suggested that we might have learnt and discovered things about the wood and also about ourselves. Whilst talking about the ‘conserve’ element he asked everyone “do you feel closer to nature?” and although no one said anything everyone present raised a hand in affirmation.

After this reflection Luke introduced an activity with a quote from John Muir. “When you tug on one thing in nature you see that everything is connected”. He asked us to form a circle and throw a ball of string to each other. He asked us to relate one living thing to another reassuring us that it was not a test of our natural history or knowledge of the names of things. He began by saying ‘caterpillar’ and throwing the ball to Peter who responded with ‘leaf’. On the game went adding: raindrop, branch, tree, feather, buzzard, air in the buzzard’s wings... until we stopped and he asked Chris who had said ‘tree’ to sit down as if he had been chopped down. He then asked everyone who felt a tug to also sit down, as people sat down everyone could feel a tug and so the entire group dropped to the ground. Luke said that although it was simplistic that it illustrated the concept of connection and the web of life, of how all things are interconnected and rely on each other, one thing supporting another even if it is not obvious or direct. He asked us if we could think of the one thing on the planet that if it were taken away would not damage or affect any other living thing in a negative way. He then revealed that he was actually thinking of human beings.

Mia arrived at this point with Julia and we all headed down to the fire to prepare for the final wide game of Capture the Flag. During the game we lost track of time.

Suddenly the game entered its final phase. The young participants had taken a defensive strategy and were all at their camp on high ground, the top camp, which seemed unfamiliar. There was much tagging and un-tagging of each other with an effort by the adult group to disorientate the younger group when they had the advantage but whooping and shouting out names when they were trying to regroup. There was much laughter but it still had an intense serious feel.

Returning to camp Luke presented everyone with an EFT Certificate, their John Muir 'Discovery' Award and a celebratory iced cupcake. Mia ate one, which although such a seemingly small thing, must have felt enormous to her.

Whilst we ate and recovered I talked with Mia who was articulate and seemed comfortable to a certain degree answering personal questions and talking about difficult situations and experiences. Again I felt honoured that she wanted to talk with me at all. It made me realise that actually being there, listening, providing the young people with the opportunity to be heard, must have had real significance for them, especially later when during the reflective closing circle they offered very little to the other assembled adults in the way of verbal affirmation, with me even vouching for Joe and speaking on his behalf.

As we leave for the final time, the participants take it in turns to jump over the fire amongst clapping and a tangible sense of achievement.

Chapter 5, Part 2

Using the research questions to explore (and attempt to understand) the participants reporting of experiences whilst clarifying the above account

Towards the end of the programme I invited the participants to discuss their experiences with me in a recorded interview. That all of the participants engaged with the process, despite it being entirely optional, is perhaps an indication of the value of being listened to that was felt by the young people. Returning to the research questions has enabled me to organise what was shared and discussed.

How might young people benefit from wild experiences?

The recorded conversations and interviews revealed a rich amount of potential benefits felt by the participants, from notions of safety and enhanced confidence to relief from anxiety and stress. Below is a sample from each of the participants. Joe spoke of the alleviation of his depression.

I haven't been as badly depressed as I was, and my anxiety is a lot better, I feel like I'm not being judged as much. I feel less pressure, more relaxed. (Joe)

Lucas was appreciative of the community that he had been granted access to.

It's helped me by meeting new friends and not being unsociable, it's helped my confidence and made me stand up for myself. (Lucas)

Simon appeared to have found direction through his experiences on the course.

I came on this course, with the aim of sorting out my life and getting from life what I want but yeah, this course has definitely helped with that, it's definitely made me realise where my talents, and passions and interests lie and its helped to grow them as well... (Simon)

Chris offered a positive account of being immersed in the wild world, one that provided space and solace.

Being in massive woods, you can just sit down, relax, you just listen to all the birds, you can just think to yourself. I used to do it sometimes, go into woods, I used to do it before school, I used to go out to school at seven o'clock in the

morning and just sit in the woods, and just think how's my day going to go, is it going to go bad, is it going to go alright, I just think that helped me and then my mum stopped it, because she was scared, she was worried about me going so early, but out here I can do it every week... (Chris)

The tangible benefits reported also morphed into benefits that the participants felt less able to adequately describe but nonetheless felt had an important impact on them.

There's not really the words for it, like there's so much freedom, there's nothing but freedom, here, you know, you've got freedom of speech in your literal terms but actually, you can be you here, there's no way you have to act somewhere like this, everyone's treated as equal, you're free to do what you want, when you want, but you're free to just be free, that probably doesn't make any sense but you're just you are free you know, everything here is a part of you but you just there's not really the word to put on it really. (Ellie)

There were a variety of personal explanations given as to why these benefits may have been difficult to describe, explanations that dwell on the felt.

Just the quietness, and the ability just to explore if I want to. (Joe)

It's peaceful. It's been good with meeting new people that I didn't already know and gaining confidence and not being shy and having fun. I would say you get to do what you want, and be more open to yourself... be yourself and do what you want. (Lucas)

I think, people are less likely to resist, if someone is showing you, how to do things successfully, rather than how to do because I said so, it definitely makes them more, approachable... (Simon)

Out here, if I need to step out, if I need my time and walk off, its accepted within the group, and its seen as something that's allowed, like I'm allowed the time, the space, to feel comfortable and to join the group and work as I need and, yeah, it's just... (Ellie)

All of the participants declared that they would recommend the course despite having reservations about whether they would be able to articulate exactly why. Mia was particularly forthright in her advocacy of the course.

Yeah, before I came I didn't go outside of the house a lot, like I spent the majority of my time just stuck indoors because I didn't want to leave because I didn't trust, like the world, my environment and the people in it and like since being on this course I've managed to go on like really long dog walks on my own and stuff and that helps to clear my head and like, I wouldn't say I like to

be on my own all the time but most of the time I do like to be on my own but this is one place where I feel like accepted and I don't want to be on my own if that makes sense. (Mia)

Mia had demonstrated the most complex needs of any of the participants yet revealed a startling amount of positive personal benefit especially as this was difficult to interpret through observing her within the context of the weekly sessions. Here she speaks about feeling safe within the boundless space of the wood.

It's open, and I just feel safe, I don't really know how to describe it, at school it was just all enclosed and like I felt trapped, like I lived in the village that my school was in, so I just decided to walk home and leave school because I hated it so much and like, I didn't feel safe there at all... whereas here it just feels safer. (Mia)

Mia crucially uses the word freedom to describe her experience:

It's like you just feel freedom and you don't have to pretend to be someone that you're not, and you don't have to fit into some sort of clique, and be the popular one or anything, you can just be you, and that's fine. (Mia)

This freedom appears to have been reciprocated with a deep felt appreciation and recognition of the value of being treated in this trusting, non-imposing way.

It's like you know that you need to behave good, like you know you have to have manners and you need to listen and stuff, but like, you just do that anyway because that's you know that that's what is expected whereas when you get told it you're like, well what happens if I have a bad day, what happens if I can't act like that and, here they'll accept if you're struggling, whereas school won't, they'll expect you to do mountains of homework, talk in front of a whole classroom when you really don't want to... (Mia)

Mia expertly summed up why she felt the onslaught of school did not provide the space or time for true confidence building or a healthy approach to becoming a whole person.

It's like they're not pushing you to, like get more confident more quickly, like they just accept that it's going to take time and you just do it at your pace, and like you can take as long as you want, you'll get there eventually, but you don't have to get there in like a week, or a day, you can take as long as you want and it doesn't matter. Because, the more pressure you put on someone, to like, get better or get more confident and get this and get that, it doesn't work it just makes them stress out more, and makes them think 'well you're telling me that I should feel a way that is normal but like it's not me', and it's not for some other

people, in all honesty how do we even know what normal is, what's normal for me could be something else to someone else, and everyone thinks that you must think and act and look in a certain way and you shouldn't have to fit into society if you don't want to because society should except you for who you are and you don't yeah, I don't know. (Mia)

What might be learnt through wild experiences?

Responses to questions about 'learning' suggest that participants were pulled by two different ways of understanding the term: on the one hand, that learning is conventionally perceived as having acquired or gained something with immediate applicable results such as skills, information and know-how (this is most likely a result of exposure to the type of learning promoted in schools); on the other hand, it can be seen that learning is also broadly perceived as a process that leads to personal understanding, growth and development as suggested by UNESCO definition of knowledge, learning and education in the literature review (UNESCO 2015).

Here are some examples where the participants confirm what they consider the first type of learning to be taking place:

There's the, the felling, and the whittling, quite practical skills, yeah. (Joe)

Eye contact, talking in big groups, teaching other people, fire skills, running little activities, just being helpful... (Chris)

Before I would go to the woods and walk around for a bit and maybe see some wildlife, but now, I can start naming things, I can start identifying things and understanding why they're there, or at least more now, I am learning more about this environment through being in it, and through being with people who know about it, and it makes it a lot more approachable, realised that it's not scary, there's nothing to be afraid of, it's just like anywhere else really, in fact probably safer than other places. (Simon)

However the participants appeared to perceive what could be defined as affective, attitudinal, self-understanding, personal growth and transformation through their experiences:

I guess, that it's OK to be different. (Joe Interview)

I've learnt, I never thought that I could do all these, it's just when I was out, when Ellie spoke about her journey, that just gave me that little more confidence

to step up and say my journey, and I think if everyone done that I think that everyone will build up the confidence to share their story... (Chris)

Yeah, I learnt how to be myself out here, yeah I learnt how to live, how to exist, how to talk to another person without being paralysed in fear, how to be part of a group and not fear that I'm being judged, you know, even though I say it again and again, I think this course saved my life, I don't know, where I'd be if it wasn't for it, housebound or not here at all, and it's just, like the life skills and the things that aren't really taught but you just learn, through the comfort and safety of the staff and environment and the people you're around, it's just, it's amazing, it really is... (Ellie)

I've learnt that it's OK to be myself, and that, I still care what people think but I, that part of me has gone, is done, I don't really care as much, and I don't really know how to describe it. (Mia)

Attempting to explain how this learning could take place here in this wild setting Mia claimed it was:

Just the people and the environment, like, just if teachers were like EFT at school then so many more people would be like able to learn more, cause like some teachers do like genuinely care but then like 75% of them don't, and like here you can just be honest and they will like help you and I don't know, they would do anything they can to make you feel happier, I don't know, it doesn't really make sense. (Mia)

Do wild experiences promote social or cultural confidence or agency and if so, in what ways (for example personal development, transformation or leadership)?

All of the participants declared an increase in independence and confidence but it was Chris who embodied the shift from being dismissed within the context of school to becoming a confident leader.

Chris and wild agency

Chris told me, with pride, that he was happy to be out here in the wood and that he was also helping Luke teach at a local Primary School whilst he completes school himself and prepares to move onto to College.

Chris was intensely practical and matter-of-fact. When I asked him if he had always been making fires as we walked through the wood together, he told me a story. Later when he offered to record an interview he recounted the story again.

I was nine or ten...

My dad was smoking, and he'd always leave his lighters around, so I thought I'd take one, I just wanted to see how it worked and what he felt like when he was doing it, and then, my mates had elastic bands, so we set fire to that, and then we found some more, so then we went to find somewhere else, so we just thought we'd just do it in this Primary School...

We just hopped the fence, and we found this shed, so we kicked the door open, just to get in there because it was a little bit windy, and we just set fire to elastic bands, watching them fizz up and black smoke...

We were just bored... just messing around and eventually we realised what we'd done...

Someone from the Primary School caught us and we got in trouble by the Police. Then the Police, gave me the choice to either go to this fire course for one day, and they'd explain all the dangers about fire, or I'd get done, and obviously I chose the fire course, because I wasn't going to get nothing, I'd get nowhere in life if I had that...

They showed us a video about the stadium, which some person was having a fag and then dropped it, and obviously anything can make a fire, and then all of a sudden the whole things gone up in flames and everyone's dying that made me realise that I could be in that shed, what had gone up, and I could be dead... It was scary. (Chris)

Now Chris was undertaking his third experience of a course with Luke, working alongside him once a week in a Primary School teaching children how to start fires!

In our interview Chris recalled how his experience of school had provoked strong reactions.

Swore at teachers, I would threaten to punch them, I would do anything to get out of the class, because I weren't getting the help, I would draw all over my work, I'd rip it up... (Chris)

How had his experiences in the wood with Luke and the Working without Walls programme moved Chris into this new position of leadership and responsibility, of trust? It appeared that Chris was in his element doing this work. When we were talking Chris said that he was, "working towards what Luke is" and with this comment it felt as though Luke had been a significant influence and support.

It was brilliant. I thought it was much better than school. Obviously, they give you free space where you can just go and wander off, and obviously in school you can't do that, and I thought I'd definitely love coming out again. (Chris)

I asked Chris directly what he thought of Luke in that role.

At first, the first time I come out here, I thought it was weird, the way that he was doing it, he was more set back than all the other teachers at school, he would let us do what we want, or he would ask us, and then it was like, with whittling, he would show us and then he would just let us get on with it, whilst watching us, and in the school, they're constantly giving you more and more work to do, I think that's better for people, that show them a few times and then just step back and just let them do it themselves, so otherwise they aren't going to . (Chris)

For Chris he was receiving the help and attention that he was calling out for in school.

In school, if you talked to a teacher about any family problems you have at home, they would ring up the social services, and say stuff about the child that you said, here it's like they will help you with family problems, they even put you to courses, or places where you can talk to people, and they will help you, but in school they don't... (Chris)

Yet here he was thriving, flourishing and surprising everyone with his transformation.

No, no one in my family imagined me doing what I'm doing now, they thought that as soon as I leave school that I'm going to live on benefits, and just do absolutely nothing... I even said to them, to my mum and my dad, I bet you that I will probably get somewhere in life, then I sort of proved them wrong, well I proved to them, and now look where I am... apprenticeship, going to College soon... (Chris)

Do wild experiences impact on the ability of young people to engage in formal education, and if so, how?

Over the course of the ten weeks I spent alongside the young participants fragments of stories emerged about time spent in school. It felt appropriate to ask them to tell me more about their experiences.

I reminded them that as well as being here in the wood trying to find out what was happening, I was also a teacher and that I was committed to finding ways to make things better for my own students as well as for this group whilst we were together.

Participants were candid about their experiences of school. Their revelations reminded me how much is at stake for young people in these settings. Ellie was outspoken about her experiences.

Yeah, I mean to me school's, I mean it's always been a terrifying experience for me just, and particularly the school I was in, it was huge classes, ninety people in a class, and I just remember going into school each day and absolutely terrified you know, I didn't even know everyone in my class, it was such an unnerving experience, to have to sit and learn or talk in an environment that wasn't safe, like, you couldn't, there was no way to form the relationships, with classmates so I just began to get absolutely terrified, I reached the point where I was having panic attacks, I was scared to go into school, I was constantly coming out of class, just terrified to be in that environment because I didn't know how to react to the situation that I was being put in on a daily basis. (Ellie)

Chris described school as being “like a prison”.

Too many students and not enough teachers, because there are like thirty students with one teacher, and I struggled to read and write and then it was like I would just wait for a teacher to come, and then they don't come and I get annoyed, then start kicking off... (Chris)

Lucas emphatically declared school to have been “crap”.

I used to get bullied and I got kicked out of one, and then moved to another... they don't teach you as much though, I just got bored and thought to myself that I should get into trouble... Nothing to do, you're just fiddling around with stuff, like pencils and that. (Lucas)

Joe revealed that he had a more open attitude to the beginning of school that was sadly not realised.

I went there because I thought I would know all the teachers and have friends around but they kind of made new friends and I was kind of sitting on the outside kind of watching in. I hated people, I hated myself, I didn't bother to do anything, and I didn't see the reason to do it. I guess, there's the pressure to succeed and you can't get anything wrong and I was judged a lot there... I didn't know, like kind of what I was meant to be doing, and how I was meant to behave, and what I was meant to do after college. (Joe)

Joe contrasted his experience with that of his current one of being in the wood.

Here you're not really told how to behave, what, what they're expecting of you, whereas kind of in school you have to act a certain way, yeah. (Joe)

Despite her reserved nature around camp Mia was the most forthright about what she felt to be the indignities of school again drawing parallels with “prison”.

I never really got along with school, I hated school, like the whole time I was at school I begged to be home schooled, but it never happened, and then I got some new problems from being at school, and then when I found out I didn't actually have to be at college I decided to leave. It was so bad that I literally had to just walk out of lessons because there was no point me being in them because I wouldn't learn anything and the teacher wouldn't do anything about it, they were trying to teach but no one would listen, it would just be people talking, so I was like right I'm not doing this, so I just walked out and most of the time, I just spent my time either getting in trouble for walking out but either way I don't really care because I just spent that time in the foyer or like outside the headmasters office just learning myself, and if I didn't do that then I wouldn't of got the GCSEs that I got. (Mia)

Mia's summing up of the purpose of school is indicative:

I feel like at school the teachers like, they just want you to get good grades so that they look good, that sounds quite horrible, but that's how I feel about school. (Mia)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the impact of Simon having been “diagnosed as being on the Autistic spectrum” at the end of his secondary schooling had contributed to the fact that he “didn't like school”.

I didn't know this going through Primary or Secondary school so I just had to sort of get on it with it. I think I was diagnosed in Year 10 or 11, so very late, not that the diagnosis gives you any help it just makes you understand why you find things difficult, so because of that, school was always difficult for me, and I didn't do very well. (Simon)

Perhaps it was to be expected that the participants relayed such negative memories of school. They were engaged with ‘Working Without Walls’ because they were seen to be at risk in some way or another, either by the institution of school itself or another external agent, a Key Worker or parent.

However each of their testimonies contains a seed that sheds light on what lay behind these frustrations and demonstrations of what was seen as defensive and disruptive expressions of behaviour.

For example what does not come across in this account is the level of frustration that Chris felt about school. His personal account contains so much frustration, frustration perhaps borne out of an unfulfilled longing for help.

Their recollections speak of lost opportunities and the inability of large-scale formal educational settings to see and support the situation and needs (wants) of the ‘whole-person’. Chris wanted help and attention. Lucas wanted to be occupied with something meaningful. Joe needed to be accepted and encouraged. Mia needed structure and time. Simon needed someone to think closely about how he was learning and integrating.

None of these wider needs appear to have been met through their experiences of school.

Could providing young people with wild experiences promote deeper relationships with the natural world?

There is subtleness to the participants’ appreciation of how they became drawn into the wider, wilder world during their time immersed in the wood on the course. Lucas confessed to feeling more “alive” out in the wood and described this by comparing school and the woods to one another suggesting that it had extended his thought.

School’s a bit, makes you claustrophobic, and the woods make you think of something else... (Lucas)

Lucas also revealed that he had felt “happy” in the company of wild animals.

Simon was more articulate in his rendering of the growing closeness he had experienced naming it as a growth of “appreciation”.

Appreciation for the things that you might overlook. (Simon)

The following quote from Simon also suggests something more, that he was able to perceive a new way of thinking about other living things beyond the human.

People often see trees as objects rather than living things, I think being in an environment where the trees outnumber you, and you see them, moving, and you hear them, and you can see all the different stages of their life, you realise that they’re more than objects, they’re not objects at all, they are not things that we should play with, they’re not, they deserve respect as all other living things

do, and I think that appreciation isn't there, especially in certain generations... erm, also the wildlife, I think it's very easy to not really to pay attention to wildlife, if it does appear in an urban environment you can just look at something else, whereas here you become acutely aware of things moving around you, and you realise that they've got their own lives too, so yeah, I think definitely appreciation of other living things that normally you wouldn't pay attention to. (Simon)

Simon indicated that this should play a part of everyone's experience.

Well, of course, I think everyone needs to get back in contact with nature, I mean we are a part of it we shouldn't always be trying to force our will on it. (Simon)

Ellie drew attention to the expansion of her relationship with the wild and the wood as a living entity.

It's just, ah, it's just (lost for words), it's such a magnificent place, it's this specific woodland, it's so beautiful, ever way you look, like every turn you take, it's so different and just so full of character and life, that you just can't really be unhappy here, like you just, it just makes it, it welcomes you, it makes you feel so free and happy, and everything you do is just so, in as much as it's so open, it feels cosy at the same time, because you've just go all these trees around, and there's so much character and life in every one, that you just kind of feel so comfortable, and there's so much comfort in where we are and what we're doing and you just feel so welcome and at home in a place like this... (Ellie)

Ellie went on to express this as a 'homecoming'.

We're all part of everything that goes on here, like we all just make up this space, and I guess it kind of feels like home here now, like I just remember the first day here, much as I was terrified of what was going on, I just felt so at home, and at peace, and just safe, there's so much safety in this environment, and this woodland, that it's amazing really (laughs)... there's not really a word for it... (Ellie)

It appeared that the course and time in the wood had transformed Mia's ability to be outside.

Yeah, because I wasn't going out before and I didn't really like going out on my own, like the furthest I went was to the end of the driveway and the other day I just thought, do you know what stuff it, I'm just going to go out, because I used to do it, nothing's going to happen, I've got my dog at the end of the day and he's going to like bite someone's head off if something happens so I'll just go,

cause I just wanted to be on my own but be outside I didn't want to be shoved in my bedroom because I have so many like negative associations with like my bedroom and my house, and with the outside I don't. (Mia)

Comfort was alluded to in Mia's appreciation of the boundless nature of the setting of the course. Again this appears to have provided a feeling of safety rather than of fear as might be assumed.

Like the trees just go on forever, and they're most likely never going to stop and the thought of like that just makes me feel more comfortable knowing that, like, I don't know how to describe it. (Mia)

Mia summed up her experience by speaking of a growing sense of freedom and linked this directly to the more-than-human world.

It's just, like the thought of knowing that you're in a space that's open and its natural and like, it's weird to think that this even exists, like, and you have access to it whereas some people don't, so you might as well not just make the most of it, it's better than sitting indoors on your phone and watching rubbish and stuff, go and watch a bird or a river or something instead because, because trees don't tell you how you should be, whereas the Internet does, whereas out here they don't, like all these trees are different...they're all different and that's how society should be, we're all different, none of us are the same and we should just accept that because, we just should... (Mia)

Here it seems that Mia is alluding to the potential of the wild world to offer guidance, that it may be possible to learn from the wild world and that these teachings may offer new and urgent insights, insights that may not be gained from formal, enclosed settings.

Chapter 6

Ethnographic Case Study 2 – The Wilderness Foundation UK

This chapter presents a distinct ethnographic case study exploring what happened when a group of six young people were engaged with The Wilderness Foundation UK on a nine-day residential journey called Imbewu, a journey that sought to provide access to wild places and immersive wild experiences.

Introduction to Imbewu (the Seed)

“We get to explore here and make the answers ourselves”. Lauren, one of the six young people on trail with the Wilderness Foundation UK, is talking to me about her experience of being out in the wilderness, away from friends, family and the comforts of home. She is attempting to help me understand how she felt being out in the open, and virtually uninhabited terrain of the Scottish lowlands, and how she felt that being able to explore the mountains, streams and forests on her own terms, encouraged her to formulate her own ideas and impressions.

I think that the wild place, it's like you're there, and you can experience it yourself, you can have your own opinions, whereas teachers might just tell you that's it, that's the answer to the question, that's it, but we get to explore here and make the answers ourselves. If you sit an exam you've actually got loads of answers you can say and you still get a point but really, there's really, only one definitive answer, whereas in the wild space it's like more opinions, and it's quite good, you can make your own, your own answers, how you feel about it, because it's not biased and you can discover it yourself. (Lauren)

The activity of ‘experiencing it for yourself’ that Lauren is describing forms an essential element of a programme designed and led by The Wilderness Foundation UK. As an organisation the Wilderness Foundation UK seeks to promote and secure wild places, both in actuality and in the living imagination. It does this through immersive journeys in the wilderness and encounters with wild ways of being. What follows is an account of one such programme undertaken over eight consecutive days during June 2017.

Day 1 (Tuesday)

Travelling from London to Scotland with Jo Roberts, the Chief Executive Officer of the Wilderness Foundation UK provides time to discuss the programme ahead. Whilst we travel Jo expands on the principles and intentions of the Foundation itself and what can be expected during our time on trail. Jo explains that upon our arrival she will be responsible for leading what is known as ‘the Imbewu programme’. This programme is promoted by The Wilderness Foundation UK as, “a weeklong experiential learning course in rural Scotland for groups of up to 10 young people. The course features a three-day wilderness trail in Scotland’s wildest countryside” (Wilderness Foundation UK 2018).

Jo describes the intention of Imbewu as “nature-connection, appreciation, developing choices for employment, team building, and communication skills” but that “no doubt there are therapeutic elements”. ‘Imbewu’ is an African word which, when roughly translated from the Zulu into English, means ‘seed’. Jo is a South African national and it is possible to perceive a connection between her experiences of the wild savannah and cultures of Africa with the current direction of the Foundation that she is now responsible for leading.

The Wilderness Foundation UK

The Wilderness Foundation UK presents itself as a different kind of organisation to Education Future’s Trust. The Wilderness Foundation UK has an established history of over 40 years and Jo considers it to be less reactive with a greater emphasis on leadership than on recovery. At its heart is an organisation that seeks to speak on behalf of the wild world and is engaged in conversations about the future and the conservation of wild spaces at a local, national and international level.

In the organisation’s promotional material The Wilderness Foundation UK describes itself as “a registered charity dedicated to preserving the world’s last remaining wild places, through providing education and growing understanding of the importance of wilderness. For over 30 years (they) have been connecting individuals with wild places through (their) varied programmes, focused on personal development, transforming lives, respect of diversity and simplicity of experience” (Wilderness Foundation UK, Wilderness Expeditions, Promotional Booklet 2016).

The promotional pamphlet describes the origins of the Wilderness Foundation UK as arising from a school based in the African savannah. “Prompted by their belief that people find an innate belonging and thereby a subliminal need to connect with the environment, the Wilderness Leadership School was founded in 1957 by South Africa’s legendary conservationist Dr Ian Player and his friend and mentor Magqubu Ntombela” (Ibid). The writer and explorer Laurens van der Post, famous for his overland journeys into uncharted African wilderness, also contributed to the formation of the Foundation.

Alongside the focus on conservation, what might be considered a ‘spiritual’ orientation can be detected in the literature available regarding the Foundation? A story embedded in the history pages of the Foundations promotional website recounts a semi-religious outlook and is here reprinted in full as it is felt to be significant to the particular case and the enquiry overall:

When Ian Player looked for a symbol for the Wilderness Leadership School, Magqubu Ntombela gave him an erythrina leaf. That leaf became the symbol of Wilderness Foundation UK across the globe. Using the Zulu word for erythrina, Ntombela said: “The msinsi is a tree found in the wild and also in the settlements. It is our job to take people from the settlements to the wild and then bring them back again. The leaf has three points, and each point contains a message: Man to God, Man to Man, and Man to Earth.” Player added: “Many years later I realised that the fourth relationship was the internal relationship of each of us to ourselves, and that was as big a mystery as the leaf itself.” (Wilderness Foundation UK 2018)

The section concludes by stating that “The goal of the Wilderness Foundation UK is to connect people—especially struggling urban youth—to these four essential relationships” (Ibid).

Laurens van der Post is also quoted throughout the Foundations literature in support of this relationship between the wild world, the human and the experience of ‘spirit’. “What wilderness does is present us with a blueprint, as it were, of what creation was about in the beginning, when all the plants and trees and animals were magnetic, fresh from the hands of whatever had created them. The blueprint is still there, and those of us who see to find an incredible nostalgia rising in us, an impulse to return and discover it again”. (Laurens van der Post 1987, Preface to *South African Passage*, quoted in promotional leaflet).

How these elements are realised throughout the Foundation’s programmes will be important elements of determining how the educational intentions meet with the activity and experience of those involved. Where once the Wilderness Leadership

School operated exclusively in Africa with long wilderness trails in the savannah, now the reformulated Wilderness Foundation UK transposes the programmes to the United Kingdom. One such programme is ‘Imbewu’.

Imbewu

The Imbewu programme takes place exclusively in the highland and lowlands of Scotland, has a specific design and goal and is led by “professional wilderness guides” with the participants expected to:

- Learn camp craft by hiking, camping in tents, and cooking outdoors.
- Build problem-solving skills and grow their self-esteem by encountering and meeting challenges posed by the natural world.
- Practice conservation and Leave No Trace principles.

For the young people participating, many of whom have never been outside of an urban environment, this will be unlike any organized experience they have previously had through school.

Struggling urban youth

The Wilderness Foundation UK claims that, “our youth face some of the greatest challenges of any generation through history, due to increasing urbanisation, economic crisis and over population. This includes their loss of a vital connection to the natural world and rural heritage skills, thus impacting on wellbeing and sustainable futures” (WF Leaflet). Imbewu has clear intentions to connect these places, the urban and the wild, through a planned sequence of activity:

Participants are inspired to preserve natural spaces and explore new career pathways. The curriculum includes rural heritage, conservation practice, estate management, and sustainable land management. Experienced gamekeepers and estate managers help supervise hands-on experience with rural jobs such as wildlife conservation, estate management, fishing and forestry, and renewable energy. (Promotional Literature 2016)

Underpinning this, a commitment to mental health, or ‘elemental health’ as Jo calls it, is ever present:

As in all Wilderness Foundation UK outdoor programmes, Imbewu participants enhance their well-being simply by being outdoors in the wild world. (Promotional Literature 2016)

Sarah, a graduate of one of the Foundation's programmes is travelling with Jo as a volunteer on the Imbewu programme. Sarah reveals that she participated in the Foundation's 'TurnAround' programme whilst she was experiencing significant difficulty with her home life and school.

TurnAround

The TurnAround programme is another current strand of the Foundation's work and is promoted as an opportunity for nature to provide a relief from anxiety, stress and to improve mental health as is reported in the associated promotional literature:

Our TurnAround project in Essex supports the most vulnerable young people in society. We give them a second chance and help them to feel confident making their own decisions and their own life choices. We take them out into nature and help them heal. (Promotional Material 2016)

Turnaround has echoes of the John Muir Trust and the Working Without Walls programme designed by Luke Funnel. It is concerned with recovery as a first step towards embracing the transformative power of the wild world. The above use of the word 'heal', and notions of health will be seen to have implications for the enquiry overall.

The TurnAround project has been independently evaluated by a small team of researchers from the University of Essex who claim to have recorded:

Positive effects on participants' self-esteem, mood, hope, self-efficacy and connection to nature. These findings add to the growing body of research documenting "the wilderness effect": that young people who have authentic experiences in the outdoors develop better self-esteem. (Wilderness Foundation UK).

As we continue to talk Jo says that, "this trip is not specifically about addressing behaviour like the TurnAround projects" but suggests, "that trauma may surface". She recollects previous trips, indicating that she has led a significant number of long expeditions across all the programmes and across several continents. "Last time we had

a girl who we thought was in a gang,” she says by way of warning. The strands of these conversations provide a glimpse into how physically and personally challenging the trips are for all those involved, perhaps especially for Jo who appears so committed, and who personally oversees and is involved in every aspect of the programmes offered by the Foundation.

Jo’s personal commitment is impressive to witness. Ahead of travelling to Scotland I was invited to stay over at Jo’s home in order to be able to start our journey early. Over dinner we were joined by Jo’s husband, and talk turned to the upcoming trip and the hoped for impact. Jo’s husband said that he thought the work was important but “that it needed to reach more than just a handful, it needs to be for everyone, every child”. This developed into a conversation about the possibility of informing policy at a national level, asking “how do we scale it up?” and it is clear that for Jo there is a lot at stake. Intriguingly Jo describes herself as ‘chaotic’, revealing that she always brings lots of papers and books with her on trail. This statement leaves me wondering what the vision driving the Foundation is, if it is always shifting because of new research and reading, if it has a wisdom tradition underpinning it, or if Jo is accessing a body of knowledge that is hard won through experience.

Approaching camp

The approach to base camp brings the vast, empty landscape of the Scottish lowlands into view. Jo describes this place as “post-industrial, coal-mined, sheep farmed, conifer stands”. She says she feels it is “sterile” although she “would never say that to the kids”. Justifying the choice of place for a Wilderness Foundation UK programme she says, “because of its remoteness, its silence, its solitude - the silence is wild for me”.

As we enter the Estate that will host the programme during the week, a single cottage becomes visible in the distance, a two-storey bothy known locally as ‘Flintbarn’. At Flintbarn we meet Hannah, the general organiser of the Imbewu programme in Scotland, and John a professional wilderness guide that Hannah has hired to assist the group during the week ahead.

Hannah and John are already busy around the building. Last week flashing had been stolen from the roof, and heavy rains have flooded many parts of the cottage. This will have a significant impact on the operation of the programme.

Operational Meeting

After making emergency repairs to the roof and ahead of dinner an operational meeting is called in the kitchen and Hannah proceeds to lead us through the anticipated programme of Imbewu. It becomes clear that there is a lot of preparation to do alongside the reinforcement of values for the group. This expands into an overview of the ethos of the Foundation and how that will be incorporated into the activity of the trail.

This will include a ‘leave no trace’ directive, an approach to being in the wild that is as low impact as possible. Family as a model for organising the group is raised alongside the roles that it is felt will need to be enacted. These include: motivators, timekeepers, navigators, health and safety, and overall welfare. Jo extends this by drawing attention to the role of the wild to the week ahead and hints at a guiding philosophy. She says that as the C.E.O she is “an environmentalist not a social scientist” and that she feels that ‘nature has an intrinsic value’ where she is seeking to ‘move away from the human focus to support transformation and deepening nature connection and kinship, to experience nature for nature’s sake’. She concludes by asking us all to contemplate, “the value of nature. Nature is the mother not the midwife’. Jo says that an African word sums this up, ‘umbutu’, which she translates as meaning, ‘I am because you are.’

John, our guide, responds by saying, “the environmental angle will be interesting, I’m more used to *activity* as a way of being in nature, of working *in* nature rather than *with* nature”.

Hannah shares her approach to reflecting on experience that she would like us to use with the incoming group. This is a five-part exercise that focuses on: highlights, knowledge, attitude, challenges and skills. In Hannah’s demonstration these five areas are written on a human figure with highlights and knowledge written above the head, challenges and skills over the feet and attitude written over a heart shape at the centre of the body.

After a late dinner the four of us, Jo, John, Sarah and myself prepare for bed, with all of us needing to sleep in what would have been the front room due to the flooding inside the building. A small fire is lit, and candles placed around it in the hearth. The atmosphere is similar to that of camping and as we begin to settle ourselves for bed I realise that it is still light outside despite it being close to midnight.

Day 2 (Wednesday)

We meet the group of young people for the first time at the Estate headquarters, just after lunch. John, the wilderness guide, greets the young people in the grounds and asks the group to form a circle. He introduces an ice-breaking game where each person gives their first name, a word that rhymes and then performs an action after repeating the names of those ahead in the circle. John explains that this is a memory game in order for us to swiftly learn about each other. The activity sounds as though it might be too childish for this age group but the young people appear to enjoy the game. There is nervous laughter as the group introduced themselves one at a time as: Ethan the cat, Emma the elephant, Lucy the swimmer, Lauren the leopard, Ryan the lion, and Jordan the jogger.

Prior to these introductions The Wilderness Foundation UK had asked the teachers working with the young people to complete a contacts form that included details of why they wished to embark on the trail.

Ethan had said “confidence”. Emma said “the skills of the fire-fighter”. Lucy had said the cadets, and that she “wants to join the military”. Lauren said she wants “to become a vet”. Ryan said “anything as long as its practical”. Jordan said, “To become a gamekeeper”.

After the initial introductions to each other, the group attends an overview of the Estate outlining how the Estate is organised and a little of the history of the area. Gary, the Estate Manager, explains that ‘farming is a way of life here, and it is still the biggest part of the Scottish economy’. Gary shares a little of his own personal story, of being a farmhand and studying agriculture ahead of wishing us well for the week ahead.

Disconnection and reconnection

As we leave the Estate to travel up to Flintbarn mobile phone signals begin to be lost. Jo says, “Get an electronic fix now because when you get up to Flintbarn there’s no reception.” At first I think I detect sighs but when the young people are asked directly how they feel about their phones and being ‘dis-connected’ they brush it off. “Not bothered”, says Emma emphatically followed by a unanimous sharing of “nah, not bothered”. It appears that in some way they may be relishing the opportunity to actually ‘dis-connect’. Later Jo will tell anecdotal stories about how almost everyone taking part

in the programmes appear to relish the opportunity to, “disconnect in order to reconnect”.

Later in the trip Lucy and Emma said, “We’re not bothered about our phones, we’d be happy not to have them at all”. The reason they give is that, “then you wouldn’t have to put up with all that shite” indicating a frustration with social media rarely reported on in regard to this age group.

As we drive into the wilderness the initial bleakness begins to give way and people start noticing details: birds; meadow pipits, plovers, curlew, lapwings, skylarks as well as the details of the landscape itself, the cotton grass and the sphagnum moss.

On arrival at the cottage we stand outside in the landscape and Jo asks us to ‘listen to the silence’ referring to what she calls, “puza moya”, Zulu for ‘drink the wind’.

As the group explores the house for the first time and gets organised the girls suggest sharing a room and swap tents with the boys who are happy to camp, to get wet and dirty. Ethan says, ‘I’d rather live in a tent’ as we are called indoors for our first group meeting.

Questionnaires

Jo requests that each participant complete a ‘baseline questionnaire’. She explains that the Wilderness Foundation UK is working with the University of Essex to evaluate several of their programmes and this is the main method of capturing for Imbewu. The group let out a collective sigh at the prospect but swiftly acquiesce.

The most substantial questions on the form explicitly refer to ‘feelings’. Use of the term in this context is attributed to the work of Rosenberg (1965) and Terry (1999) with participants invited to respond using a scale and scoring system. Positive and negative prompts varying from:

- On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
- I feel I have a number of good qualities.
- I take a positive attitude toward myself.

To:

- I feel I do not have much too proud of.
- I certainly feel useless at times.

- All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

It is unclear how the responses will be used but the forms are dutifully filled in. The questionnaire concludes with three open questions: what do you hope to get out of this project, what are you most nervous about, and what are you most excited about? It is striking that these questions will be asked directly, yet informally, to the young participants throughout the days ahead, in a variety of different ways and settings.

Community Code

After completing the questionnaires John leads the group into an exercise designed to generate a code of conduct for the week that all will contribute and consent to. Lucy volunteers to scribe what will be referred to as the Community Code charter. I notice that she had volunteered lots of input beforehand when the group were looking around the site, and admire this willingness to speak up.

Creating the Code is lively and leads to interesting discussion and debate with the group finally settling on the following ‘rules’:

- Include everyone.
- Have fun.
- Teamwork.
- Don’t annoy each other.
- Gratitude.
- Tidy up after yourself.
- Personal boundaries.
- Respect each other.
- Communication.

It will be interesting to see how this is enacted throughout the week.

Play

After the intensity of the questionnaires and creating the code it is suggested that the group spend some time playing. John introduces a game called ‘Monkey ball’ that everyone participates in and helps to further bond the group. It is then decided that we will go in search of a spot to wild swim.

There had been talk of swimming right from the first meeting. When pushed on the subject and asked if she was serious about the group really going Jo said, “I promise.” Emma said “are you serious about the swimming? I take promises to heart”. We drive out into the wild in search of a place to swim. As we are leaving Flintbarn the group notices a stray lamb at the roadside. We leave the vehicle and are impressed by Lauren who tackles the lamb swiftly before lifting it over the fence and returning it to its distressed mother.

Wild Swimming

Approaching the burn (stream) the air was thick with mosquitos. Ryan was bitten so many times that his face, arms and legs became aggravated and swollen. The six young participants changed into shorts and t-shirts and tentatively approached the water.

Where we entered there was a little eddy where the water was deep enough for us to get fully submerged. It was ice cold. In the end Jo did not enter the water, but stood close by watching over everyone. As a demonstration of adult solidarity I joined in, both because I did not want the promise to be broken and because I love open-air swimming.

Swimming has its own risks. Knowing the landscape intimately Phil the gamekeeper will later say that “the water levels are 5 foot over normal at the minute” and that the high levels are known locally as “mare’s tails, not a good sign, the white-water in the streams is an indication of overflowing streams”. Learning a place takes time and is not to be taken for granted.

On return the group is given ‘chill out time’ whilst the girls volunteer to cook the first evening meal. After dinner, at the close of day the young people were asked what they were looking forward to. Ethan said that he was “looking forward to having fun, to gaining confidence and team building”. Lucy said that she was looking forward to “looking at things from a new perspective”. Not everyone contributes and Jo repeats a quote, that “silence is better than bullshit” which is then added to the Community Code.

Check out

Jo then initiates a final ‘check out’, the opportunity for each member of the group to sum up a positive experience from the day. The responses included, “tired” and “happy”

as well as specific moments such as, “the swimming” and several allusions to school such as it being “good to be away from the pressure of exams”. Ethan left the room saying, “I just want this week to go slow”.

After lights out Jo and I sit up talking about the day. She says ‘it is so important to nurture and show them that they are taken care of right away. This is thriving, not surviving’.

Day 3 (Thursday)

At breakfast Jo outlines the day ahead and invites everyone to ‘check in’ asking, “What are you looking forward to today?” The responses vary from, “seeing farming from a new perspective” to “meeting the gamekeeper”.

As we leave the house to meet our first rural workers, a team of shepherds, the group is given a camera to share in the hope that they will record the week from their own perspective.

Standing together in the field, waiting for the arrival of the shepherds, Lauren finds and catches frogs in the burn. She seems so at ease and happy to hold and handle them, happy seeing mice and voles in the long cotton grass. This ease impresses itself on the rest of the group who begin taking an interest, relaxing their apprehension about handling the animals.

Shepherds

Ian, Alastair, Alan, and their sheepdogs, round up the sheep from the surrounding hillsides and begin herding them into the large shed at the side of the cottage for processing. The group will be working most of the day alongside the shepherds and I wonder if handling the animals will deepen their relationship with the animals and the natural world.

Once the sheep are in the shed they are run into separate pens for antibiotic dosing, castrating, and marking. This involves picking up the sheep, feeding a tube into their mouths, putting a tight elastic band around the male sheep’s testicles and clipping their ears with pliers.

Lifting the sheep through gates and processing them individually is heavy physical work and at first many of the group are reluctant to get involved. Gradually the

shepherds coax the group into participating and before long they are all deeply involved.

Over the course of the morning a work ethic emerges and jokes and banter are exchanged between everyone in the shed. When Jordan curses, Ian, the head shepherd, softly remonstrates saying, “bad language is the sign of a poor vocabulary”. I notice this because in the setting of school Jordan’s swearing would most likely be met with a show of force and admonition rather than gentle, good-natured guidance. He appeared bruised by the interaction but adjusted his behaviour as if by his own accord.

Learning in this way appears to be straightforward, hands on and involved, with little mystery, entering into the practical principles directly by being invited to participate and help, taking responsibility alongside those who are experienced and masterful. The sharing of insights and tips along the way, as a natural consequence of helping others learn by doing, is the anti-thesis of school, of bookwork, it builds the group, this sharing of direct experience, the trials and errors of taking part, the moments when someone steps up and does something new. This is when they need they support of others most, and are at perhaps their most open and receptive.

Ahead of lunch I tell the shepherds how much the young people seem to be getting out this experience alongside them. I say, “That a day out here is surely worth a week in the classroom?” Alan smiles in agreement and says, “Yes, because they are doing so much more than just listening, they’re team building, being independent, seeing new things, being with new people in new places”.

Later the young people will say how privileged they feel, that as far as they are concerned that it was a once in a lifetime chance to meet people like that who would share and show you how they work, and think. Jordan said, ‘It’s great to see how other folk live”.

Game-keeping

In the afternoon, Phil, the gamekeeper for the Estate arrives with his wife and their dog, Bobby. They introduce themselves in the kitchen and Phil explains his role and working life. He says that his life can be “a little twisted and single track” with “lots of time spent alone” and that it “takes a while to adjust to the bleakness, the emptiness”. He goes on to claim that he, “does like people” but that he “also likes solitude”. He tells the group how he can sometimes spend as much a month alone up on the mountainside without returning home, “looking after and protecting the grouse”. Explaining his use of

traps and the planned extermination of ‘vermin’ across the land he states that he “has the right to shoot any animal if it is a threat to the commercial venture of the Estate”.

With this statement Phil proceeds to invite the group to a gun handling demonstration. Jordan expresses real interest in the guns, having shot firearms himself and is the first to volunteer firing the shotgun into the ground. Lucy and Emma refrain from participating whilst everyone else takes part.

Recognising that much can be learnt from Phil’s role and outlook I wonder what the intention is and how that is being structured into the overall experience. When I ask Jo about this later she replies, “I’m not sure what we’re doing even now, there’s not a lot of structure to be honest”. Is it simply that being here matters more than the pedagogy? At another point in the trip she will describe her way of working as being able to ‘flex’ which seems appropriate out here in the wild. I am puzzled and delighted by the apparent lack of coherent structure, beyond the approximate structure of where we will be and when. Jo says she loves the ideas of Arne Naess (2016), the founder of the Deep Ecology movement, when he says, “that wildness will do the work”. Yet I continue to wonder if, as an educational activity, it is reaching or fulfilling its aims, which are never explicit.

After the demonstration Phil and John leave Flintbarn to look for suitable sites for camp as the heavy rain means that some places are currently inaccessible. Whilst they are gone the rest of group pack up and prepare to move back to Estate because the rain is also making Flintbarn impractical as a base of operations. Back at the Estate we are offered simple quarters and despite the relative comfort the group expresses its dismay that we are not staying out at Flintbarn.

Roses and Thorns

After dinner and ahead of bed there is a general tidy up and the beginning of preparations for tomorrow’s first trail day. Jo leads the group through an enhanced version of the now customary ‘check out’, a process she calls, roses and thorns.

Retiring to bed I think about how the experience of the week, of Imbewu, is so interlinked into so many other layers of activity, the Estate, the flora, fauna, the weather, the government, the funding. Emma and Lucy had spoken about the difference in the Scottish educational system, how they stay on at 16 but can then spend time at College. The slight difference in the ages of the boys and the girls is interesting. I wonder how it will manifest over the remaining time.

Day 4 (Friday)

We wake early and prepare to leave for the wilderness trail. Despite there being limited mobile phone reception, the adults in the group are keen to find out the results of the snap General Election from the previous day. For a brief moment the world that we have all left behind enters back in and shifts people's moods and behaviours for a while.

Over breakfast, talk about politics continues but is pushed aside by the now obligatory 'check in'. Jo refocuses the group by asking, "How do you feel about today?" Ethan responds by saying, "excited, I want to go camping". Lauren tells the group that she is "intrigued" and "curious about what's going to happen". Ryan says he is "excited and looking forward to all of it" and Lucy says that she is "excited to roast marshmallows". Emma is the only participant to sound a note of caution when she says, "Mixed. Excited, but what if it doesn't work out?"

John then leads the group through an overview of the potential obstacles and hazards that could be encountered whilst out on trail. He lists them as: "cold, rain, injuries, twisted, ankles, animals, livestock, bulls, midges, barbed wire, getting lost, deep water, currents, contaminated water, fire, tent and equipment catching fire". He then explains the ethos of 'Leave no Trace' and asks questions about the level of our impact on the land.

John has led most of the group information gatherings. He has a no-nonsense approach. At times this is not explicitly encouraging or focused on being participant led or empowered. He asks questions as a vehicle to get things moving but the approach feels didactic, which at times feels at odds with the overall outlook of the programme.

Whilst planning for the trail Ryan and Jordan are reserved, appearing happy to take a passenger role. I notice also that Emma and Lucy, who are so verbal when the group is informally together, are so quiet and monosyllabic when in a formal group sharing context. It appears that there are always one or two participants in a group that are more vocal, that answer the questions, that the questioner looks to, to answer questions, that the group start to lean on when they are being asked questions.

John leads the group through an equipment list and packing instructions, with all participants encouraged to use a bin bag as a lining for their rucksacks. After preparing the group board the mini-bus and shuttle back to Flintbarn.

Back at the cottage Lauren lets the group know she is feeling sick but that she is still willing to walk out with the group. Ahead of this walking out, and discussing challenges, Jo says, "guys, there is this amazing book you should buy yourselves. It's

called 'Man's Search for Meaning' (Frankl 2004). It will change your life and make you feel differently about challenges".

Walking out

As we all walk out into the wild landscape together I notice how the group shifts about, changing partners, how the group moves, dances, shifts, striking up a variety of conversations and developing thoughts.

As we walk the sun comes out and the young participants engage me in conversation. They seem at ease and our talk ranges from school and parents to the birds overhead.

Ryan talks to me about his experience of school saying, "I don't like school, but I still have to go, it's boring, if I were in charge I would get everything done early in the week and then let them go on their phones." He went on to tell me that he had, "nearly been excluded because I've been naughty, throwing pens in class, and food at lunch, but I've stopped that now".

Walking with Lauren for a while she begins telling me about her experience of the Duke of Edinburgh expeditions. "It's the same", she claims, "the expedition is the same, wild camping", before making a distinction about rules. "Well you have to follow the Country Code, it all depends on your group really. But my last group just enjoyed it and walked in the silence, they didn't play music like some groups".

Emma and Lauren walk together for a while and their talk is about parents. Emma says that she, "moves between her Nan and her Mum, it's difficult at home". Lauren talks about being an "only child" saying that, "it would have been nice to have a brother or sister but now I'm so used to it, I'm independent".

Lauren tells me that she decided to undertake this trip because she was looking for something more when she received her 7 A*s at school. She talks about her interest in becoming a vet, of always being around animals, "loving them" because "they don't do you any harm, so why not help them?"

Jordan talks about his experience of poaching and volunteering on another Estate with a gamekeeper. He tells me that he's, "killed 70 foxes". He says, "I started when I was about 10, my dad and his dad did the same, it's in my family, it's not for everyone, but it's the way of life I want to live".

Returning to Ryan I hear him talking about the birds overhead. “I wonder if the birds want to be like us and they’re up there, chatting about us, in their voices, talking about wanting to be down here.”

Being out here is so much richer and subtle and more complicated than theorising or reading about these experiences, being in the field (literally) alongside the group, helping, supporting, and joking. Perhaps most importantly it is more muddled than a simple or straightforward perspective can allow for. Jordan’s relationship with animals, as “vermin”, as objects, appears to have been set and he seems to not want to permit another viewpoint, yet as he walks alongside Lauren their conversation includes her admission of love and care for animals and sets them on a conversation that is expansive in regard to the ethics of both.

Jordan says, “If – the smallest word with the biggest meaning” challenging the position of Lauren and others as we walk and talk. He talks about killing deer when he was 5 and how he doesn’t mind doing it. I told him about my friend swerving in his car to avoid a deer in the road, about how he crashed and later died because of that action. Jordan said he would run it down. When I asked him if he looks in the deer’s eyes before he kills them he said “no”. When I asked if he would mind if all animals were killed he said, “No, I wouldn’t care, well expect for dogs because they’re nice, not like deer, they eat trees and that affects finances”.

Arrival

As we arrive at the site that will be our base camp for the next few nights, Jo is already starting to construct a tarpaulin tee-pee tent. This will be where we meet together, to cook and talk as a group. The site is nestled slightly in the low-lying mountain range. The ground is soft, covered in moss, making it delightful to walk barefoot.

Small hiking tents are provided to the group and everyone begins setting up, helping each other to solve problems as they arise. After the tents are set up Jo suggests that we find a place to swim together. Lauren is still not feeling well and so remains at camp. Sarah also refuses the invitation.

It is sunny when we reach a nearby stream that is deep enough for us enter. The water runs through a culvert that is big enough to clamber through and Ethan finds a bird’s nest inside which everyone wants to look at. Jo swims this time and everyone seems so relaxed and happy, chatting and splashing in the late sun. As we leave Ethan and Lucy ask with genuine glee, “can we come again?”

Cooking

On our return everyone is hungry and we are given cooking instructions. The group will be responsible for their own meals whilst on camp. When are all paired up and given a cooking stove that uses oil cooking commences. There is much laughter during dinner with Ethan in particular making jokes about cheese.

Over dinner Lucy talks about her study of philosophy, mentioning moral choices and utilitarianism, and despite the ideas appearing a little a jumbled, she is obviously interested in the subject. As she begins talking about the idea of a ‘happiness quotient’, Lauren and Emma join in and talk turns to the experiences of the week so far. Talk then turns to school with Ethan, Emma, and Lucy saying that they don’t like school, and that they would be rather be out here. Lauren however said that she couldn’t wait to get back to school because her assignments would be piling up and it would be hard to get on top of them all.

After dinner we take our cooking utensils and wash them in the stream. Clouds of mosquitos hinder progress and the group find the task challenging but work hard to get the job done.

Campfire and gratitude

When we return John asks the group to collect firewood from around the site. For many in the group it is the first campfire they have ever experienced. John instructs the group in fire starting, and as the fire gets established everyone gathers together to share in stories and to toast marshmallows that Jo has brought with her for the occasion.

Whilst at the campfire the group shares it’s gratitude for the day and Jo leads a ‘roses and thorns session’. Despite the allure of the fire the whole group are keen to turn in ‘early’ at 10pm. It is still light but the young people all admit to feeling tired after a long day out.

Talking around the fire after the young people have gone to bed the ‘staff’ take time to reflect on the day. Jo talks again about structure, plans and “being flexible”. Jo said, “I see myself as an equal, on a par with them, so I don’t want to do a big talk, but perhaps a story, we could all tell a story. I could introduce the concept of Imbewu more?”

A puzzling thought occurs. Is it the value system, the philosophy behind the programme rather than the activity that is essential? Or is it the activity itself, the sheer

weight and immersion of being engaged in this that produces the values and philosophy? Thinking about the different styles of Jo and John. Which better serves the intention, didactic or loose flowing facilitation? How do we learn well out here? Is it us that does the learning despite instruction, even without instruction. Is nature itself teaching us?

Day 5 (full day out) (Saturday)

The rain is heavy through the night. The group wake late, rising after 8am. John is in the faux-tipi helping to organise a slow breakfast. The girls offer to make toast for everyone whilst the boys share the last of the tins of baked beans that they have opened.

At 'check in' Jo asks the group, "how would you rate out of 10 so far and how would you improve?" The group responds with lots of 8s and 9s out of 10 with mainly "cold and wet, lack of clothes and sugar" being the main hindrances to a full score. Lucy qualified these scores by adding, "There's always room for improvement".

Whilst together under the shelter of the tarpaulin, Lauren read a poem by Gerald Manley Hopkins aloud to the group. The poem, 'The Peace of Wild Things' by Wendell Berry (2018), was selected by Jo from one of the many books that accompany her on trail. The group listens attentively.

When despair for the world grows in me,
and I wake in the night at the least sound,
In fear for what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with fore-thought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water
and I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free. (Berry 2018)

The group share what it feels about the challenges faced so far, focusing mainly on the mosquitos, and the weather. This soon gives way to a sharing of gratitude for, "the sun, the outdoors, the space, the wild, being together, teamwork, eating together, helping each other with the food and chores".

We wash up the breakfast things and individuals head to the wood to go to the toilet. Jo and John travel back to Flintbarn for mosquito nets and more supplies. Whilst

they are gone the group mess around in the tipi. The boys and Lauren juggle with oranges, and break into a spontaneous game of 'two truths and a lie', an icebreaker they had been introduced to on arrival at the cottage. Ryan has an unbroken record of guessing the lies correctly, but at end he lost a few and that put him off playing any more.

As we make our lunch of sandwiches to take with us on an exploration outside of camp Jo and John return.

We leave camp in drizzle and walk past an abandoned house provoking conversations about being able to sustain a life out here. Walking alongside a ravine, and traversing a gully we notice moss, ferns, and lichen, yet few mention the wind, or the driving drizzle.

A break in the rain coincides with the discovery of a quarry pool at the ravines edge. We stop and as time begins to pass the young people start to notice things in the water, newts, and tadpoles. Ethan in particular is taken with catching a newt and exploring the life we have found.

Returning to the windbreak of the abandoned house for our lunch provides respite from the wind. Ryan suddenly declares he urgently needs the toilet, but is scared to go in the woods. Jo volunteers to accompany him. Whilst Ryan is gone talk turns to the mines that are visible in the distance and conversation turns to the impact that human beings are having on the wild world. John interjects with questions about the environment and the wind farms that we occasionally have seen.

John has a stern, no-nonsense approach. He remains steadfast, creating strict boundaries between himself and the group. He is didactic, yet is now playing 'team building games' leading the group through a challenge involving a rope. In these moments he appears to soften and another side is glimpsed. I wonder about how this is all connected, if it is, with the wild, the wilderness and wild education experiences?

Into the woods

After the games we enter the pine forest that is on the far edge of our campsite. The wood is dark due to the denseness of the canopy overhead and the young people comment on the atmosphere. I am asked if I will talk a little about John Muir. By way of introduction I lead a blindfolded stalking game that I had learnt from Luke during my time research his Working Without Walls programme. This was intended to bring John

Muir's story to life, the moment in Muir's story when he was blinded and on regaining his sight, turned away from industry to become wholly immersed in the natural world.

The group cautiously move through the wood, relying on their hearing, whilst I bang a log against a tree trunk to guide them. There is a feeling of elation when they make it 'home'

Shelter building and solo time (solitude)

Jo invites the young people to explore the wood and take time to build a shelter, a place of refuge ahead of us all having intentional time alone in the wood.

Later we all visit the shelters and comment on the structures with Jo particularly focusing on how the qualities of the shelter reflect the personality of the builder. Ethan becomes frustrated with his shelter and requests that he has time to rebuild.

The sun shines through the forest as individuals drift away to be alone. Jo has asked that everyone have around 30 minutes of solo time yet she hasn't provided much in the way of a framework for this time to be spent.

Later when we come back together by a stream to reflect on the experience of solitude in the wood there is a mixed reception to the activity. Ryan confesses to falling asleep during his time alone whilst Lauren has a more positive reaction. Jo explores the difference between being active and alone and being reflective and self-absorbed. It will be interesting to see how the group reacts if they are invited to do this activity again.

The young people then challenge the adults to build shelters declaring that it is unfair that the 'staff' make them do things, but aren't willing to do them as well. The adults agree to the challenge and later there is much laughter at the efforts of the adults to build their own shelters. We then visit Ethan's attempts to rebuild and offer praise for his determination to improve. As we walk back to the camp Jordan appears distant and wanders through the wood lashing out violently at trees.

Back at camp we prepare for dinner and I offer my penknife to the group for whittling and this seems to be a big hit with the boys especially.

It is so windy in the tipi yet Jo insists that we still go through the check-out process of 'roses and thorns'. Emma says, "I don't like being alone. I found the solo hard". Lucy and Lauren both confessed to "feeling tired". Jordan said his highlight was, "whittling" and that I "was the most immature adult he had ever met". His comment (and laughter) reminds me why I became committed to teaching. I wanted to provide an alternative role model, one that could play and tease, could show emotion, and could be

vulnerable and human, one that might appear whole whilst being invested in the whole of the other. In this moment I think to myself that I will keep teaching, not because I consider myself to be a good teacher, but because I can see again, amongst these young people, that I am able to offer an alternative for them. Someone, a man, who can be kind, silly, patient, thoughtful, caring, tender, encouraging, and supportive.

After the 'check out' the group chats more openly and easily. Emma talks about her issues around trust and that she feels school is safe, a sanctuary. Reflecting with Jo and John I ask Jo if she feels that she is meeting her personal goals for the programme. She said, "no, because of how unsettled it has been, but we are hitting our outcomes: rural work, nature connection, and building self-confidence".

I sit up alone gazing out across the landscape, watching the clouds in the half-light ahead of midnight, so peaceful. Time has shifted here for me. I wake early but I am compelled to stay up late, later than anyone else in the group. It is as though the fatigue just leaves me. There is a late night peace that comes, I just want to be out there, to sit and let it unfold.

Day 6 (Sunday)

Everyone is up early and there is a sense of expectation around the camp. We drink tea together and look out over the land that is rapidly transitioning between rain, sun, rain, and wind.

During breakfast Jo begins the final 'check in' of camp and asks, "How are you? What have you got out of it? What have you learnt from this place?"

Emma says, "I'm OK, a bit sore. I don't like camping as much as I thought I did, I'm not sleeping but I do like the daytime. This is a nice place to be". Lucy echoes Emma. "Tired. Sore. The experience outweighs the bad though". Ethan says that he is, "sad to be leaving" and asks Jo directly to clarify her questions. He finishes by saying, "I feel happy being in this place". Lauren says, "Tired, but OK. When we first came I thought there wasn't much to do but now I realise there's so much to do, we've only just touched it". Jordan says he, "would've like to have stayed another night" and adds a thought to Lauren's contribution when he says, "going back to the house there's nothing to do, but being here there's loads to do. I didn't know what to expect". Ryan concludes the check in by saying, "I'm tired, I feel good but I don't know how to describe it".

The group begins preparing to leave, dismantling tents, packing bags and washing up. When everyone is ready Jo invites everyone to participate in a final ‘solo’ at the campsite.

Solo Time

Looking around I can see the whole party scattered across the landscape, sitting cross-legged in the long grass, alone yet together. Everyone appears to be receptive to the ‘solo’ today whereas yesterday it seemed more challenging. Jordan even says it was, “good, peaceful” whilst Lauren refers to it as, “awakening”.

Whilst participating I experience the moment as peaceful and reflective. The skylarks above, and the moss under my hand move through my thoughts as the rain, wind and sun move across the landscape. Not one of us attempts to escape the short bursts of rain overhead, staying firmly in our spots. I am suddenly struck by a thought about Jo and her way of working. It appears that she is ‘flexing’ all the time, working with what is, rather than with what she wants. She works with the whole group and keeps the individual needs in mind, responding to the needs of the group and also the suggestions of the group. Her ideas, plans and expectations are not fixed. This reminds me of the Wild Pedagogy ‘wiggle’. Jo had said that, “if I think about it, that is how I like to work”, using a metaphor of clay to explain. “It’s easier to flex with softer clay, this group is soft”.

As we gather together and start to leave Jo says, “This place has become part of us, the land, the water, it has held us and we’ve left part of ourselves here”.

As we leave my thoughts turn to the wild place itself. What have we learnt here? How did we learn it? The emphasis on ‘outdoors work’ seems to be on the human, personal development, principles such as self-confidence, team building, and resilience. Yet these qualities are not dependent on the wild as an environment. So what is distinct about being here, as opposed to being at school, college, or on the Duke of Edinburgh programme?

Back at Flintbarn we unpack and eat lunch. The final part of our time at Flintbarn will be a walk to the ‘trig point’ at the summit of the highest point in the range that overlooks the cottage, known locally as ‘Cairn Kinney’. There is a surprising amount of resistance from the group who appear daunted by the prospect both physically and psychologically. Jo claims that this challenge is undertaken by all the groups that come on Imbewu. The young participants challenge Jo and say they would

rather stay and play games around the cottage. A debate is entered into where the young people make a deal. If everyone will play ‘sardines’ around Flintbarn then they will join the adults in the ascent of the summit. There is a sense of satisfaction that the process is one of mutual respect and understanding.

The walk is strenuous but everyone participates and completes the circuit. Jordan took time to sit away from the group on the ridge of the mountainside. Later I asked him what he had thought about scale the ridge. He said, “I was thinking how this could be my life”.

We gather at the trig point and look out across the landscape. Talk turns to motorways, wind farms and climate change. At the summit Jo expands on these themes saying, “This is your place. Do your friends come up to these places? Do you think you will? We want you to love these wild places. They are your heritage. Do you think you could wild camp now? Do you think you could cope?”

I am struck by Jo’s use of the word heritage. How is it that we now have to teach our young people to get out into nature, to aide them in developing a relationship with nature? Does it have to be learnt? Has it always had to be learnt? Has there always been a pedagogy of the wild? On return from the mountain we clean up and get organised to leave Flintbarn to travel back to the Estate accommodation.

On arrival we hang tents and wet clothes up to dry. Sarah enlists the help of Jordan and Ethan with cooking the final meal that they appear to relish. Jordan offers to share his chocolate with everyone. It seems he has responded to being treated lightly and fairly rather than admonished for his views and behaviour.

Preparing

After eating the group are paired up to prepare for Tuesday’s presentations when the group will tell the story of their week to managers from the Estate, teachers and parents.

Each adult is asked to work with a pair and I work with Emma and Jordan who come up with ideas for how to make the presentation more interactive. Jo and John then lead the group through Hannah’s reflective exercise. This pays particular attention to knowledge and skills, highlights, challenges, and possible changes in attitudes.

For knowledge and skills the group list the following:

- Learning new games e.g. sardines.
- What a 'trig point' is.
- What 'frog hoppers' are (living creatures in cuckoo spit).
- How to castrate lambs.
- How to work with lambs.
- That game-keeping is harder than you think.
- How to navigate.
- Identifying plants.
- How to 'leave-no-trace'.
- That you need to dig 6 inches in the ground if you need to go to the toilet.
- How to make a fire that leaves no trace.
- That you need to close the gate if it is already closed.
- How to use the cooking stoves and pocket rockets.

For highlights the group share:

- Working with the sheep.
- Watching the sheep dogs.
- Walking up the mountain.
- Walking out to the campsite.
- Being around everybody else.
- Everything with the sheep.
- Swimming in the rivers.
- Playing sardines.
- The team building exercises.
- Saving the lamb.

For the challenges the group said:

- That I came on my own.
- The lambs.
- The weather.
- Leaving.
- Building the den.

When it came to attitude, the group was prompted by the additional question of, "how did you change?"

- Get on with it.
- Knuckle down.
- Stay positive.
- To get on with things in a positive attitude.

- Pull through for the rest of the team. That if I backed it would have ruined it for everyone else.
- Stay focused, get the job done, to dig deep, regardless if you feel like doing it or not.

Lauren shared a final comment before heading to bed. “To be in the community encouraged me to push on and try harder”. Checking out for the last time, I felt I could sense the gravity and the health of the activity, how it provides space to be heard and share, to process and move on. What might happen if this ritual was regularly undertaken in school and college?

Day 7 (Monday)

The group is up early and Jo conducts a check in focusing on how the group are feeling whilst we eat breakfast. After clearing up the group move down to the Estate workshops and are introduced to Stevey, a gently spoken man who is responsible for the maintaining the Estate grounds. The group are invited to help build bird boxes for the resident owl population as Stevey explains his commitment to the wider ecology of the estate.

This engagement, this doing real things with Stevey, not just doing ‘woodwork’, but building things that are needed and connected to this place appears to really engage the young participants. Making the bird boxes, owl boxes and bat boxes leads to stories about place and the differences within similar species, revealing perhaps the interconnected nature of things. I conduct interviews with each young person whilst the group are engaged in building the bird boxes and again each participant is keen to take part and support my work. This feels like a genuine reciprocation, an exchange in return for the work that I have done supporting the group over the week.

At lunch I reflect on how everything is an opportunity for learning and that everything we do can have the power to transform our lives. I begin thinking about this in relation to the food that we have been eating and how it does not connect or reflect with the intention or values of the programme or Jo’s overarching mission. If this has been a powerful experience, where the young people trust and respect the adults and their values then they have learnt little about health or food systems. In fact they have learnt that it is OK to eat crisps, to eat meat, to consume heavily packaged foods, mindlessly without critical engagement, because of the need for convenience.

I share this thought with Jo later whilst we are visiting a café and eating a supper of fish and chips who agrees that this aspect needs serious consideration. Whilst we are eating Jo brings round a final questionnaire for the group. After dinner we drive to a nearby lake, and take the time to engage in a final ‘solo’ amongst the trees and meadows around the water.

It starts to rain and we huddle back together again as a group. It is Lauren who takes the initiative and leads the group in a final spontaneous swim in the lake. She seems suddenly so confident and happy in this moment, laughing with Ryan in the water and egging everyone else to join her in the water for one last swim. Suddenly everyone is in the water together, laughing and playing. It is a joyful final moment.

Back at the Estate we tidy away kit, and take showers to warm up. When everyone is ready we gather to listen to the pairs run through a mock of their presentation for tomorrow and then settle around the kitchen table for a final check out. This will take the form of what Jo calls a ‘rosy glow’, an opportunity for everyone to formally say something positive about the other participants.

Hesitant at first the group soon embraces the moment and each participant takes turns to listen to the rest of the group say positive, and at times beautiful things about each other. These comments are directly addressed to the listener with each taking it in turns. It is a moving activity, close in feel to a ceremony. I can’t help thinking what would happen to intelligence, empathy, and self-confidence if we spent more of our time like this, together, celebrating each other, talking, sharing, communicating, in dialogue, and being given the chance to listen and really talk with one another.

At the end of the process Jordan says, “I feel more confident now after that. I never say anything nice about anyone so this is a first”. He was so upbeat afterwards, buzzing with positive energy. I am left feeling that a single teacher in a classroom cannot do this work. Being in community is crucial with divergent voices all pursuing the same direction.

Day 8 (Tuesday) (last day)

Breakfast follows an early start with a final tidy, pack, and clean up before heading over to the main barn on the Estate grounds for the group’s presentation. The presentations are attended by Gary, the Estate manager, Harry, the Factotum for the Estate, Harry’s personal assistant, Stevey the conservationist, Karen a schoolteacher who works directly with everyone from the group except Lauren, alongside Ryan and Jordan’s mothers.

Lauren recites a poem aloud to the assembled adults titled 'Sometimes' by the author Herman Hesse [1970]. She had selected it from a small book called 'Earth Prayers' that Jo Roberts the CEO carried with her.

Sometimes, when a bird cries out,
Or the wind sweeps through a tree,
Or a dog howls in a far off farm,
I hold still and listen a long time.
My soul turns and goes back to the place
Where, a thousand forgotten years ago,
The bird and the blowing wind
Were like me, and were my brothers.
My soul turns into a tree,
And an animal, and a cloudbank.
Then changed and odd it comes home
And asks me questions. What should I reply? (Hesse 1970)

There was something about the choice of the poem that reflected my own image of the group, and the participants that had taken shape during our time in the mountains.

As the presentation ends the group receive certificates for their week on Imbewu and a final photograph is taken as everyone says an emotional goodbye, perhaps in the knowledge that this unique set of circumstances may not be accessed again for some time.

Chapter 6, Part 2

Using the research questions to explore (and attempt to understand) the participants reporting of experiences

The more time we spent together as a group the more frequent our talk turned to what might have been learnt on the programme. With this in mind I asked all the participants directly if they felt they had learnt anything whilst on Imbewu. Each participant revealed feeling that they had learnt something of value.

What might be learnt through wild experiences?

Interestingly, despite being engaged in a variety of specific skill acquisition and display type tasks all the participants responded to the question with a focus on the affective changes and growth they felt they had experienced over the week. These ranged from manners and teamwork (Ryan) to listening and being more caring toward the environment and the wider, living world (Ethan).

Jordan, who would later express the most conflict towards the formal school system, reported that this experience had been considerably different to his usual week.

I've really enjoyed myself, and I wouldn't have really enjoyed myself if it was a school trip with teachers, because I've come and I've not known anybody, I've like, I've met new people and I've learned different things. (Jordan)

Jordan's claim, that he had "learned different things", was echoed by everyone in the group. Jordan revealed that his conversations with the gamekeeper and listening to the challenges of Jo and Lauren had expanded his view of animal husbandry.

I've learnt more about the job that I want to do, I learned that it's not just all about shooting, it's all about helping people and fixing things, and looking after, like trying to cut down the fox population and trying to keep them up as well, so then there's more life for the game birds. (Jordan)

Did this mean that Jordan had experienced more of a connection to nature, to the wild as a living system?

Before I just thought game keeping was always just outshooting all the time, but I've actually learnt that that the things that you do actually help everything, instead of just going out and shooting everything. (Jordan)

It was instructive to hear how Jordan had arrived at this new perspective, the notion that it could have been dependent on the people and the place. Jordan starts to explain that the living world of people and things is more instructive than book learning in school.

You'd not get as much information out of a book as you would out of an actual gamekeeper. (Jordan)

Through this network of relationships Jordan appeared to have enlarged his view of himself, albeit cautiously.

It has, but I just don't know how to explain it... I've learnt that I'm more confident in doing things, and meeting new people and just trying out different things, because that hill walk, I wasn't too keen on doing it, but I managed it and I'm glad I done it. (Jordan)

Emma spoke about "a different way of learning" which she attributed to the autonomy she had been granted. In particular this had meant Emma was able to develop a new interest for being outside.

It's a different way of learning, like you don't learn about the outside and everything in school, you don't learn about nature and that, but this week you can learn about it in your own way, and you can take it all in, in your own way. (Emma)

Emma spoke of preferring this way of discovering and encountering as opposed to her experience of school that suggests the image of the factory farm.

I find it like hard when I'm in lessons and that, I find it hard to take it all in, but when I'm out I can take my own time and I can take it in, like bits at a time, like if you're in school and you're in a lesson it all gets shoved at you at once. (Emma)

Again it was personal growth that Emma reported over practical skill acquisition.

I think I have just learnt new things about myself, like, I didn't think that I would like the outdoors and that as much, like I feel like I have fell in love with the outdoors, like I love outdoors. (Emma)

Lucy in particular appeared to have formulated a refreshed sense of her own identity. Was this because she had been released by the wild world from performing a negotiated self? Referring to school she said

I feel like I should just be myself and I shouldn't pretend to be somebody I'm not for people who in the future aren't going to matter and aren't going to be there. (Lucy)

This renewed sense of self had also resulted in an expanded sense of confidence in the face of unfamiliar challenges summed up by her statement: "that I can do things if I put my mind to it".

Castrating the lambs and like cutting the ears, giving them an ear piercing, and giving them medicine... when we first got there I was like, no I don't want to do it, I will just stand there and watch, but then when I actually got in and gave it a go, I was like, mmm, I can do this, I'm actually capable of doing it. (Lucy)

Lucy also talked about *how* she had been learning things.

I think learning things like, this week is like so much better, because we're actually doing stuff about it, we're not just sat in a classroom, listening to the teacher, like death by PowerPoint, were actually interacting and doing different things. (Lucy)

The space to walk, talk and work alongside each other had enabled Lucy to learn more about her friend Emma, something not possible amid the restrictive timetables of school.

Obviously I knew Emma before we came here, but even this week I've learned new things from Emma that I didn't know, or like I would never have done. (Lucy)

Lucy intimated that the wild place had taught her, "that I don't need to rely on phones, I don't need to rely on Wi-Fi or service or being in the house all the time, and relying on the TV or electricity, and you know all that kind of stuff".

Ethan revealed, reflecting Lucy's insight, that he had appreciated being without his phone during the trail.

I loved getting away from my phone... (Ethan)

An over involvement and reliance on technology, on phones, screens and videogames are often attributed to adolescents. Ethan surprised me when he claimed he could live without them and would prefer to spend time relating to the kestrel that he keeps at home rather than in a virtual world.

So if I had to, I would probably sell my phone and my PlayStation, everything that I had that was technology, just to get a lot more stuff for the outdoors, and doing a lot more things... (Ethan)

It is critical to represent the complexity of the inter-relationships that the young participants experienced. It seems plausible that the participants grew as a result of all their encounters, with the wild and with each other. Ethan expresses this by talking about what he learnt from listening to other members of the group.

I've learnt a lot more about respect, about trust, like Emma said we just came and met you as strangers, and we trusted you to take us in for a week, you don't get a lot of people that would trust people like that. I've learnt how to cook. I've learnt a lot more than what I did about nature. I've learnt to read a compass and a map, I got taught a lot about plants and nature and just a lot of stuff. (Ethan)

Do wild experiences promote social or cultural confidence or agency and if so, in what ways (for example personal development, transformation or leadership)?

Revealing that he did not feel trusted or supported in school Ethan went on to say that through being trusted he had been able to redraw the boundaries that curtail his achievement in school, and resist the complications associated with competition.

I learnt that I can be, I don't know, it's hard to say, I can be, I'm not really the best in school, but when I'm out doing stuff that I like I can be the best, not the best out of everybody, but I can be the best to my liking. I've learnt that I can cook. I've learnt that I've got a lot better team work than I thought, I'm a lot more active when I'm around people that I like and I'm enjoying being around. I can do stuff that I never thought I could do, climb that hill, that mountain. (Ethan)

This trust and the slow growth of respect for the whole community on the trail, including the adult instructors has resulted in a change of heart when it came to participating in some of the more challenging aspects of the trail. The group had not wanted to walk to the high point at Flintbarn on the final day. Jordan articulated this succinctly.

Yeah, because like, the stuff that we've done you would never get to do at school with teachers, but that's why I've really enjoyed it, because you've done stuff that we've wanted to do, and we've done stuff that you wanted to do, like we wanted to play sardines yesterday, you done it, you wanted to walk up the hill yesterday, we done it. (Ethan)

Ethan had also recognised that through the development of close relationships the group acquiesced. This was after some negotiation and bargaining, something infrequent in formal environments. Through this Ethan claimed that he had learnt something valuable.

I've learnt that I should listen to others, I should take in advice, because everyone was saying you should do it, it will be great, it will be good, but I was like, oh no, because I'm tired, or it won't be as good as what you say, then when you get to the top you realise. (Ethan)

Lauren was perhaps the most articulate about comparing her experience against her time in school. The notion of structure arose in her conversation.

We've got different people telling us different things, like every day when you go into school you've got the same teacher and some people just don't get on with their teacher so they don't really learn, but in this place you get different opportunities, some might prefer different people, some activities might suit others better and some people might not benefit from it but at least you've got that variety so you at least one thing does suit you and you can show off your skills, whereas at school you just go in, if you don't like the teacher, if you don't like the class, you don't like the friends, you're restricted, it doesn't really let you bloom as such. (Lauren)

I was interested in finding out if Lauren felt that it was the teacher that had all the knowledge, and if she felt that was possible that the group might have learnt not just from the adults but from each other as well.

I think I have, I've learnt how other people think, things that I wouldn't normally do, and they've given me the confidence and encouraged me to do things, it's been nice getting different perspectives on different activities, and how people would do that, whereas I wouldn't think that way I would more academically than physically. I think I've learnt quite a lot, I've got a lot out of it, how to deal with things, like problems, like when it's raining how to keep your stuff dry and how to mix with people, how to work as a team, because I'm more independent, I don't really, I work better on my own, because I'm an only child, so I don't really mix with people the same way as other people would, and

they would always look for support, like the two other girls in our group, they're really close, and they always depend on each other whereas I don't really have dependency on anyone else I always think for myself, and I always do what I want to do, and if I don't, and I just feel like back home like you're in a class then you've always got to like, work in pairs in schools, whereas here you can really like, you can just do it yourself but also help with other people, if you want that is. (Lauren)

Lauren hinted at the freedom experienced in the more balanced approach of the trail.

Yeah, because you're sitting next to the same person every single day and you might not get to know them, I was sitting in Chemistry two weeks ago, sitting next to a boy called Ross and we just didn't get on and he was failing and I was doing well and he was dragging me down and he kept asking me for help and just kept annoying me and I hated that class, I just wanted to move out of it so much, whereas here you've got the freedom, just to go about and mix with the people you want to mix with. (Lauren)

Lucy spoke of the opportunity to do things that were out of the ordinary, even including the games in her account of feeling the benefits.

Castrating the lamb, because it was a new experience and not many people my age would be able to say, oh yes I've just castrated a lamb, or like, oh yeah I castrated a lamb a couple of months ago, I bet you haven't done that, like it's something that you would like never have the opportunity to do, like even going in the river, being able to go in like that (clicks fingers), I think is an amazing opportunity, or even like sardines. (Lucy)

How might young people benefit from wild experiences?

It was unexpected that much of the conversation about the positive benefits of being on trail centred on the experience of solitude and the solo time. This appeared to have a connection to the wild place itself. Ryan surprised me with how positive his account was and how sensitized he seemed to have become.

It felt good, relaxing... like when we're talking we can't really hear like anything, apart from each other, but when we're doing the silent time we can hear like all the birds and how quite it is, because like if you're in your bedroom and you think it's really quiet but if you compare it with sitting on your own and not talking, that's actual quiet. (Ryan)

I asked Ryan directly what had been going on in his head during the solo time.

I don't really know, like, I was just thinking about how quiet it was compared to like at my room at my house, I was just thinking about how quiet it was. I was actually quite happy, when it's quiet, it's nice and relaxing... (Ryan)

Reflecting on the sound of the everyday Ryan expressed that it had an unusual quality.

You can't really get that kind of quiet normally, because if you're in your house you can just hear cars going by and all that, but out here there's no cars, all you can hear is the birds, and that's it, and the wind. (Ryan)

This reminded me of Jo's claim that for her "the silence was wild". When I asked Ryan if he thought he might want to have some of that quiet time in the future he said, "Yeah, and I'll probably need it as well", suggesting that it might be helpful, healthy even.

I don't know, just calm myself down if I'm annoyed or something. (Ryan)

Perhaps it was the sense of expanded freedom, of liberty that Ryan had responded to so positively?

I liked it, the free time, because that was some freedom, just sitting there and enjoying it, shutting your eyes and thinking about stuff. (Ryan)

Jordan reported similar experiences.

I really enjoyed them because it gives you time to reflect back on what you've not done and what you could have done. (Jordan)

Again I asked what had been going on in his head.

I don't know, but the one thing that I enjoyed about the ten-minute alone time was the views, and I really enjoyed it. (Jordan)

The experience seems to have had a subtle impact on Jordan, permitting him to engage with an alternative to his previous actions.

I don't know, because, like walking up that, walking up the moor that we walked up, walking up that, it's not really what I do, because like, I did enjoy walking up it, but most of the time I walk up I've got a rifle or a shotgun with me and it's just not the same, because that's what I'm used to, but then I've managed to do something different. (Jordan)

Emma was more ambivalent about the solo time but appeared to have appreciated the space created by the time.

I don't know to be honest, I kind of liked them, but when I'm solo I prefer to like walk and do things, like I don't really like sitting still. I think it's just because I'm a fidgety person, I don't like just sitting doing nothing. (Emma)

Emma also expressed that her ability to be with her own thoughts was linked to her emotional state.

It really depends on what mood I'm in, because if I don't feel too good then I don't like to be by myself, but at like certain times I prefer to be by myself so I can like take things in, and think about everything that's happened. (Emma)

For Emma the space, the freedom to "think it all through", was a critical one. Ethan, who perhaps more than anyone, appeared to relish the freedom granted by being on trail, reported something similar.

We're like free, we're like, allowed to go and, well not allowed to do what we want, but we have a lot more free time and we're doing stuff that we like. (Emma)

For Ethan this was connected to how he had been treated.

We've been treated amazing. You're getting so much respect, you're getting amazing meals, and you're getting a good quality talk time, to speak to each other, just good yeah. (Ethan)

Lauren confirmed that she had also encountered an increase in freedom and thinking for oneself rather than being solely led by a teacher.

There definitely has been freedom this week, it's really encouraged me to still think for myself and still listen to others and still work as a team. (Lauren)

Do wild experiences impact on the ability of young people to engage in formal education, and if so, how?

School was not far from the minds from the young participants, concerned as they were with what they had left behind and what they may have to deal with on return.

Lauren articulated the growing anxiety she felt around this tension of embarking on something that she clearly thought was worthwhile.

Well, because this week is the first week of school, and I'm scared that when I go back to school everyone is going to make friend groups and I'm going to be sitting on the end, everyone's going to be in their new classes settled in and I'm just going to be coming in and I'm just separate and everyone will be quite pally and I will like try to get into a group of pals because I'm not with my friends anymore because we've all separated to do different subjects, some are actually going to University right now, and I'm quite scared to go back to school in a way because it will be difficult for me to get back into the, to see what my friends are doing, how much I've missed, the assignments the teachers, because teachers want you to be there on the first day so you can settle in, so it's going to be quite hard going back. (Lauren)

Lauren revealed mixed feelings about school when we talked about what it was like for her currently.

Well I'm in the 6th year and I'm going into the 6th year and it's quite difficult because the workload that our teachers put us under is quite a lot, we get a lot of homework every night, a lot of assignments, it's just going to get harder and harder and harder, and it's quite a difficult exam time, they put loads of pressure on you and every single day that you go in then there's this piece of homework and if you forget it once then they're not really keen on you as such, you don't feel like, they really want to encourage you to have it in on time, no excuses. (Lauren)

When asked to articulate how this made her feel Lauren suggested that

It makes me like unsettled in a way, because it's, loads of things happened in the background, like social things, you can't really spend time with friends, you can't go to concerts the same, and like, even if you go out with your friends you're always thinking I need to get this homework done, this assignments due, you don't enjoy it as much as you can enjoy it. (Lauren)

This pressure could be seen to be impacting on Lauren's quality of experience in the present moment, on her ability to enter completely into the quality of the moment itself.

Ryan's reflection on school and his experience of Imbewu, how he had responded in kind to being treated as an autonomous agent was echoed by most of the participants.

Because in school we just have to like sit at a desk and be quiet but here we can talk to anyone we want wherever, we can walk about, we've got free time as well, we can have a snack if we want, have a drink and we can go to the toilet instead of putting your hand up and asking if you can go. (Ryan)

Emma's response to our conversation about school took me by surprise and ran counter to the other participants' critical outlook.

I quite like school. (Emma)

Emma had struck me as vulnerable and I had made an assumption that school might be difficult for her. When I asked her what she meant she told me,

I just think it's a good environment, like it takes everything else away, and you've got something to focus on. (Emma)

I was intrigued by the apparent caveat, "it takes everything else away", which she went onto explain meant:

All the stuff that goes on outside of school, the background stuff, when you're in school, you don't really think about anything else, just your minds set on that. (Emma)

When she agreed that she found school to be "a safe place" I understood that it helped Emma to set aside other things that were going on in her life, home stuff, friend stuff, work stuff "and you just focus on that". School in this respect was good for the relief that it provided from the more challenging aspects of her life beyond the school gates.

Emma was another participant for whom PE was their favoured subject but yet again it seemed that this was a comfort and retreat from personal problems rather than for a love of learning the subject.

I like sport and that, like when I'm having a bad day, I always turn to sport, to get me through it, and I like running and walking and that so it's like... (Emma)

This had been reflected in her appreciation of the solo time reported earlier and hinted at the importance of freedom, the space to make one's own decisions and choices.

Contrasting the experience of school with the experience of the trail Lucy described school as “quite strict and you have to follow the rules and you don’t really have your say on things” (Lucy). The importance of freedom was explicit for Lucy.

It’s a different outlook on life, you’re still learning things but you have the freedom to do your own things as well it’s nothing like school. You get to make your own choices and you get a say in what you want to do. It feels good. It feels like you’ve actually got a voice. (Lucy)

The participants talked about wanting to take some of these qualities back with them when they returned to school and home.

I think I will definitely take some back with me, like definitely the key skills, teamwork, because usually in school if I had a project I like doing it myself, but I would like to work more and try to get other people’s perspectives on it, how they would do it, whereas I just take it back, take it home and then type it up on my computer and send it to the teacher, but whereas comparing it to other people, seeing if I’m on the right track, getting opinions and using that feedback to help me and that is what this course has really emphasised. (Lauren)

This appears to have led to a new conception of the future for Lauren.

I think it’s also emphasised to me this week, that you really don’t need to be around your friends all the time, that you don’t need to be going into Glasgow, going shopping, you can actually just spend some time yourself, because you’re always like on your phones and Facebook and Snap chat, keeping street scoring and yeah, they’re all in each other’s faces all the time, asking what are you doing, do you want to come over to mine, you’re kind of like all packed together, whereas at University we are going to all separate, we’re all going across country so I think this course has helped me like realise that I’m going to be able to go to University myself, and make a new life. (Lauren)

Could providing young people with wild experiences promote deeper relationships with the natural world?

Over the course of the eight days it appeared that the wild place and its more-than-human inhabitants had subtly affected the young participants. Inarticulate but full of glimpses of the positive impact of just being out there Ryan struggled to put this into words but he claimed that it had resulted in him caring “about animals” more.

Yeah, it taught me, like, treat animals the way they should be treated, instead of anything flying about or all that, instead of going to annoy it just leave it, or like

the frogs, because some people are just mean or cruel, if they saw it they would end up kicking it or standing on it, but I saw that some folk were picking it up and just like leaving it, or not annoying it, picking it up and showing everyone and then putting it back down, and that was the same when we went on that walk, to the water, and we saw the wee water... yeah the newts yeah. (Ryan)

It appeared that the young people had grown in their connection to the outdoors, to nature and wildlife. Asking about how this might have happened Emma claimed that

It's just such a beautiful place, and you never realise how much there is actually that you can do, like because it's so plain, and it doesn't look like there is much to do but you can make so much out of it. (Emma)

The experience had expanded the potentiality of being in the wild.

I feel like I would want to go out more, and do more things outside, instead of being stuck in the house all the time and just lying in my bed. (Lucy)

This in turn seemed to enhance a sense of care for other living things, the more-than-human world.

Because there's like, other creatures and animals out there and plants out there living their lives just like us and then we could go in and destroy their home and not even realise it. (Lucy)

Ethan expressed this care with a tenderness and insight that moved me.

I would always think that it was just land that was there, for us to live on, but you've got to, it sounds weird, I don't know if it will make sense, you've got to trust everything around you, more than you've got to trust people, yeah I don't know, you've got to like understand it, you've got to, I don't know, appreciate it a lot more, because that's practically what keeps you on your feet, everything around you, the land, if that wasn't there, there would be nothing. (Ethan)

I asked Ethan if this was a new realisation, if the experience of the week had increased his capacity to care more about the wild places.

Yeah. Like when we saw the newts, it's practically, they're living a life that's like, they've practically, it's like - we live a life, with our families - they would live lives, they would have families, but in a different way, like they would be in a completely different place, like underwater, it sounds weird, but we live on land, we're a lot bigger, but then everything around you is practically exactly the same as you, just living its life, getting food, getting stuff for its family... (Ethan)

This strikes me as a beautiful realisation for such a young person to have come to. Ethan's recognition that all living things live lives akin in some way to our own transitioned into a revaluing all life because of this. For Ryan this deepening appreciation of animals as a result of the wild time and the freedom translated directly into practical action.

I've learnt about the rubbish, like don't leave rubbish, like don't disturb like any animals, like walking up to the sheep, don't go chasing them and all that. (Ryan)

This deepening appeared to have awoken a desire to be in wild places.

Now I'm just going to end up, when I go home or something, I'm going to take my dogs out to walk, well I do that, but I don't go into fields and all that but I'm going to do that now, just take them out in the fields. (Ryan)

Lauren had written "deeper understanding of wildlife" on a piece of paper during our conversation, intrigued I asked if she would say something more.

I think, what I mean by that is, because I like my animals and I like, and I've got a good understanding of them but actually hearing it from other people, how they view them, knowing what the gamekeeper does, seeing guns, I just think of them as violent, the only thing they can do is hurt someone but, in a way it's also helping, but is really weird for me to say, because I'm totally against any killing of anything, because I'm a vegetarian, and I don't agree with putting cruelty out, but if you think about it, it could do harm if you didn't go out and keep the numbers down, it can totally destroy the whole ecosystem, so I think that hearing it from someone else, getting their perspective, instead of just reading stuff off of the internet, which can be completely untrue, it's good to actually experience it, than just read things. (Lauren)

Chapter 7

Ethnographic Case Study 3 – The Helpers Mentoring Society

This chapter presents a distinct ethnographic case study exploring what happened when a group of young people were engaged with The Helpers Mentoring Society on a three-day immersive programme that sought to extend their personal experiences through direct contact with the wild.

Introduction to the Sacred Fire Quest

It is dawn. Raven calls ring out through the wood, stark over the distant sound of traffic. The calls are not being made by birds but rather by a small group of people who, having tended a community fire throughout the night, are now making the agreed signal of return for those out beyond the encampment. Before long men, women and children emerge from the trees and gather together in a large circle. Some take seats, whilst others move closer to the fire. The man who has held vigil at the fire throughout the night, the acknowledged teacher and leader, sits on the far side of the circle silently welcoming those who are returning. When quiet descends on the gathering he asks for those present to sing the song or tell the story that has made it itself known throughout the night. Individuals are called upon to tell their stories, to share their visions and sing their songs from the solitary quests that began at dusk and that have now ended with first light. Those that have worked with these Fire Quest participants as guides gently encourage the members of their groups to share their experiences of being out in the wood, alone with their own fire.

How did those participating arrive at this moment, a moment that seems so far removed from any found in formal education? What would they share when they began to speak of their experience? The following account seeks to pay close attention to what happened during this unusual programme.

Day 1, Arrival

The drumming is loud and insistent like a raised pulse. Voices begin chanting in both high and low pitches creating a mesmeric atmosphere of focus and arrival. It is so

different to any opening of teaching or instructive gatherings that I have encountered at any level, in any setting.

A greeting is shared in Lakota, the language of the first nation's people of the plains of America. Salvatore, or Sal, the teacher, notes the "big circle". Once seated there are a total of twenty-six people in the room. Two of the group are children, Andrew who is fifteen years old and at Secondary School, and Mary, the eldest daughter of Pippa and Mark, who is currently being home-schooled.

Gratitude

Sal leads the group into the practice of 'gratitude' saying, "as always, the words before all else" and instructs the group to share what they are grateful for in this moment. This sharing touches on: "connections, nature, family, being here again, three cormorants, geese, aeroplanes, this ground, this circle, the welcome, a blackbird, the people here, the trust, the change in the season, a grandfather, the joy of birds, peace, the winds of autumn, the full moon, the robin that pierced the dawn this morning, cobwebs, the journey, just being here, that even the idea of being here starts the shift, for my body, and for the song that emerges to communicate what I most need to bear in mind." Andrew shares that he is "really grateful for being here again" and that he has "really missed this". Mary says, "I'm grateful for my family".

Sal talks about how we are all connected, "by threads of connection, like those cobwebs", since the last gathering. He offers his own 'gratitude' for "the journeys we have all been on, and all that supports us being here". He asks us to move our thoughts towards "the four directions, the ancestors, the past, the young ones and the children of the future, the six directions, the past, and the future". Sal closes this opening by stating that, "we will bring our hearts and minds together in gratitude and we will say that our hearts and minds are one". A song sung in Lakota follows. The two activities combined make for a personal and evocative opening.

Logistics

Before the teaching begins logistics for the weekend ahead are shared. These are deferred to other senior members of the group, Falcon and Hope. This moves into a discussion about the young people from the 'Earth Stewards Apprenticeship' (ESA) joining the overall group. Sal segues into this aspect of the weekend by stating that it

will “be different from the last one, we’re going to add another layer onto this gathering” before handing over to Paul the ESA group leader.

Paul is an integral member of the group and leader of the Earth Steward Apprenticeship (ESA), a yearlong course that the young people joining this weekend’s Quest are all engaged in. The Earth Steward Apprenticeship promotes itself as ‘Nature connection and rites of passage for teenagers’ (Sacred Earth 2018). The webpage for the course quotes the American poet Walt Whitman, and the broadcaster David Attenborough. It contains an explanation of why the course exists, citing ‘Natural Childhood’, the 2012 report commissioned by The National Trust and authored by Stephen Moss, as demonstration for the need for children to spend more time out of doors. This is supplemented by a bullet point list of intended aims that the course explicitly seeks to enable participants to encounter:

- Develop a variety of skills to help them thrive in the natural environment.
- Discover their role as integrated members and care givers of the natural world.
- Gain a greater depth of appreciation and understanding for the outdoors.
- Become more self-reliant and able to adapt to an ever-changing world.
- Develop strategies for taking sustainable practices into adult life. (Sacred Earth 2018)

There is a paragraph claiming to make links between the course, and the National Curriculum, focusing on self-esteem and confidence. This is followed by details of the course structure, dates and financial cost, alongside a selection of parent testimonials.

The Sacred Earth website profiles Paul as well as his journey into the “core routines of nature connection”, studying with “Tom Brown Junior, Jon Young and Thomas Schorrkon” (Sacred Earth 2018), of which all three are connected through the teachings of Stalking Wolf (Grandfather), an ‘Apache elder, shaman and scout’. This lineage, of indigenous teachings, allegedly arising from the Native American Indian tradition, appears to be a through-line connecting up much of the teaching and philosophy on display during the Fire Quest weekend (and echoed in other ‘wild’ educational sites).

Paul explains the background of the ESA course and that there will be “sixteen young people between 13 and 18” joining the weekend with “pretty much all” ‘questing’ or “maybe one or two of the second year just doing community fire, as they are still on the edge”. He goes on to explain that, “they are a group of young people who have been journeying with us since March and we have two groups within the Earth Steward Apprenticeship. So you’ve got six that have done the Quest or an aspect of the

Community Fire. They're delving into nature-connection, sensory activities, you know, bringing all of their awake-ness..."

Sal expands this for the group. "So these are the children that are primed up, ready for this type of experience. These are the ones that have gone through that nature connection, self-awareness journey, to the degree where now they're ready for this kind of recognition, transformative moment, of sitting with the fire overnight and as small as that might seem, you know for those that have done it, it can be quite a profound experience. For a young person to know, that relationship with fire but also that relationship with tending something, to a living being, a spirit entity, and through that their relationship with themselves, nature, ancestors, future, it can be quite profound when it's all co-ordinated in this kind of like, continuum of experience. So it's a great opportunity, to support and to see what that's like".

Paul says that it is likely that parents of the ESA group will join the group at dawn to witness their children returning for sunrise. Hope, who, as an experienced, and elected elder of the group, is often sought out for advice and guidance brings to the group's attention that there are potentially twenty-nine people going out to Quest and that the whole group should be gathered together by 6pm on the first night.

Teaching

Sal continues by talking about teaching and experience. "The philosophy behind all of this is that you can't help somebody, or teach somebody, something that you have not personally experienced. Right. You can't teach from the place of, 'well I read about this so now I'm going to show you how it's done'. It doesn't work like that. The reality of the experience and the thought in learning of the experience are actually two very, very different things. We create in imagination, an imagined experience and think that it is real. It's not. The only way to get the real experience is to sit by that fire".

The anticipation is that those present are learning how to help, perhaps arranging their own Sacred Fire Quest ceremony for young people in the future, and that the weekend is organised for the adult participants towards having these experiences of being a helper. "We want to make sure that you have as much experience as possible and in that way you are going to have that embodied learning" reinforces Sal.

It is interesting to notice how much instruction there is, yet how few questions are raised or clarity required. I can sense how I have become accustomed to this yet remember how out of my depth I felt when I first took part a year ago.

The first teaching continues for over an hour and is followed by a comfort break. A system of calls is used to alert the group when to gather and return to the main space. A raven call is used to notify the group that they have ten minutes in which to complete what they are doing and return. A wolf pack howl is used to indicate that most of the group have returned and begun the next cycle of activities. This method is used throughout the weekend. It is particularly effective when the group is located in the woods. The group is instructed that if a call is heard, then the hearer should face away from where they heard the call and then repeat it loudly in order for the calls to spread as far as all the members, despite where they might be and what they might be engaged in. The raven calls, mimicking the alarm calls heard within the wood by native birds, align themselves with the setting and the philosophy of the course. The wolf call, whilst feeling sympathetic to the location, hints perhaps at other desires hidden below the surface wants and needs of the both facilitators and the participants. From my exposure to this style of instruction it seems to be a regular feature of outdoor ‘nature-connection’ groups and facilitation.

Returning to the teaching Sal talks about “expectations around transformational experiences creating opportunities to learn” and speaks about how learning takes place despite how messy these experiences can be. Sal asks directly “what is it to be a helper?” He makes it clear that this weekend is about supporting those questing. He talks about “spiritual application” and how a “helper is between action and spirit”. Sal talks about the upcoming Inipi, or Sweat Lodge, as a ‘container’, a ceremonial container for another purpose. He speaks of the Sweat Lodge and the Fire Ceremony, as “real ceremonies, real community indigenous ceremonies and that with our actions we can change the community”. He states, “Every action must be a conscious prayer”. He talks about “being present to all your actions and your interface with the fire, the wood, the tobacco, and consciousness leading to greater connectivity for health and happiness. This is the difference between somebody who is just taking the actions and a helper. Consciousness, connectivity, awareness, they are not different. A person that’s connected is an aware person”. Sal goes on to say, “I see people use this word connection and then take actions that are not conscious”.

At the closure of the second session the beginnings of rain can be seen out beyond the windows of the main space. There had been severe hurricanes in the United States and there were weather warnings for the United Kingdom ahead of the weekend. In these conditions it was possible that the Quests would be very challenging. Several times those that had been on Quest earlier in the year and were now supporting Questers

expressed their relief that they would not have to face the storms and heavy rains predicted. I heard people say that perhaps, “it’s what they need”, referring to those Questing and the challenges those out for the night might experience.

Mark, one of the principal organizers, approaches me seeking to offer advice on my role as facilitator-researcher, and to talk in more detail about the problematic issue of permission. Mark said that he felt I “should gather the stories, and then ask for permission, after the weekend and the participants have had a chance to think about what happened here”.

He says “in many ways there can be no legal contract for this work, as we are asking parents to give permission for their children to fast, abstain from sleep, work with dangerous tools, to be amongst unknown adults, and sit alone with fire. So in some ways just by being here they have already given, or forgone, a level of implicit permission”.

These concerns had been palpable ahead of arriving. I knew from prior experience that the weekend would be intense and that there would be precious little time to unpack what individuals had gone through, felt and seen over the course of the weekend. I realised also that this gathering operated almost as a solely oral culture, with no supporting literature or printed materials of any kind. This was even more evident whilst at the wood, with all interactions being spoken, sung or felt. There are no PowerPoint lectures, coursework books, or pens or pencils in the wood.

The Fire Quest appears to me now to be ultimately unobservable, in that it is a private experience that takes place in the dark, at night, with the participant alone, with the recording of thoughts or experience expressly discouraged by any means. That I was able to secure verbatim stories from the young participants as well as record conversations discussing their experiences now seems a significant achievement despite the seemingly insurmountable limitations.

Entering and creating ‘the village’

We arrive at the Sacred Earth site, large woodland that has recently become a community regeneration and re-wilding project.

There is much activity around the site and many tasks to be attended to. A central tarpaulin is erected close to the main fire circle for shelter, but the rain was already making that look unsuitable. The group is called to the circle to share in some site and programme logistics. Sal talks about creating a safe environment for the

activities ahead and also for the later sharing of experiences. He tells the group “sharing is important. It helps to clarify, to solidify, and to make sense of it. The telling of the story becomes the medicine of that experience”.

There is then considerable time spent organising small groups that will work together throughout the remainder of the weekend. Adults from the Living Fire course are invited to put themselves forward as leaders supporting Questers. The remainder of the Living Fire course participants are then invited to join with a leader along with those adults at camp who will be Questing. I join Linda’s group which is joined by Elena, who will be questing again, and by Jonathan, a young helper from the Sacred Earth team who will also be Questing, although for the first time.

By now it is beginning to rain and most groups take shelter. Linda beckons us under a large tarpaulin where she encourages us to get physically close, to talk, share insights, and concerns. Elena confesses to being most concerned about the weather and how she will prepare. She is worried about preparing, lighting and maintaining her fire through the rain and into the night. Both Jonathan and Elena ask questions and raise personal concerns. These are mainly answered with deference to Sal and his instructions to those helping. Linda requests that we connect ourselves as a group by lying on our backs on the earth, with our heads touching in the shape of a star. As a Forest School instructor she declares that she wants to share some of her activities and expertise with us.

As we settle into a deep breathing, core routine of grounding the young people begin to arrive.

Arrival

As night draws in around us the young people arrive and move through the camp in small clusters, having been met by Paul and accompanied to the wood. There are sixteen all together including Mary, who is Pippa and Mark’s daughter. Of the total group, ten are boys and six are girls. All are participants of the ESA and know the site.

I recognise four of the boys and one of the girls from a previous visit. Ashley, Nemo, Juan and Andrew, had all been at the Living Fire Quest last year in September 2016. Andrew had now become a participant of the yearlong Living Fire course and I had seen him in May for the first teaching and Quest. Ben had been at the recent boys’ Rites of Passage camp hosted by Wild Child just a month ago in August. Intriguingly

Juan had also been at the Rites of Passage camp and had cut an impressively confident figure there. Ashley was the only girl that I recognised in this grouping.

Andrew and Nemo were friends, around the same age, somewhere between fourteen and fifteen years old, and both attended the same local state Secondary School. Shortly after all the young people have arrived and the central fire is successfully lit, the insistent rain becomes a surging downpour the intensity of which catches most of the group by surprise. The driving rain makes group teaching and listening almost impossible. Instead it is suggested that the small guide groups merge with the young participants and spend time discussing any issues, problems or concerns ahead of dinner.

Juan and another from the ESA group, a tall Asian boy called Edgar, join Jonathan and Elena in the group led by Linda. We huddle together under the parachute sitting on split logs and talk over our expectations for the coming Quest. The parachute offers little protection from the rain that now threatens to become a deluge. As the only other adult in the group not Questing, Linda requests that I act to support her main facilitator role causing me to reflect on how my intentions as a researcher might impact on the individuals in the group as they prepare for, and conduct their personal Quests.

Intentions, Quests and Questions

Within the group there is an exchange about the Quest and about taking questions out to the fires to work on overnight. I refer back to what felt like an important aspect of the teaching that I had witnessed during the last training. Then, Sal had drawn attention to the weight of words, and how we should be cautious about wishing for something that we may not be able to cope with. He illustrated this by way of a teaching story that he called 'The North Star', a story underlined by a desire to stay orientated.

Raindrops suspended under the thin material of the parachute draw my full attention away from the group. I find I begin listening to the conversation of the group and observing the raindrops simultaneously. The raindrops appear to glow, shimmering like mercury or quicksilver and communicate to me deeply, enhancing my awareness of the more-than-human world, and reminding me of my own Quest experience.

The rain becomes so loud, that Sal and Hope make the final decision not to undertake any instruction or teaching but instead to have dinner early and prepare for bed. This creates a slight sense of unease as we move down through the woods towards the kitchen area by the lake.

Dinner has been prepared by a clan group for the whole community and is a welcome warming bowl of vegetable soup and bread. There is a small kitchen fire spluttering under some trees which some of the group gather around to eat. Most stand and eat their dinner almost shoulder to shoulder quietly talking about the weather, the food and the weekend to come.

Anthony, a tall, lean man with long dark hair worn back in a ponytail and a serious bearing, engages me in conversation at the fireside. Anthony has occupied several key roles within the group during the previous gatherings. Alongside recording, photographing and filming key moments and teachings he has taken the lead role of 'sacred fire tender', creating and maintaining the sacred fire that houses the stones for the sweat lodge. This places him in a powerful position within the group.

In an exchange about my work and the difficulty of catching stories he says that an author, Martin Prechtel (2015), a self-proclaimed 'shaman', recommends NOT sharing stories from these ritualistic kind of experiences, that they are sacred and should be left that way. It seems that he is inferring that this work has been done and is being done by practitioners better placed to look at this than I am. Recollecting that I can, and should, leave these feelings of anxiety aside, I choose not to give them any further fuel whilst I am engaged in the activity of working through the weekend.

After dinner the rain continues. Back at the central fire people gather ahead of going to bed. Standing at the makeshift shelter which has a stove and facilities to make hot drinks I am approached by one of the girls from the ESA group, who are sheltering collectively for the night under a single tarp, one for the boys, and one for the girls. She had returned to the community fire because she said felt left out by the group who were all talking together and not including her. As we talk Andrew approaches. I ask if they know each other, which they confirm they do but I can sense a little awkwardness perhaps because of the gender difference. Andrew reassures the girl that she will be OK and seems happy chatting, if a little aloof. We talk about shelters and Andrew mentions he has a spare tent. I ask him if I could perhaps borrow it, just in case I get rained out of the hammock. He agrees but with the caveat that I really look after it as it is new and was expensive. I store the tent under the main tarp just in case and wish them both a good night. I realise that this is the first time I have spoken directly to any of the young female participants in the group and begin to realise that my approach is tangibly different to the first time that I attended the Fire Quest in September 2016. Then I had placed my focus almost expressly on the young participants, engaging them in conversation and attempting to sound them out without getting in the way of their

experience. Now I realised that I was too enmeshed in the activities of camp and the community to have that sense of either focus or distance.

I spend a restless night in the hammock, gently swaying, and rocking at times like a baby in a cradle, spending periods of wakefulness followed by snatches of sleep. My sleep is broken but the night passes uneventfully, with the occasional call of an owl overhead.

Song

We are woken in the dark, just ahead of the dawn, by gentle singing. Paul and Kannaki move quietly through the camp, softly repeating a simple refrain together. Kannaki is a hardy European girl, with a dark complexion and countenance, perhaps in her early thirties, who speaks directly and abrasively at times. It was Kannaki's singing during the closing stages of my own quest that triggered me to gently cry with gratitude for making it through the night. The song she is singing now is referred to as a dawn greeting, allegedly sung by the Bushmen of the Kalahari, and will be sung again at the sacred community fire as the Questers return from their nights alone with their fires. It is a beautiful alarm, blending with the morning calls and songs of the first birds.

Nature Appreciation

We are ushered out of our beds and down to the kitchen area of the site, beside the lake, where a small brick building the size of a shed houses cooking equipment near to a hand-built Yurt that provides the principal organising space for the activities of the Sacred Earth organisation. Paul gathers the young people and the adults together and circles everyone up around the kitchen fire, before leading all through a guided nature appreciation.

His offering of appreciation is structured radially, beginning with drawing our attention to the earth beneath our feet. This then spreads outward from the ground to the insects unseen by us, to the birds around us in the trees, "the two legged" as Paul refers to them, to the animals, "the four legged", and then up to the moon which is still visible in the early morning sky, to the sun and out into the cosmos. It is subtle yet powerful and draws people's awareness to the blue sky, the first warm rays of the sun and the stark difference between this morning and last night.

Kannaki extends this with what she calls a 'sense meditation'. This takes the form of a series of exercises intended to extend the physical awareness of those present. These are called, 'Fox Feet' and 'Owl Eyes' with emphasis given to the pattern of breathing and letting go of any tensions being felt in the body. They are exercises that I have now witnessed several times in my encounters. They appear in part to have their genesis in the work of an American outdoors educator, Joseph Cornell and in particular his influential book *'Sharing Nature with Children'* first published in 1979. The body and mind exercises that Kannaki leads the group in part are informed by the Buddhist practice of meditation and once again it appears that concepts and tools from this spiritual tradition have informed several of the activities at all the sites I have visited.

After these gentle exercises those questing are invited to walk the site, selecting certain areas they feel drawn to, perhaps to find a 'sit spot' and settle into a quiet, personal appreciation of the dawn, this place, and this moment. Marie, a Nordic woman in late middle age, silver haired with skeletal features and smiling eyes, walks to the lake and takes up a meditative seated posture on one of the wooden fishing platforms.

Fasting

Those that are not questing mill around the kitchen fire and prepare themselves coffee and eat chocolate biscuits. Two of the boys from the ESA group, Bobby and David, are hanging around the food boxes, torturing themselves with the temptation to eat. I suggest to them that I could save a whole packet and give them out on their return from the Quest. They make me promise to save the biscuits and quickly joke about having more than one each and not giving any out to the other Questers. Hope catches our conversation and talks with the boys about privilege. They speak about Africa and those that are in the world right now starving. She returns to the notion of gratitude, of being grateful for the three meals we have each day and I can see that this moves the boys along, preventing them from crumbling in the face of early temptation.

Teaching

The group 'circles up'. A song is sung in Lakota. Sal says that the Lakota language is an 'earth based language'. He explains that the song we have been singing is a plea to what his people call 'the great mystery'. He tells us that the words ask for "help, help us nature, we want to live".

With everyone present and attentive Sal poses a question of the group. “Why do we do this work?” There are many offers of answers, coming one at time in steady succession. The responses arise from young people and adults alike. “For the children, nature connection...” Sal acknowledges each response and then clarifies with his own answer. “To live. We do this work in order that we may live”. He elaborates by stating that these processes are “ancient techniques” and makes the allusion “that those (villages) that forgot it didn’t last”. He says that the Quest is one of the oldest forms of maintaining life. “We are going to learn about ourselves this day. Learn about nature, and about one another”, Sal proclaims. “You cannot fail, it is not school. It is not pass or fail. It is an opportunity, it is an opportunity to learn”. He recommends that we ask, “how is this helping me, how is this helping me serve others?”

When we are all gathered together, adults and young people together, up at the main fire and an adult is talking or teaching or instructing I notice genuine attention from the young people. They sit in silence, with no chatter, no phones, no fiddling, appearing to be absorbed in a calm internal process of attentive listening. Sal talks about the approaching sweat lodge as the opportunity of “clearing”. He speaks of the process assisting to, “clear the stories you arrived with”. He encourages everyone to be open to the experience asking that we “let go of containment, let the creation come to you I whatever form it comes”.

When Sal is talking about tobacco as a sacred plant that has been used to enhance sacred attention I wonder how it must feel for the young people here to have these experiences and instructions that so contradict those from school and parents. During the following song and drumming I think about how we all yearn for and seek that which is authentic, and how young people are no exception. Is it any surprise that the authentic, when its presentation is met with, is intoxicating? I am then invited to share my intentions with the whole group.

First I speak of what can be considered ‘the camp technology’, an idea that I have picked up from visiting the ‘Wild Child’ Boys Rites of Passage weekend. I explain that there are many crafts being experienced and utilised in the camp, from fire starting and knowledge of wood, to shelter building and the sharing of tools. I explain that I feel there is another technology of the camp, but one that often goes unmentioned or unnoticed as a craft, that of story. I say that I feel the campfire itself calls out for story. I tell the group that I have been on my own quest and how I was helped to recognise the importance of hearing my story, first here in the group, then outside beyond the camp. I explain that it was my good friend Luke, who had helped me learn the woods, who

came to hear my story, that he had known, more than I had, how important it was for me to share. With his help so did I.

Then I said, “I would like help in catching your stories, to share with the wider world in the hope that we can bring about some small change and share the power of these experiences so more people might have access to these kind of experiences. I would like you to help me in my search so it is your search too (and it is). This is so I am not the conduit alone, we all are.

When I tell the group I have exercise books and pencils they let out a collective involuntary sigh. I remind them that this is not school, echoing Sal’s earlier comments, and that these are just tools for catching some of the flavour of their experiences. I tell them I have brought Dictaphones, and mini-cameras so that they might share their experiences with each other, perhaps interviewing each other, and help in the harvest? Asking two of the young people what they thought of my intentions and what I said around the fire they say, “It makes sense to document it in some way”.

Cleansing

The group of questers are then invited to participate in an Inipi, a sweat or purification lodge. The experience of the Inipi as a sacred, and ceremonial tool was promoted as an opportunity to go deeper into personal questions and to slow down into the natural rhythm of the land itself.

Whilst in the total dark of the sweat lodge, undergoing the purification ritual of the Lakota Plains Indians, the Inipi, I had struggled for breath. Feeling the discomfort of extreme heat, on, and in, my body, I sat bolt upright in an attempt to regain control of my posture and switched from breathing in through my nose in short blasts, to breathing in and out solely through my mouth, in deep inhalations. The air was hot with steam. I focused on my breathing and, cut off from my sight, I began to perceive the air that I was inhaling as ribbons or cords of steam arising from the stones at the centre of the lodge. I could ‘see’ these cords being sucked directly into my lungs by the power of my breath. I attempted to expand the capacity of my lungs to their full extent. I sensed the moisture of the air as it entered and exited my body. It was the first time that I can remember when I was able to directly notice the workings of my lungs and their dependence on elemental forces beyond my everyday attention or control.

After the Inipi was over the group used the remaining available water to wash off the mud and leaves from their bodies and spoke only a little to each other. Time was then spent settling ahead of dusk and the beginning of the Sacred Fire Quest proper.

Sacred Container

Whilst the participants of the Fire Quest spent time slowing down, checking their sites and preparing for the evening the organisers began work on the Community Sacred Fire. The creation of the Sacred Fire site was done exclusively by women and entailed demarking the space for the central fire and gathering. This involved clearing the floor of any leaves, stones and debris, positioning the 'four corners' of the compass – East, South, West and North, making a single entrance to the site of a bower of branches and ferns, preparing tables with ritualistic items for use through the night – tobacco, cedar smudge sticks, and blessed bowls of water, alongside areas for images and artefacts of ancestors to be placed. Whilst this work was taking place the male part of the organising team exclusively prepared the firewood, chopping logs and creating tinder for the fire, enough to last through the night until the dawn.

Ritual and Ceremony

At dusk those questing were called back to the community circle in order to witness the lighting of the Sacred Fire started by hand using only a bow-saw, wood and twine and participate in the opening ceremony. Whenever anyone entered the Community Sacred Fire circle they performed a 'cleansing' ritual at the boundary and offered a pinch of tobacco to the Sacred Fire. Four songs were sung as gifts to the questers and a poem was read aloud by one of those remaining at the fire for the night. The questers were then invited to bring their tinder to the fire and an ember from the Sacred Fire was placed in each bundle. The questers then left the circle one by one and retraced the steps to their individual fire site in the nearby woodland.

Song

Of the four songs sung in ceremony and support of the Questers preparing to leave the community Sal suggests a song about 'Grandmother Moon' that he then leads. The song is known by some of the group. Others ask if they can learn it. The refrain is simple,

repetitive. The words are repeated four times with a melancholic, soft refrain repeated twice, almost fading away to nothing, as they are gently intoned.

Jim, a rangy, tall young man, with long hair and a woodland look, is invited to share a song he has composed. At first he appears uncertain as he will be Questing and the song must be sung until the last of the Questers leaves the community fire. Sal reassures him that the song is a simple enough refrain for the group to keep it going after he has left the circle. It is a plaintive song.

Feel the thaw...

Feel the thaw...

Thaw the river. Let it flow...

Flowing where it needs to go.

Crossing the threshold and holding vigil

When the group is confidently singing the words Jim begins to add additional lines, creating a sense of deeper harmony and resonance. It is moving to feel an integral part of the song as the Quester's voices begin to die away as we watch them step out of the circle, one by one, into the dusk and into their own individual quests.

The questers tended their fires throughout the night with the light of each dimly visible from the Community Sacred Fire. The men that remained at the central fire divided the responsibility of tending the Community Sacred Fire throughout the night with a watch of two hours each decided on at the outset. It was made explicit that this responsibility was paramount for the success of the experience and on behalf of those undertaking the quest. We would refrain from sleep, just as those who were questing would.

Stories

Stories are told from the Native America tradition of coyote trickster stories. A small group of young children, the younger brothers and sisters of those questing, listened and joined in with the telling with their parents by the fireside whilst occasionally dozing in sleeping bags. Chocolate and hot drinks were shared around by those friends and well-wishers that were visiting the community fire. Songs are sung late into the night. The

full moon rose unexpectedly brightly in the early hours before dawn and this confused a number of those out at their own fires who tended down their sites before dawn and returned to the Community Sacred Fire confused about the time.

During the dead of night Hope asks me to help her retrieve water from the outbuilding down at the kitchen fire. We slip through the woodland softly, making the best attempt to move silently so as not to disturb any Questers. We see several fires but don't stray too close. It is a challenge moving through the wood with only the faint moonlight illuminating the way. Whilst we are down at the kitchen fire Hope asks me about my research and about how it is going. It is the first conversation that feels like it could take place beyond this setting. I talk a little about my PhD supervisor, and how supported I feel. I explain that I have been extremely fortunate to be encouraged to pursue my own project as a result of the Freedom to Learn project and my supervisor's attitude to my learning. I speak a little about the synchronicity of our interests and how my supervisor has also been exploring the wild, travelling to remote locations, embarking on wild courses and learning birdsong. I talk also about the work of the 'wild pedagogies' and how there appears to be a growing movement attempting to explore these settings and ideas. Hope refers to the 'collective consciousness', another Jungian term, and in the faint light of the moon I catch her smiling.

Later in the evening I was rearranging my belongings in the hammock that would be my bed for the night. As I slipped out under the trees, I caught sight of my breath in the light of my head-torch. I exhaled as fully as I could and watched as my breath cascaded out of my body in a cloud, rapidly dissipating and curling away into the cold air of the night. My perception felt heightened. I could see each droplet of water that had only moments ago been inside my body, now adrift on the breeze. I could see my breath leaving my body and moving back out into the air around me, being absorbed by the night, the trees and the Tawny Owls above me, which I could hear but not see. I knew in that moment that I was connected to life in a bigger way than I would normally have the opportunity to witness or have the ability to comprehend.

Then, in the cold hours of early morning, just ahead of dawn, Hope, seated outside the group campfire, called me over and asked if I wanted to talk. Perhaps she could tell I was restless because instead of initiating a conversation she instead said, "you should go down to the lake and have that quiet moment ahead of the day beginning." Leaving her side I walked tentatively down through the dark wood to the edge of the lake. The moon was high in the sky towards the east and was being reflected in the still water, broken by the occasional ripple or movement of carp. Looking out

across the lake I began to see ‘waves’ or plumes of water droplets, billowing across the surface of the lake. They moved like sails, crossing the lake from the south towards the north. If I have ever seen anything like that before I have never been so moved by it. It was as though I could see the breath of life itself and in that moment I had a moment of genuine clarity and the feeling of a deepening in my appreciation of the forces that sustain life. Those plumes, those sails of water droplets were moving through me, completely independently of any instruction or force, and breathing life into me and everything else around, seen and unseen.

This prompted reflections on my own quest undertaken earlier in the year as a pre-requisite of joining this weekend. They are recounted here in the hope of describing a little of the experience from my own perspective that might reflect a little of what might have been experienced by those questers out in the wood.

My own Quest

During the final afternoon of my Quest weekend in May, participants were invited to unpack some of our experience and to take some time in solitude to ask ourselves what actions we were perhaps inspired to take next as a result of what we saw and felt out there.

I decided to walk to the field and sit with the beehives. It was very sunny and warm. Whilst I was sitting there I thought about the bees, about how they know what to do, they know how to dance, how to serve, and I wrote in my notebook, ‘why don’t I?’ This quiet reflection, without the input of others, just time to think and look at the experience and to feel the heat of the sun, to feel the grass on my feet, was enormously useful and facilitated a healthy processing of the events from the previous night of my quest.

There I asked myself ‘what did I learn out there?’ instead of asking what actions I might be inspired to take as I didn’t know how to grapple with that question and it felt imposed rather than arising in me. I did not want to force myself to answer a question that I wasn’t ready to examine or answer.

These are my initial notes taken directly from my notebook:

- Some wood burns true, burns bright, clean. Not just the wood itself, but how it has been sourced, handled, processed, treated, stored, looked after, prepared. Some wood burns dull, wet, smoky, spitting, and murky.
- That I could do it, that I could take on a potentially enormous event (physically, psychologically) and handle it. Not only survive, but thrive.
- I learnt that I don't have to fear being alone. That all creation speaks to us if only we are able to turn towards it and tune in, the bird alerting me to the deer; the mist, the nameless noises, the lights.
- I learnt that I was, I am, afraid of being alone, of being cut off, that I may never have had the chance to prove to myself that I can be self-sufficient, strong 'enough'.
- I learnt that if what scares you is welcomed in (with sincerity) then it can become a guide or a helper. Something that points the way.
- That a ceremonial act, the repetition of an offering, brings focus, recollection and clarity.
- That in not judging or not expecting or not hoping lies the possibility of refreshed creativity, of renewed ways of seeing.
- That working with an immediate problem, a headache, is a layer of experience, not the only thing being experienced.
- That all things, even that as bright and fierce and powerful as the fire are moving towards their end, that all things will, must, end.
- That if you can't beat them – really it is better to move with them, to dance, and move it along.
- That I cannot guide all things, that I cannot save everything, the moths were drawn to the fire, their end. And I could not prevent it.
- That others help and do so without needing, wanting, anything in return.

Reflecting on the Quest over the distance of time, I am challenged to consider if the recounting of my experience was simply a personal projection, an anthropomorphising of sorts? As the months pass, I begin to doubt my own experience, yet no matter how many times I replay the encounter it remains as vividly *participatory* as in the first instance. David Bohm (2004) explores the concept of participation, breaking open the meaning and assisting my thinking.

The earliest meaning was, “to partake of,” as you partake of food... Symbolically, or even actually... it meant partaking of the source. The second meaning is “to partake in,” to make your contribution... it means that you are accepted, you are being taken into the whole. You can’t take part in something unless that thing in some sense accepts your participation. Taken together, these ways of thinking do not create a separation of object and subject. (Bohm 2004, pg. 99)

Questions arise. If we can cultivate the ability to be open and aware, to really listen, *to participate* might we find the whole of the wild world directing us? How might my own experience assist in understanding the experience of others in the group? Could my experience act as a way of orienting to the experiences of those that also Quested providing a richer access point for understanding and interpreting meaning?

How would those out questing during this night begin to articulate their experiences?

Return and breaking of the fast

At dawn on Sunday morning the organising group made the agreed call for return to the Community Sacred Fire. The questers slowly returned from their fire sites and gathered in and quietly greeted friends, family and the sacred community but did not engage in any in deep conversations. The younger participants were invited to break their fast and were greeted with fruit and tea at the edge of the sacred circle. There was a tangible feeling of tenderness amongst the camp, both of those returning and of those receiving. Some time was spent in quiet reflection whilst awaiting all those that had gone into the woods to return. The teacher then said a few words about providing space for the experience to percolate. He suggested that the gathering break into four smaller groups, with each assigned a facilitator from the sacred community, and to spend some time in sharing what had happened out there in the wood.

Harvesting

Later in the morning the whole group was called back to the Community Sacred Fire for a ‘harvesting’ of stories, songs and experiences. This was done one group at a time without interruption from any member of the group. At the close of a story the teacher or a facilitator might offer an insight or commentary but these were limited and did not seem to superimpose themselves over the original experience that had been shared.

Community

After the small group sharing the whole camp is called in to share in the ‘harvesting’ of stories. It is mainly the adult Questers that share openly in this format. Falcon talks about the grief that he sat with, and how he was absorbed in reflecting on the recent death of a close family member. He talks about witnessing the fire as ‘conscious’ and that he felt that when it ended, when the last ember smoked out that it was ‘consciousness leaving’, that it represented death and the moving on, the release of consciousness.

Ashley, one of the girls that Quested last September, says that she saw a bear in the ash of her fire. This resonates with some of her reported experiences from the year before. She informs us that her group took a ‘roses and thorns’ approach to sharing their experiences, saying what was good and what was bad about what had happened to each of them. This is another similarity with the other sites I visited. It also made me wonder if the quality of the sharing was solely dependent on the experience and tools of the one facilitating, that the ‘teacher’ or instructor, the leader in this setting had a lot of responsibility.

Later Iona, a young adult involved in the wider group, will comment on a similar thought, sharing that she didn’t feel that it was well held, and that there wasn’t enough time or support to share effectively, that she hadn’t even begun to start processing what happened out there.

Ashley continues by talking about how thorns that were ‘felt’ included loneliness, both social and cultural whilst roses were the fire itself and how it connected to emotion, meeting in the fire, how the fire itself brought it up.

Sal advises everyone at this stage to “be kind to yourselves. This experiences will still be going for at least four days”. He recommends that everyone “journal and draw the pictures, or else it will be lost.” Whilst he is talking Rose sits next to me drawing in one of the exercise books that I had given out, but which were unused by everyone.

Marie expresses “gratitude to the standing nations” of the trees and as she does so an acorn audibly lands on her head. There is laughter and Sal claims this as “a good blessing”. He says that he appreciates that everyone has ‘hungry bellies’ but that this process, of capturing the highlights is essential. “What you have received may not be

for you, it be an answer for someone else.” He then asks, “Does anyone have anything that they think may be for another?”

Marie responds by talking about what she calls the reasons for coming into being. She relates this to her experience with the fire, which she found challenging, saying, “the fire needs air, don’t choke it, I realise I need air too”.

Receiving Gifts

As the last group are invited to share their experiences attention turns to a teenage boy who decided not to venture out into the wood and instead remained behind with the teachers and guides, tending the fire throughout the night on behalf of the community, creating a link with all those out in the darkness. In relation to this Elena speaks of her “appreciation of the Moon and the abundance of gifts we all receive, of the stars and the all the fires out there in the night”.

Jim tells the gathering that he received a song whilst he was out there in the night at his fire. He asks if he can share it and the group begins to accompany him as the words and song structure repeat on themselves.

There’s a chamber within my heart...
Way down, deep down low...
Within my heart...
There’s a well within my heart...
Way down, deep down low...
Within my heart...
Feel it brimming.

After everyone had finished this final sharing the group was invited to pay its respects to the site itself and encouraged to leave the woodland in better condition than they had found it. This preparing to leave was given plenty of time with participants returning to their individual sites and walking through the area raking over coals, covering fire pits with disturbed earth, and scattering leaves with the aim of leaving no trace of human activity.

Preparing to leave

Pippa approaches me as we pack up. She asks if I would be interested in parental stories and begins to explain that although she did not Quest she had a powerful experience in

support of her daughter. She explains this by way of showing me an acorn casing. She opens her hand where a series of three cups at the end of stalk has been clutched. Pippa explains the significance of the three cups being her, her husband and her daughter, Mary. She talks about how she felt that her find reflected her experience of wanting to hold onto her daughter, to watch over her, and to protect her, but on turning over the acorn casing she had found that one of the cups was empty. She took this to mean that Mary had to move on in order to grow.

The struggle of story catching begins to make me feel teary. As I am engaged in the packing up of Hope's hammock, which has to be done in a strict fashion ensuring that all the parts are put away neatly in the correct bags and containers, I am approached by Mack, a stout Norwegian man, wearing round spectacles, and decked out in the classic garb of the outdoorsmen: red chequered flannel shirt, beanie hat, and worn in walking boots confronts me about my methods. He is camped close to me under a very minimal set up of low strung tarp, bivouac bag on the ground and few comforts. Mack arrived during the teaching on Friday and Quested on the Saturday night. "You're doing it all wrong, going about it in the wrong way" he says. He asks me if I have done my own Quest insinuating that if I had I would know not to be going about things in this way. He seems surprised when I tell him that I have. "You know after your Quest that it needs time. You should offer to listen to the stories in a week, write them down for them and then offer them back". There is a brashness to his insight, a sense of self confidence that rankles, that at the time could be read as harsh but is most likely a matter of communication style. His comments add to my sense of frustration. He may be right that I going about it all wrong but there doesn't appear to be another path available to me in this moment.

Facing what is beginning to feel like a crisis I decide to make a direct appeal for help, to express my vulnerability and situation in the hope of finding support. I approach some of the young participants that are hanging around the equipment and packed up tents. I state plainly that I am struggling, that I need help and that without it I will feel that I have failed.

The youngest boys in the group along with Ben from the Boys Rites of Passage Camp offer to be interviewed. It is a touching moment. I ask Ben if he would like to interview some of the others which he seems up for but does not manage in the end, filming a little section of the camp instead. He sits with us at first as I begin engaging in the process. Bobby, colourfully dressed in a green jacket, with burgundy top and flame red hair, and his friend David, quiet, demure and dressed in dark clothes, both come

forward and sit on the ground by the makeshift shelter. They ask if they can be interviewed together, and they agree to support each other. The boys are open. I'm surprised to learn that they are so young. One is thirteen and the other fourteen.

When we are finished I ask them if they will help me encourage some of the others to share their experience with me, acting as advocates for the process. Another older boy, Shani, is engaged, albeit a little reluctantly, and sits with me to talk over his night by the fire.

During our exchange it begins to rain heavily and we move to Anthony's shelter to continue. After this the rain and the winds pick up and people begin rapidly moving down to the kitchen fire beginning the process of preparing to leave.

I had felt this process, of the strands holding everyone together begin to unravel as soon as all the Questers had returned from their overnight vigils. Once everyone had broken the fast it was as if we all were already moving towards the end of the encounter.

The questions I ended up asking in my brief conversations with the young people were:

Name.

Age.

School?

How is school?

How did you feel ahead of going out?

What happened? Did you have any visitors?

What did you learn?

Do you feel a closer connection to nature or the wild world?

Will you take anything away with you from this experience back into the wider world?

When I realised that the window of opportunity to gather any more stories was over I reluctantly began to move my belongings down to the kitchen fire in preparation for the last gathering before the weekend drew to a close. As I walk down through the wood, Bobby comes forward off the trail and hugs me whilst David offers to take my sleeping mats from me and carry them down to the kitchen fire. Bobby says, "Thank you, thank you for the interview, for the recording, it was good, I'm glad I did it". David asks me directly, "do you feel better?" and I am lost for words by this declaration of solidarity and support. It is humbling and moving and reminds me of why I am such a supporter of young people in my work as a teacher.

Reflection, Mirroring, Separation and Leaving

At the fireside, gathered for a final sharing, Sal says, “the tide of life is receding from this earth” and opens up a final sharing of gratitude. He says that gratitude is a teaching of the Iroquois. He says that, “gratitude and connection nourish us”. He mentions the connection of this practice to the ‘Haudenosaunee’ (Thanksgiving) address. Sal offers a thought to the group. “If you are born with a gift, it’s not for you, it is for others to receive”. It is a thought that runs counter to most current thinking given as we are in the West to seek individual gifts and maximise their return. Hope says in response, “we fill in the gaps in creation”.

Seated around the fire, wrapping up the weekend, I note that neither Sal nor Hope ever refer to pre-prepared material, to notes, to paperwork, or to written plans. They appear to answer without ‘thinking’ (as Linda puts it) they ‘know’ what they are doing, rather than needing to make reference to anything other than their experience. Sal uses the word ‘accountability’ in the sense of holding oneself accountable. He goes on to challenge the use of the word, despite having used it himself. He suggests that, “this word has been used in North American corporate language and business training and has even crept into the Art of Mentoring course”. He says, “I’m not beholden to any words”.

It is the first time I sense a disjoint and perceive the weekend as a ‘course’, a series of intentional experiences shaped by others whose goals exist outside of my own. Kannaki shares that she has a fear of not being seen. Hope responds by asking, “Where do we learn that?” Motioning to a participant’s child, who is crawling on the floor, she expands her point by adding, “Because we’re not born with it”. Marie suggests by way of response, “in this world” and Hope concludes the exchange by recommending, “Let’s reclaim it”.

Marie addresses the group with a final comment and puzzle. She says that, “Because this is an experience and not a theoretical transmission” that she wants to “find a way to enact and remember, to recollect what happened here”. It is suggested that people pair up and act as supporters.

There is then a final, closing song, sung in Lakota. We are told that the words mean, “Don’t lose your way”. Hope tells the gathering that “our hearts and minds are now separated”, and with that the group disbands moving toward cars and home, “free again” as Sal says, “to dream our own dreams”.

Chapter 7, Part 2

Using the research questions to explore (and attempt to understand) the participants reporting of experiences

The experience of the Sacred Fire Quest was an intensely personal and private one. There are very few accessible accounts available from young people across the available literature with no testimony from young people embarking on this style of programme in the UK. Here I present an account that was constructed without any guidance and written entirely from the personal perspective. It encapsulates much about the nature of the Fire Quest itself and provides clues as to what might be anticipated by those embarking on a similar experience.

In the first day of the quest, I was mostly getting ready for the night and making preparations for the fire, although not really finding anything new about myself in this stage, except for the fact that I need to take things slow and have patience. The highlight of this section was the inipi. Being in a hot, damp, steamy space, gives you an opportunity to go into what I would almost describe as a trance like state, a connection to the subconscious, Mother Nature. This was the stage where I found my question. It wasn't answered in this space, but asked. The night was warm and I found myself dozing off time to time, 10-15 minutes at a time with maybe 30 minute gaps. Time passes slower when you have no timepiece and several times I found myself letting the fire die down because I had thought that it was sunrise, but it turned out that it was only the moon coming up. On one particular section between the space of sleep and wake, I thought I felt a presence, heard a twig snap or something of the sort and out of the corner I saw something, human in form but not in nature, a pure white figure, a fleeting glance of something I do not yet understand. It was shortly after that experience that the answer came to me. But after that I did not fall back to sleep. The sunrise brought a mixed set of emotions for me, kind of happy that I could go back to camp, but also quite longing for another night for more answers to come. As I walked in I remembered that I had not eaten for 24 hours but to my surprise, I was not hungry, something that I had not expected. We sat and talked, had the closing ceremony, packed up our things, said our goodbyes, and left. I personally would have liked another day to just be, not on quest but just to be in the woods processing my discoveries. When I got home I couldn't actually walk in the door; I had to go out and sit in a tree for three hours. Then I could come back, to somewhere where I did not want to be at that moment. I was a changed person and I think that I realized for the next few days the importance of peace. After about two weeks, I was whisked away with all the things that I had thought I would want to do again, but something inside of my still holds onto this experience and realizes its importance, even in the 'darkest' of moments. (Andrew)

Further testimonies are featured in a later Appendix (Appendix 4) as they are seen to be a significant contribution to knowledge in this area. These testimonies include several

composed by adult participants (whilst these adult testimonies have not been included in the current analysis they are included with the intention of providing triangulation for this unusual sequence of experiences). The remainder of this section focuses on the conversations with all the young participants seeking to understand what was experienced and how these experiences came about.

How might young people benefit from wild experiences?

Several of the participants talked about the sense of community they had experienced, community which began in the human and as shall be seen, moved beyond the boundary of the human to include the more-than-human. Shani felt the benefit of being part of an unusually close-knit community:

Oh yeah, I love it, it's quite nice and it has a real tribal feel to it which is like interesting. (Shani)

For Bobby and David (amongst others) it was an opportunity to offer something to the adult community not usually afforded them through school.

I thought it was really quite helpful, we taught the adults something, like some of the adults wanted to learn how to use the axe, and we showed them that and then they just helped us with the knowledge, and stuff, just teaching us bits and bobs that would help a lot between, and then we would repay the favour by helping them. (Bobby)

Finding themselves more skilled and able bodied than some of the adult Questers they were able to engage in teaching and sharing. This provoked positive feelings and enhanced relationships.

Yeah it is a new feeling, adults learning off you, it's not that often that would happen. I don't know. Yeah, a nice feeling (Bobby)

Yeah, bonding with them (adults) was really nice, just sitting around the fire, singing a couple of songs and it talking about their quest and gratefulness and stuff. (Bobby)

David added that, "Because there are different age ranges so that quite nice as well". (David)

A young female participant, Eva, expressed what she felt to be the importance of real connection as a pre-requisite for true communication, something perhaps missing from most encounters in school.

This feeling of belonging has been forgotten for a long time, as the communication nowadays relies more on intellect. I found it a lot easier to communicate with people after we have built up this sense of connection, which only occurs through actions but not thoughts. (Eva)

Extending the notion of community from human to more-than-human Eva expressed

Being only with the fire is not being alone, at least not as “feeling alone”. Though I was physically parted from other people during the quest, the feeling that captured me when I saw the flickering light scattered in the dark forest was the connection between us through our deeds---the fact that we were carrying out similar action that had been done also by our ancestors thousands of years ago. (Eva)

It is clear from this closing statement that Eva was profoundly affected by her experience:

My experience of attending the Fire Quest is meaningful and has affected me profoundly, as I am convinced, which will keep its everlasting influence on my attitude towards the events in my life. (Eva)

Relief from stress and pressure

Andrew’s quotation here sums up much of the tension felt by the participants regarding the desire to discover and the burden of absorbing the lessons of school.

It was a change from school, the fast paced world outside, social media, friends, and responsibilities. You can just stop and actually take in your surroundings and not have to be anywhere, do any homework or be pressured. To be honest, I dislike the fact that school is so fast paced, I like the idea of learning but it’s just too pressured. (Andrew)

Shani was the only young person to explicitly refer to the term ‘stress’ however the remaining participants all inferred that they were encountering it.

Yes, I mean like, stress of life and stress of society and all that it just kind of gets to you and it slowly builds up and up and up and this is an easy kind of release where you can forget all that and clean it away, you know, even like just a couple of days in the woods scrubs that all clean and it's really nice otherwise I don't know what would happen I'd break down eventually, you know. (Shani)

For Shani this provided liberty, the opportunity to feel self-reliant and potentially self-willed.

It's really liberating in a way, it's like there's a certain self, you know, like, what's the word, just like being out of civilisation, like being able to rely on yourself, rather than everything else and everything that's given to you, like everything in our society, because you know we live in like a first world country, it's all like handed to you on a silver platter and stuff, here you actually have to fend for yourself, it's really good to learn that because if you are ever in that situation, you know... (Shani)

What might be learnt through wild experiences?

All the participants made claims about what they thought they had 'learned' through the programme of the Fire Quest. Interestingly these claims do not focus on the practical aspects of the programme but rather on aspects of personal discovery and growth. Is this because, in the main, these participants have already gained significant practical skills and that therefore they were able to move beyond them?

For me wilderness skills go far, far deeper than the mere physical learning's. I was surprised on my first solo survival quest to discover a part of me which I had only glimpsed briefly in times of deep reflection and dreams. (Juan)

Bobby echoed these statements about reflection and patience.

Yes I have learnt, to be patient, to let your emotions go when you need to let them go, and just keep on thinking positive and the fire will eventually start up, and just get as much stuff as possible, never get too little or just the right amount, you want loads more, you want enough to light four fires or more, because it will really help. (Bobby)

Shani was more cautious in his personal claims about the experience.

I feel like it was a valuable experience, I feel like it is something that probably all youths should do, like part of growing up, and it was a milestone to achieve

and overcome. I don't think I came into any massive self-realisation or anything like that, it was just a nice experience. (Shani)

However, despite claiming not to have come 'into any massive self-realisation' he did make the case that all young people should have the opportunity to embrace these experiences.

Because it's like very deeply rooted into like ancestral and tribal roots and stuff and it's just something that's just very nice, you know, it's quite a milestone, like it's kind of hard for me to put into words but, like I don't know, it just kind of like matters as part of our ancestry and fire is such a deeply rooted part of our culture and our upbringing as part of our civilisation, so I guess yeah that could be part of the answer. (Shani)

It was anticipated that the younger participants might focus on practical skills. However even in the case of David, the youngest participant in any of the programmes, it was personal growth that appeared to be the focus.

I learnt to listen. I learnt to be more patient. I learnt to always look on the bright side. To go out and don't be lazy, go out and if you need more wood, go get more wood, just go and do that. (David)

That this could be extended beyond the personal towards learning about 'other beings' was compelling.

When I was out and about, when you're just listening, nature can help you learn new things, learn things about yourself, about other things, other people, other, like, beings... (David)

Eva put forward that she had gained self-knowledge through her experience, expressing this as a "space to reflect on our experience" and hints at how this is supported by a wider network of the living world.

Participating in the ESA course enables me not only to build up truthful and reliable relations with people, but also gave me a new perspective on being "alone". In my school life, the sense of lonely looms above and panics me even when there's no one around to judge my status. Through what I have experienced in this Fire Quest weekend, I am starting to understand that being alone or recessive from the crowd may bring complete different things from what has been existed. Being alone and having a space where one doesn't have to react to everything constantly doesn't mean being neglected by the world. (Eva)

Andrew who is candid about his desire for greater self-awareness confirms this theme of self-understanding and the opportunity to gain aspects of self-revelation.

I don't know a lot about myself, I don't think that I know myself fully, erm, and I have pushed a lot of emotions down, because I felt at times that I wasn't allowed to express them, and this brings them back up and I can process them, erm, it is a feeling of connection to my surroundings whilst finding out about myself, and I think the more that I know about myself I'll be able to know other things, it opens the pathways to learning more things. (Andrew)

Andrew was also able to see skill acquisition in relation to a bigger picture.

We do also learn other useful skills, well, skills useful for society, a society that I think has almost completely lost touch with Mother Earth and Grandfather Fire, the basic principal of that is you take, you have to give back, and a society that has its senses so deeply buried. I believe that the world would be better place if everyone found the connection between the earth and them again, we would be a less violent peoples. Not everyone would feel this way, so there always be many different ideologies. (Andrew)

Putting what he felt he had gained into one succinct statement Andrew summed up by claiming:

I prefer being in the forest than in school and I believe the more important lessons can be found there. (Andrew)

Do wild experiences promote social or cultural confidence or agency and if so, in what ways (for example personal development, transformation or leadership)?

Through the processes of reflection and the development of self-understanding Andrew claimed that he had changed direction at school.

It showed me what was important to me in my life, erm creativity actually, rather than intellectualism, so I started putting more effort into the subjects that have, or the creative subjects at school and really putting those at the centre, making them the most important... (Andrew)

Describing how he arrived at this insight he describes the fire to have been central in unlocking this new perspective and independence.

It, on the Quest, that it, the fire seemed to, it never had one form, it was, it seemed creative in what it was, how it was, and it just it, my train of thought went from that into what can, I think what I was really trying to find from the fire is, what can I take from this, so my train of thought had gone onto, how can I apply this in my life and being more creative was what, is still with me. (Andrew)

The trust, independence and agency offered by the experience appeared to assist Juan to begin overcoming significant obstacles.

I think by doing what I did I did give way to a better way of healing my past and now that I have given this energy more time, time to flow I am working towards doing a three day survival quest in the winter during which I will pay close attention to my feelings and emotions. (Juan)

It appeared that Juan had recognized that the process itself was valuable rather than the end result

I now feel that what I did was the right thing to do and whilst I wrote the last sentence something that another teacher of mine once said came to mind: "We gain far more from the pursuit of our goal than in actually achieving it". (Juan)

Juan remained sincerely appreciative of the support he felt he had received from the wood.

I turned the pursuit of my goal into my goal and I learnt a lot but would I have learnt all that I did without the trees, the fresh air, and the earth? I think not. (Juan)

With this final quote Juan helpfully returns the agency for these transformations to the wild world. One of the participants of the Fire Quest intimated that they were ready to move on, beyond the container of the community.

I mean like it would definitely be nice just to go for a nice fireside camp by myself, I mean this is nice but there is still a sense that your be being watched and looked after, but I mean completely wild, that would be like something I might do sometime. (Shani)

This notion of being beyond the need to heal, or build up skills but rather ready to expand beyond the boundaries of the programme and become truly independent will be explored a further in the following chapters.

Do wild experiences impact on the ability of young people to engage in formal education, and if so, how?

It was instructive to hear about the young participants experiences of school. As the group had a higher incidence of independent schooling and home schooling than the previous sites it was anticipated that their experiences might be markedly different from those engaged in the previous settings. This was not the case with negative feelings made clear in conversation and interviews. This perhaps indicates that feelings of frustration and that the associated experiences of pressure, stress and confusion are widespread throughout most formal settings in education.

Shani, 16, the oldest interviewee was perhaps the most forthright and critical of school.

I'm not really a big fan of school to be honest, I feel like school's good with catering to a certain kind of student but it doesn't cater to a lot of really active and hyperactive students and has like, I don't know, the system seems very oriented around a certain specific group, so like it doesn't really tap into what I need in school. (Shani)

The younger participants were less vocally critical but still revealed problems with formal education and teachers in school with the outlook of teachers being a particular focus.

Well, if either of the teachers are in a bad mood, or I'm in a bad mood, then it's kind of like not a positive, it's kind of like a negative. (David)

The most positive portrayal of school came from Bobby, the youngest participant of any of the programmes at only 13 years old. Despite referring to his current school as 'good' it remained a place that 'could have more' activities and interactions that have perhaps the individual more in mind.

Andrew, a Secondary School pupil about to embark on GCSE examinations, expressed a reluctant acceptance of the status quo offered by school and in particular the subjects promoted as essential, equating the mastery of Maths and English with 'the good life'.

I think it's important to learn Maths, English, all the things that you will need to have a good life in the modern social world... (Andrew)

Reflecting on this tension Andrew spoke about the “*need to live fully in both worlds*” the world of school and the world of the wood. Shani again did not have anything complimentary to say about school.

I don't think anything we learn is very useful, at all, in life, you know, unless we follow very specific paths in life, which I don't really want to follow (laughs), and err yeah, but I do like socialising in school, that's nice. (Shani)

Reflecting on the experience Bobby shared that he would

take back the patience, in if I'm in an assessment for GCSEs and just deep breathing and then try and think of the answer sensibly, and if not, leave it and then come back, and I will just take back the peace and quiet from the fire, just go outside someday if I'm bored or have nothing to do, and I'm pestering my mum or dad, or my sister, go outside, light a fire and sit there and just think about stuff and do something that will keep me occupied. (Bobby)

Overall though the participants shared very little about how the experiences undertaken during the Sacred Fire Quest would translate to the starkly different environment of school. It seems to me that this was because what these young people undertook during their personal quests had bigger implications one that might guide them beyond the immediacy of exams or qualifications.

I think school starts when you enter the gates, each day, and when you go away for a holiday, school kind of ends, and you don't think about it for a while, and from the September Fire Quest I was always thinking about that, and I almost suppose it was special because it was one off, but it was also because it also gave me the right kind of education for me. (Andrew)

There was a significant reporting of a feeling of vulnerability that will be looked at in more detail during the discussion chapter as it is felt to resonate across all the sites and participants.

Could providing young people with wild experiences promote deeper relationships with the natural world?

Alone, in the dark of the night, surrounded by dense woodland, the young participants out on their Fire Quest reported only positives about their experiences. No only

positives but apparent insights into a larger perspective that included the more-than-human.

Some of these insights are slight yet perhaps can be considered stepping stones for developing connection. David repeated that the night spent alone had developed his attention to listening.

It has changed it by like listening more to the actual like nature side of things and then actually say at home you could just listen to like, open your window and just listen out and listen to things that are there and that's probably like a good skill. (David)

During the night Bobby appeared to have come to consider elements of the natural world as role models.

Yeah, when I'm not stressed, or panicking about stuff, and I'm just sitting down carefully, I feel like I am just one of those roots from a tree, just out of the ground and breathing. (Bobby)

Equating the roots of a tree with a living being, a being unstressed and not panicked, sitting carefully, breathing, Bobby could be talking about the practice of mindfulness (which intriguingly was developed by the Buddha whilst sitting under a tree). This outlook would be hard to find in many adults.

Despite claiming that 'nothing really exciting happened' and that 'no visions came through or anything like that', Shani went on to explain how he had developed a relationship with a tree throughout the night of his quest.

Nothing really exciting happened, no visions came through or anything but I did like, befriend a tree (laughs) which was, yeah, weird, but yeah... well, like, branches started falling from the tree and I thought it was angry at me or something (laughs), so like I hugged it (laughs incredulously), and started talking to it, telling it my life story and stuff, and then that went quite well and then I asked for its life story but I couldn't really understand a tree... umm and I feel like the tree, it, every time I was about to fall asleep, or every time the fire, or every time I was about to fall asleep and the fire was about to go out, a rain drop would fall from one of the leaves and like land on my forehead and just jolt me awake, which was very useful, so yeah, I felt like me and the tree were quite tight there. (Shani)

This appeared to present a tension for Shani who went on to speak about the development and containment of his connection to the wilder world.

I'm like also so deeply rooted in civilisation and our modern world that it's a bit hard to be, but if I was constantly out in the woods and constantly doing this sort of thing, it would probably be a much, much stronger connection. (Shani)

Revealing perhaps a desire to maintain and deepen this sense of connection Shani spoke about his plans for the future that appear to have taken shape in these experiences as they reflect little of the concerns of school careers or that trust in literature review.

When I grow up kind of like my ideal at the moment is a kind of vagabond-esque kind of life I guess, kind of a mixture of city and wildlife as well, I'm going through the city, maybe busking for money then going to the woods maybe sleeping there for the night something like that, just mix it up and travel the world wherever life takes me. (Shani)

Fire was understandably a significant factor for all of the participants.

I feel like I have become closer to fire, a lot closer to fire, I can reflect whenever I am near fire, I can think of things and I can think of things better and it really does work, just the actual earth itself is so grounding, and you're grounded there, and it's just a good feeling, to be there, like that. (Bobby)

However it appears that the young people whilst tending their own fires, alone in the dark, and refraining from sleep and food, entered into a new and substantially different relationship, perceiving the fire more often as a living being and potentially as a companion, rather than simply an aide for warmth or as a resource.

If I were to define the Fire Quest I've been through, it would be "to be with the fire". In the process of our quest, fire was well attended and cared for like a human being rather than a mere element that is acquired easily through technologies in daily life. To be honest, everything (work, study, relationships, etc.) needs to be attended and treated as how we ourselves want to be treated by our surroundings. That's what brings out quality and equilibrium. (Eva)

This experience for Eva appears to have generated an appreciation for tending and caring. This is in stark contrast to the more accessible 'outdoor' programmes for young people, where fire, wood and gaining skills are seen as aspects of survival and resources rather than developing a connection of 'care'.

Eva had "cared for" fire" as if it was "a human being". She had moved towards seeing her own wholeness reflected in the wholeness of all.



Chapter 8

What is knowledge for?

Since embarking on the field research I have begun to think with the ideas that I encountered there, thinking alongside the ethnographic descriptions and data (Atkinson 2017). This is congruent with the hermeneutic approach to understanding where “it is only by being deeply involved that any understanding... can take place. For hermeneutic thinkers, this is how all knowledge works. Objective understanding of the world, others, and ourselves requires personal engagement and passionate curiosity” (Zimmerman 2015, pg. 17).

In particular a single encounter and exchange had impressed itself on my thinking and has ultimately contributed to my synthesising of much that I have encountered.

The Quest and the Question

It was late afternoon on the second day of my first research encounter when the group I was accompanying during the Sacred Fire Quest were invited to a part of the wood where an Inipi, or purification lodge, had been constructed. The experience of the Inipi as a sacred, and ceremonial tool was promoted as an opportunity to go deeper into personal questions and to slow down into the natural rhythm of the land itself.

The construction of the Inipi had been completed under strict ritualistic conditions with the actual ‘purification lodge’ experience itself lasting for up to an hour and a half. The Inipi was made from the cut branches of hazel trees pushed into the ground and then bent over bare earth to form a squat oval tent frame. This frame had then been completely covered in felt with a single entrance cut into the side of the fabric. At the centre of the Inipi was a deep pit. The structure around the central pit was perhaps big enough to hold thirty people, if closely packed together.

Outside the structure a large fire made from beech and hornbeam logs covered a mound of granite stones the size of large bricks. These stones had been heated until they glowed and sparkled with heat. A clockwise direction of movement was strictly adhered to at all times by those participating. Because of the heat and humidity those entering the lodge were encouraged to wear swimming shorts or swimming costumes only. Women were invited to enter first with the male group following. The interior was

crowded and only permitted a crouched sitting position. When the door was closed the Inipi was light tight and completely dark.

After an introduction to the experience of the Inipi the teacher invited an assistant situated outside the tent to begin the process of bringing in the heated stones. These were placed in the pit one by one using a single deer antler as a fork. Once all the stones were placed in the central pit a bucket of water was brought in and placed by the fire. The teacher expressed that the experience of the Inipi would be challenging and although it was possible to leave if necessary any discomfort was encouraged to be worked through and sat with as a potential lesson.

The felt door was pulled closed. A series of offerings were made to the fire and the process of ladling water onto the stones began. This intensified the heat and created thick hot steam throughout the tent. The sudden heat made breathing difficult. Sitting in this heat was physically demanding. Once during the ceremony a ladleful of water was passed to each of the group for cleansing. This could be drunk or used to pour over the head and body. During the purification lodge the teacher chanted, sang and loudly beat a single drum. On occasion members of the group who had experienced the ritual of the Inipi before accompanied the singing adding to the already charged atmosphere.

Whilst this chanting and rhythmic drumming was taking place the teacher spoke about knowledge both in the language of the Lakota and in English. Speaking of his perspective, one that he carried as a bridge to an indigenous wisdom tradition, he continued by expressing that “knowledge can be destructive, it can and has been put to destructive use”. He then asked a single question into the darkness.

“What is knowledge *for*?”

Later during the ceremony the teacher offered a response, an answer.

“Knowledge is for healing.”

Salvatore Gencarelle’s declaration that “knowledge is for healing” suggested a multiplicity (Hage 2017; Lucas & Maslin 2018), an alternative perspective from another cultural tradition that sought to resist the dominance and monopoly of the prevailing culture, and with it a potential series of actions that could address the problem that those involved in the encounters that I had witnessed were reporting.

In the purification lodge Sal had continued by asking those present “how will your knowledge help to heal, yourself, your family, all beings, the Earth?” No direct answers were expected or given. The question appeared rhetorical, akin to a mirror that might enable self-reflexivity. The concept of the mirror is to be found across First Nation accounts of teaching and learning (Turner 1977) and provides access, albeit through metaphor, to a concrete action that might deepen thought and provide the conditions for personal growth. This is perhaps the clearest indicator of what is meant by a ‘mentor’ in this context and has implications for those committed to working with young people as teachers.

The question, what is knowledge for, and the perspective the answer suggests are here regarded as a critical encounter that has implications for the researcher and for the research itself. Sal’s question had profoundly impacted on me. It resonated with my abiding concerns regarding the aims and intentions of education as a philosophy (Noddings 1995). Yet despite being enlivened by the remark I was equally perplexed by it, and the challenges it seemed to pose.

Healing and wholeness

In order to better understand the proposal of Salvatore Gencarelle I sought clarification from many sources. The physicist David Bohm has been particularly helpful in elucidating a broader conception of the notion of healing, making a connection between the notion of health and wholeness.

It is instructive to consider that the word ‘health’ in English is based on an Anglo-Saxon word ‘hale’ meaning ‘whole’: that is, to be healthy is to be whole, which is, I think, roughly the equivalent of the Hebrew ‘shalom’. Likewise, the English ‘holy’ is based on the same root as ‘whole’. All of this indicates that man has sensed always that wholeness or integrity is an absolute necessity to make life worth living. Yet, over the ages, he has generally lived in fragmentation. (Bohm 2002, pg. 4)

This thinking about health and wholeness began to infuse with the experiences witnessed on the programmes. I wondered how this might connect to the practice of education, learning and instruction. John Dewey’s educational philosophy argued for the necessity of not separating learning from life, that we must not “separate school from what (Dewey) called the ‘great common world’, either physically or intellectually” (Weston 2004, pg. 35). Weston expresses concern that our culture has made “the very

place where children are sent to discover the Earth (school) the one place in the world where the Earth barely shows up at all” (Ibid).

Writing over 100 years ago Dewey “attempted to indicate how the school may be connected with life so that the experience gained by the child in a familiar, commonplace way is carried over and made use of there, and what the child learns in the school is carried back and applied in everyday life, making the school an organic whole, instead of a composite of isolated parts” (Dewey 1907, pg. 106). Dewey urgently reminds us that, “we do not have a series of stratified earths, one of which is mathematical, another physical, another historical, and so on. We should not live very long in any one taken by itself. We live in a world where all sides are bound together. All studies grow out of *relations* in the one great common world” (Ibid).

It is the contention of this research that it may be possible for the school, college and university to reconcile this fragmentation with the wild world and that in so doing potentially open up participants to “a concrete and active relationship to this common world” (Dewey 1907, pg. 107) extending relationships and health, both public and planetary. This resonated particularly with my concern with person-centred or human-centred education and the commitment to the *whole* person.

More-than-human education?

The concerns of Person-Centred and Human-Centred Education (Gill & Thomson 2012; 2017) have continued to inform my work as a teacher and as a researcher yet as time has passed this concern with the whole person, whilst remaining a primary commitment, has shifted and expanded to include an enlarged range of concern; the more-than-human.

By investigating these steps the present enquiry has sought to meet the “growing need for research and for building a knowledge base” (Ibid) within the area of person-centred education. This has been stated as including “how to conceptualise whole-person learning and PCE, its pedagogical implications, and how to integrate the values of person-centred learning in typical day-to-day educative encounters (Gill and Thomson 2012, pg. 2). This enquiry has worked to progress the argument of ‘person-centred education’ or ‘human-centred education’ by extending its remit to encompass a more than human perspective (Abram 1996; 2011).

This understanding, and witnessing, of ‘wholeness in relation’ extends the work of the person-centred and human-centred educator by seeking the adoption of the more-than-human world as an intrinsic part of the growth of the whole person.

This enlargement can be inferred as a direction of thought in the last published work of Carl Rogers (1980). Since his death Rogers’ work continues to be re-evaluated and extended. Bernie Neville in his *‘The Life of Things: Therapy and the soul of the world’* (2013) moves the work of the person-centred therapist beyond the concerns of individuals and into the relations of the wider ecosystem.

In ‘A Way of Being’ (1980) Rogers makes it clear that his objection to ‘imposing’ does not only apply to our relations with other human beings. Like (Martin) Buber, Mahatma Ghandi, (Arne) Naess and ‘ancient oriental sages’ he believes that this respectful, compassionate, non-oppressive stance must extend beyond humankind to the whole of creation. (Neville 2013, pg. vi)

This appears to be synergistic with much contemporary thought regarding ecosystems and environments (Wilson 2017), with what has been termed the ‘human-turn’ (Raffnsøe 2016) and with emerging Post-Human critiques (Haraway 2016; Braidotti 2013). Neville explores Rogers’ connection with this thinking:

In the final pages of his final book, Rogers expands on his ‘person-centred scenario for the future’. The ‘person of tomorrow’ he suggests, will ‘feel a closeness to, and a caring for, elemental nature’. People will be ‘ecologically minded’ and get pleasure from an, ‘alliance with the forces of nature, rather than in the conquest of nature’. (Rogers 1980, pg. 351 in Neville 2013, pg. vi)

Whilst re-framing Rogers’ thought as ecological, Neville also responds to the critiques of Person-Centred therapy suggesting that it has supported a wider view of the self in relation.

The contribution of person-centred theory to this line of thinking is the notion that self-actualisation of the individual is part of a larger process, and that the basic therapeutic conditions of empathy, acceptance and congruence apply not only to our relations with the individual client but to our relations with the species and the planet. (Ibid)

These statements can be said to have implications for education and for the person-centred, or human-centred educator. Within the experiences of this enquiry it is suggested that the concept of a ‘more-than-human centred education’ needs developing. This would take into account the intention of educating for the whole person *and*

ensuring that the notion of wholeness was extended “beyond humankind to the whole of creation” (Neville 2013).

By looking at what happens when children and young people have wild experiences within and alongside their formal education this enquiry has taken steps towards asking if *our wholeness* may be dependent on *the wholeness of all* and if this may be cultivated in the wholeness of all, rather than only in student-teacher, parent-child, or human-human relationships.

Toward a theory of healing

What has this meant to me, to my personal understanding and analysis of all that I have witnessed?

It has, thus far, meant becoming an authentic participant, whilst being returned to the source of my own learning and growth. It has meant being in a place where I was not judged in traditional ways, or asked questions, but where questions could arise, where encounters with other active constituents could take place. Perhaps, these experiences, these recollections, could act as a starting point - for educators hoping to support the child into a relation with (in) the world, the wild, and their own liberty?

For me as an educator and researcher it is imperative that the child is not overlooked in any drive to engage in a different kind of relationship with the rest of the planet. Indeed, what I have experienced might not be accessible to a child in the same way. But perhaps my experiences with the Sacred Fire Quest, the cleansing lodge, the fire, the dark, the wood, and everything beyond could be available in different ways, given conditions of support and challenge, of nature, foregrounded as co-teacher and of habit and practice?

This research, situated as it is in the lived experience of young people and practicing educators insistent on wild freedom, has sought ways to find out what this might mean precisely to the children and young people in my life and beyond. It has suggested that we can come to know something of the more-than-human worlds around us and to step into a wider knowing, one that is expansive, that radiates out from the individual into the whole.

Yet if our knowledge cannot be said to have a direction then what is the good in knowing anything?

During the ‘wild pedagogies floating colloquium’ conference I gave a presentation that recounted some of the practices and rituals that I had witnessed during my empirical field research. I told the story of the sacred fire ceremony and of my own personal experience during the cleansing lodge. After I had told the story I asked those listening for their response to the question that I myself had been asked - what is knowledge for?

The question provoked strong responses. “I like to think that it *isn't* for anything” stated one of the key participants. Later Professor Jickling took to me to one side and let me know that he felt that this position was naïve and disagreeable. It felt that I had committed an epistemological sin yet I have not been able to stop turning the phrase over and over in my mind since the original encounter.

I have since posed the question to many others, to collaborators, friends and family. The most helpful came from a professional colleague working at a university. “That is an interesting *perspective*. If you were ask all the teachers at this university I doubt that any would respond by suggesting that ‘knowledge is for healing’. Imagine if they did. It would have profound implications” (Personal Journal).

This use of the term *perspective* supported my thinking and gave confidence to the underlying principle within the concept that “knowledge is for healing”. David Bohm again assists in clarification.

The word ‘theory’ derives from the Greek ‘*theoria*’, which has the same root as ‘theatre’, in a word meaning ‘to view’ or ‘to make a spectacle’. Thus, it might be said that a theory is primarily a form of *insight*, i.e. a way of looking at the world, and not a form of *knowledge* of how the world is. (Bohm 2002, pg. 4)

The question itself, ‘what is knowledge for’, and its proposed solution, ‘knowledge is for healing’, when looked at this way, becomes a theory rather than an expression of knowledge or a philosophical, epistemological or ontological puzzle.

My feeling is that the phrase itself helps to “solve some of the problems of life – not only theoretically – but practically...” (Thoreau 2008, pg. 14). The question looked at this way moves toward a practical set of actions. What would knowledge for healing look like if enacted? My sense is it would look like a lot like the programmes and experiences reported here. The basis for this claim will be discussed throughout the following chapter.

Chapter 9

Four Wild Proposals

This chapter discusses the case studies in light of the preceding chapters, seeking to further interpret the accounts and move toward understanding. This understanding is here presented as a series of proposals. I use the term ‘proposal’ in keeping with Bohm (2002) and the notion that, whilst I seek to assert these understandings, they remain contingent, tentative and vulnerable. It is hoped that these proposals will be developed further through dialogue with those that encounter this work and seek to challenge, enhance or expand upon it. These proposals are used to address where the enquiry as a whole fits within the existing literature in the field, to clarify where the study coheres with existing arguments, where the study may offer new insights, contributes knowledge and might provide confidence (Stake 2010) for those exploring this territory in the future.

Original empirical evidence

The case study accounts in this enquiry present distinct empirical evidence of three exceptional educational programmes whilst privileging the voices and testimony of young people, voices that remain under-represented in this area of educational research. Critical questions were pursued throughout in order to bring important elements of understanding to light as a result of spending time immersed within these programmes. These questions included:

- What might be learnt through wild experiences?
- How might young people benefit from wild experiences?
- Do wild experiences promote social or cultural confidence or agency and if so, in what ways (for example personal development, transformation or leadership)?
- Do wild experiences impact on the ability of young people to engage in formal education, and if so, how?
- Could providing young people with wild experiences promote deeper relationships with the natural world?
- Is a wilder pedagogy possible, or even desirable?

It is important to restate that this research remains primarily concerned with education, learning and knowledge. Despite attempting to heed the challenge that all “social phenomenon is related to the environmental crisis” and that it is “imperative to show in what way what one is studying can help stop the sinking process” (Hage 2018), the focus here remains pedagogic, that is – what are the specific elements from the programmes that might be considered to contribute to an understanding of if, and how learning takes place in these settings, how the programmes intentions were enacted and how learning is supported within wild and wilderness experiences overall.

So *what* have the voices and experiences of the young people revealed, and how might this relate to the concerns of the human-centred educator, the whole person, and of health and wholeness, that have been presented throughout?

Tentative Proposals

This research has generated unique empirical evidence where it has been identified as currently lacking. This lack, of direct reporting of the voices of young people engaged in wild experiences, is claimed to have been a catalyst for the specificity of the case studies, and the enquiry overall. The recent formulation of philosophical proposals regarding “wild pedagogies” (Jickling 2016; 2018) and the perceived lack of testimony from those being presented is here considered to be a critical example.

Through a commitment to thinking and acting pedagogically (Van Manen 1990), and through connecting this thinking directly to the conceptual tools of ethnography (Atkinson 2017), freedom (Hope 2016; 2019), human-centred education (Gill & Thomson 2017), and the wild world itself - that is the possibility of the wild to self-organise (AbdelRahim 2013; 2014), to infer, or impress, and to participate (Bohm 2004), the notion of spontaneity (Fromm 1960; Berry 1994), and of the potential of the wild as teacher (Ford & Blenkinsop 2018) - this research has contributed a series of accounts and analysis of experience that suggest several areas of critical significance for the field.

These areas of significance are here claimed to include the following:

- **Wild Proposal 1:** Structured (pedagogic) wild experiences may contribute to the alleviation of mental health problems such as anxiety (amongst other significant benefits), through acting as an antidote to the domination and

coercion of institutionalised education, whilst having the power to be transforming for the individual (as opposed to being in the service of supporting or reforming the current educational system). These benefits appear linked to notions of freedom and autonomy.

- **Wild Proposal 2:** These experiences (and benefits) are connected to an emerging pedagogy *for* the wild, making learning possible with, from and in the wild. This pedagogic position (despite appearing counter-intuitive) includes structured sequences of encounter, strategies, ideas, and dispositions that aim to support and nurture the self-will and spontaneity of participants whilst simultaneously acting with, and on behalf of the wild world.
- **Wild Proposal 3:** Nature disconnection (separation, severing) can be transformed by intense, immersive experiences, especially those based on traditional, indigenous practices. These experiences can result in possible transformation of the individual. This appears to require particular relationships between “educator and educatee” (Freire 1971), alongside a pedagogic sequencing of skill acquisition, acclimatisation, periods of preparatory solitude, and extreme boundary-crossing experiences that in turn may provide experiences of altered consciousness resulting in enhanced empathic appreciation of both the human and the wild world.
- **Wild Proposal 4:** If included within the pedagogical process with intention then the wild world has the capacity to act as guide and teacher. In this sense the wild world itself possesses qualities that might promote a different way of conceiving of education, learning, and by association, of being human. Here the wild world may be encountered as an *exemplar*, a model acting as a corrective to the current dominant imposition of an exclusively human value system (one that currently appears to be sincerely damaging to both the ecology of the individual and to the environment).

These proposals will now be discussed in detail, supported by material from the cases and the testimony of the participants (where necessary) alongside indicating where these proposals provide clarity on the preceding literature and arguments reported across earlier chapters. The proposals are seen here to be interlinked and taken together

develop into a sequence of ideas that present possible guidance for further practice and research.

Wild Proposal 1: Structured (pedagogic) wild experiences can contribute to the alleviation of mental health problems, whilst leading to other benefits.

The survey of associated literature presented within the opening chapters of the enquiry suggested that school, as the locus and embodiment of institutionalised education, is contributing to young peoples' mental health deterioration (Hutchings 2016; Gill and Thomson 2012/2017; Barnardo's 2018), whilst simultaneously denying young people access to the wild world (Monbiot 2013; Carrington 2016). It was also suggested that school has some responsibility for the breakdown in relationship with the natural world (Griffiths 2013; Hage 2018). It is widely claimed that the 'natural world' is good for mental health (Williams 2017; Sheldrake 2018) but often the specific nature of this improvement is alluded to and not concretely examined as a process (see A Green Future 2018; Duncan 2018), especially where perceived mental health benefits may intersect with pedagogic elements.

The young people, who so eloquently shared and reported their experiences during the programmes, often spoke about the condition of their mental health and the outlook of their mind, describing feelings of "anxiety, depression, being unsocial, lack of confidence, feeling scared and pretending to be someone you're not, stress, and pressure" (composite taken from across all three Case Study accounts).

It appeared that these conditions resulted (in part) from exposure to the constraints of institutionalised education and the associated stress of conformity, isolation, enclosure, pressure and restriction, as Mia, a participant from the Working Without Walls programme straightforwardly reminds us here: "at school it was just all enclosed and like I felt trapped".

In contrast to these conditions and constraints the young people who were engaged in the pedagogically wild programmes reported a variety of significant affective benefits. These can be summarised from the cases as:

- Increased feelings of peace, acceptance and non-judgement.
- Experiences of trust.
- The alleviation of some mental health related issues.

- Relief from stress and anxiety (especially regarding exams and pressure to conform).
- An increase in natural freedom.
- Liberty to pursue own thoughts and questions.
- Ability to raise critical questions about the self and the world, outside of normative social parameters, without fear of being judged or from displaying non-conformity.
- Empathy and solidarity with each other, adults, ‘teachers’ and on occasion an extension of these feelings with the more-than-human world.
- Authenticity of self and relations – especially through community and play, alongside experiences of independence and solitude in wild settings.

Perhaps most appropriately immersion in the wild appeared to act as an antidote and corrective to the domination and domestication (Freire 1971; AbdelRahim 2013; Hage 2017) felt through institutionalised, formal education as reported in the opening chapters and throughout the participants reported experiences of school. This in turn may have led to the associated benefits reported in the cases above and discussed further below.

It appears that there is a significant pedagogic element to this (despite institutionalised education itself potentially contributing to mental health problems). The wild instruction and structure (oftentimes un-structure) witnessed in the programmes indicate that those reporting mental health deterioration may find this condition directly alleviated by the associated freedom incorporated within these alternative approaches and by the way the programmes are run.

How then did these wild experiences alleviate mental health problems? It appears that through expanding personal liberty, and extending empathy towards the more-than-human world that the participants experienced transformation of their conditions, capabilities, attitudes, and outlooks.

There’s not really the words for it, like there’s so much freedom, there’s nothing but freedom, here, you know, you’ve got freedom of speech in your literal terms but actually, you can be you here, there’s no way you have to act somewhere like this, everyone’s treated as equal, you’re free to do what you want, when you want, but you’re free to just be free, that probably doesn’t make any sense but you’re just, you are free you know, everything here is a part of you, but you just, there’s not really the word to put on it really. (Ellie)

The Green Future (2018) document claimed that “spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or a visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of wellbeing” (A Green Future 2018), despite drawing on very little empirical evidence (what was included and referred to was actually from a singular source and considerably out-of-date). Many similar research works and evaluative studies similarly do not provide reasonable definitions or grounds for what mental health or wellbeing might actually consist of. The recent work of Duncan (2018) suggested that “widening this medical view to include an eco-psychological perspective” is critical.

This research, through describing and illustrating the processes of organised wild experience, has provided examples of how those responsible for the programmes, alongside those engaged in them, have suggested renewed ways of thinking about health as intersecting with knowledge and knowing. These suggestions have crystallised here as perceiving of health as arising from, and being maintained in, wholeness (especially in regards to the health of the mind). Health in this respect has been presented as being connected with healing and wholeness. When we are separated, from our self-will, from the other that provides us with life, then we become less than whole which can result in separation, dislocation and a possible decline in health, especially the health of the mind, a health that is dependent on freedom as argued by Fromm (1980) and autonomy as latterly argued by Duncan (2018). Crucially this research has presented how problems associated with mental health (such as anxiety, stress, lack of confidence) may be alleviated by (structured) time spent in the wild.

The results for the individual are here considered transformative rather than a vehicle for reforming education, as outlined by Freire (1971). The results are considered transformative because they appear to liberate as opposed to acculturate. This liberation as proposed by Freire (1971; 1972; 1973) appears to grow out of the increased freedom experienced by the participants. It is this sense of independence that Fromm (1980) suggests is the hallmark of the “healthy man” (Fromm 1980). Through being granted autonomy and freedom, alongside independence of thought and action (as has been reported consistently across the cases), the young participants experienced an uplift of mental health. This has implications not just for work taking place in the wild and wilderness but throughout many educational contexts.

Looking across the cases it is been possible to discern how a conjunction of both the programmes and the wild itself may have contributed to experiences of this personal growth and freedom. The following extended quotation is especially relevant when checked against the reports of the participants experiencing extended periods of solitude

within wild settings. During the Working Without Walls programme Chris had offered a positive account of being immersed in the wild world, one that provided space and solace.

Being in massive woods, you can just sit down, relax, you just listen to all the birds, you can just think to yourself. I used to do it sometimes, go into woods, I used to do it before school, I used to go out to school at seven o'clock in the morning and just sit in the woods, and just think how's my day going to go, is it going to go bad, is it going to go alright, I just think that helped me and then my mum stopped it, because she was scared, she was worried about me going so early, but out here I can do it every week... (Chris)

Chris's phrase, "you can think to yourself" calls to mind John Dewey (1938/2015) and his insistence that learning, as it takes shape in the reflection on, and reconstruction of, experience, is prefaced on stopping and thinking.

The old phrase "Stop and think" is sound psychology. For thinking is stoppage of the immediate manifestation of impulse until that impulse has been brought into connection with other possible tendencies to action so that a more comprehensive and coherent plan of activity is formed. Some of the other tendencies to action lead to use of eye, ear, and hand to observe objective conditions; others result in recall of what has happened in the past. Thinking is thus a postponement of immediate action, while it effects internal control of impulse through a union of observation and memory, this union being the heart of reflection. What has been said explains the meaning of the well-worn phrase "self-control". The ideal aim of education is creation of power of self-control. (Dewey 2015, p. 64)

Dewey connects us here to the notion that having access to independent movement and thought is a crucial element of reconstructing experience. According to Dewey this in itself might contribute to healthy expressions of the self. It appeared that Chris was certainly demonstrating a healthier expression of the self-whilest engaged in the wild programme. Dewey's concerns are articulated in a chapter of *Experience and Education* (1938) entitled *The Nature of Freedom*. Here Dewey contrasts what he calls 'freedom of movement' and 'freedom of intelligence' that has links to several experiences attested to by the participants.

Despite claiming "that an increased measure of freedom of outer movement is a means, not an end. The educational problem is not solved when this aspect of freedom is obtained" (Dewey 1938, pg. 63), Dewey goes on to claim that, "freedom of movement is also important as a means of maintaining normal physical and mental health" (Ibid). Related to the restrictions imposed on them by the school system, it

appears that the wild, boundless freedom experienced by the young participants may have had unanticipated positive consequences for enabling health and wholeness.

Wild Proposal 2: These experiences (and benefits) are connected to an emerging pedagogy *for* the wild, making learning possible with, from and in the wild. This pedagogic position (despite appearing counter-intuitive) includes particular structured sequences of encounter, strategies, ideas, and dispositions that aim to support and nurture the self-will of participants whilst simultaneously acting with, and on behalf of, the wild world.

The survey of associated literature presented within the opening chapters of the enquiry suggested twin poles of argument surrounding the suitability of, and place for, a pedagogy of the wild. AbdelRahim provocatively stated that, “pedagogy can thus have no place in the wilderness” (2014) whilst Jickling has attempted to formulate a new philosophical approach to wilderness education called “wild pedagogies” (Jickling 2014; 2016).

This research puts forward through three sustained ethnographic accounts that there is *already* a pre-existing pedagogy of the wild (despite AbdelRahim’s protestations and Jickling’s latest philosophical proposals) despite being an elusive and currently little understood process. That these programmes work in a particular pedagogic way has been brought to light through the preceding cases studies. These processes and practices relate to the ethnographic *how* of this pedagogy. These processes and practices include: encouraging movement beyond boundaries (both physical and psychological); working in tandem with freedom and non-imposition; the possibility of teacher and pupil “dying to each other” (Freire 1971); the practices of ritual and gratitude (amongst others); and the inclusion of elemental forces and instruction.

Seen from this perspective this is not then a pedagogy *of* the wild, but rather a pedagogy *for* the wild, that is, a structured sequence of intentional encounters, strategies, ideas, and dispositions that aims at bringing about, realising and supporting the self-will of participants whilst simultaneously acting on behalf of the wild world. Pedagogy *for* the wild supposes that this work acts as an advocate for the participants’ freedom and self-will whilst seeking to incorporate and protect the self-will and self-regulating aspects and expressions of the wild.

The programmes illustrate that pedagogy *for* the wild is already taking place, and in some cases has been taking place for a long time (not just a contemporary expression e.g. the Sacred Fire Quest). What that pedagogy looks like in practice is mapped out here (above and below).

Looked at across the cases this pedagogy *for* the wild could be articulated as a series of guidelines including:

- Acknowledging, respecting, honouring and supporting the self-will of the one participating.
- Permitting the ability to wander and wonder (aimlessly if necessary).
- Openness to the educative possibilities of chance and random encounter.
- Acceptance of error as an essential building block of knowing and of freedom.
- Inclusion of the more-than-human as a catalyst and potential agent of this knowing.
- Active loosening of control and imposition (non-imposing of ideas, aims or outcomes).
- Encouraging the process of raising and pursuing questions that grow directly from the personal and are integral to the individual.
- Opposing domestication and conditioning.
- Recognising and encouraging co-operation, reciprocity and mutual aid.
- Respect for those participating as existing for their own purpose and ends.
- Participation with the inherent freedom of the wild world itself.

The discussion regarding freedom in the first proposal goes some way to suggest the positive implications of a wild setting on mental health, amongst the other positive reported benefits. It has been illustrated throughout all three programmes that spontaneity, autonomy, trust and liberty (being but a few key examples) significantly contributed to the transformations witnessed and reported. Moving beyond boundaries appears to have significantly contributed to this and was an integral structural feature of all programmes reported on.

Encouraging movement beyond boundaries (both physical and psychological)

Atkinson (2017) suggests, that for those embarking on ethnographic research, analytic ideas should be taken directly from the discipline of ethnography. His work suggests that the notion of boundaries is of particular relevance to the present study.

An analysis of boundaries – physical, symbolic, discursive – can be a productive strategy in understanding the cosmologies of local cultures, such as those of occupational groups. It is, of course, always important to remind oneself, that such boundaries and distinctions are never entirely fixed or impermeable. Boundaries can be crossed: depending on the circumstance, such border crossings can be acts of transgression and deviance, or of pioneering heroism. Fieldwork, therefore, is permeated by issues of boundary. (Atkinson 2017, pg. 40)

Looking at the study from a distance I can perceive where I myself crossed, and witnessed the crossing of, borders and boundaries to find myself amongst the “small but significant number” of ethnographic researchers who “have submitted themselves to initiation ceremonies in studies of local belief systems” (Ibid, p. 86). These boundary crossings appear to have been an integral feature of initiatory rites.

Such a process of commitment and immersion can allow the ethnographer to comprehend, by direct experience, the physical sensations that accompany rites of passage (such as separation and isolation, bodily preparations). By seeking out conversion themselves, the ethnographers are able to gain access to otherwise esoteric, private mysteries. They are able to document the physical and personal experiences that the rites occasion. (Ibid)

Given the opportunity to be freed, and released from the boundaries of ‘normal life’ (that is: conditioned, colonised, and monopolised in school) through entering into a wild space, participants appeared to be released from the onslaught of commands, demands, pressures and imposed relationships of institutionalised education, and instead began to extend their thinking and feeling beyond themselves.

Here the wild was akin to the terrain of meditation. The practice of meditation is often thought of as the cessation of internal dialogue about the past and the future that can result in an increased awareness of the present moment (Rahula 1959; Kabat-Zinn 2013). Except in the case study examples, rather than entering into the expansiveness of mediation through an entirely interior process, this was, is, a physical one, a process that impacted on the interior of the participant.

The result of this physical process for the participant appears to develop first in an increased tenderness and inquisitiveness towards themselves (*who am I, what am I doing, what do I want, what do I want to find out about*) in tandem with the possibility of entering into a process of recovery and healing. This could then begin to be expressed outwardly towards each other (*I'm with these people, who are they, where do it fit in*), the adults (*could these people be like me, could they be here to help me rather than 'tell' me, rather than just to be conduits for the culture that seeks to impose its will on mine*) and finally extending further to include the more-than-human (*there is more than just me, there are trees, birds, fire and these things have their own life, which is in some way reminiscent of mine, and I begin to see myself in, reflected, related, or at least the potential/reality of this is glimpsed*) which in some cases results in the enlargement of a caring, empathetic outlook (Eva tending the fire, Ethan relating to the newts as a family).

The freedom from physical boundaries and the freedom from culturally imposed messages or demands created the potential for renewed, different relationships. Adults were no longer imposing their will or the dominant stories of societal conditioning, or of 'acceptable behaviour', and in so doing they become other human beings who might have something to offer with sincerity and generosity, rather than as a capital, instrumental exchange that focused solely on attainment and results.

Working in tandem with freedom and non-imposition

Outside the usual boundaries and in unfamiliar terrain it was on occasion necessary to seek the guidance of these adults, their experience and assistance, rather than merely accept it as an imposition. This has the potential to transform relationships. This enhanced relating was then extended to the other people, whom the participant may find are more like them than they had the chance to encounter before, in the spaces and places of school where there is little opportunity to explore other people's lives outside of working together to meet an externally imposed objective (in classrooms for instance). This then extends to noticing other living things and systems at the edge of our experience that may have something to offer that are not simply a resource or yet another thing to be incorporated within instrumental ends. We may on the one hand burn a tree for warmth, whilst on the other embrace a tree and seek its solidarity, its companionship and reflected wisdom (as experienced by Shani).

Moving beyond physical boundaries encourages moving beyond mental boundaries (those patterns of consumption and the logic of thinking imposed by capitalist culture, its stories and demands) towards relational experiencing that offers glimpses of other ways of knowing and relating. This in turn has the capacity to nourish mental health (sense of self, wholeness), reminds us of our self-will (this is who I am and this is what I want to do) and propels us into a wider community beyond the concerns of the immediate imposition of contemporary culture.

The practice of meditation is again a useful analogy for these experiences. The mind has been likened to a thinking machine, producing ceaseless thoughts and images, with the practice of meditation seeking to alleviate the mind from this torrent of thought and create respite from the unceasing thought production that it is claimed takes us away from the present moment and our capacity to witness the now with clarity (Mangalo 1970).

Our current culture of the Global North could be likened to the above Buddhist illustration of the restless mind, with culture itself being an unceasing mediator and producer of images, images and demands that seek to impose themselves on us with the ultimate goal of shaping and conditioning us to better fit and serve the dominant direction of the culture itself (for example to consume, to ideologically accept how things are presented as natural and that they must be this way).

When within the home, at work, or at school, where many people now spend the majority of their time, we are surrounded (overwhelmed) by the messages from the ‘cultural’ environment. These messages are relentless and ever-present. We are most of our time, whilst submerged in the cultural stories and images of society, unable to recollect, witness or perceive the significance of other lives or how they might relate to and influence us. This may be true even as a mature, experienced and educated adult who has been trained in critical discourse and reflective reasoning.

Yet, when we enter a wild space, and “drop in”, after some time adjusting and acclimatising to this other way of perceiving, feeling, (to this alternative place where the logic of capital, where the images of consumption, where all signs, symbols from the prevailing culture are absent) thoughts may slowly seem to become our own, or rather they might begin to be influenced by the terrain and life around us. Provided with supportive conditions and pedagogic structure, this attention and appreciation has the potential to extend our relations and move our concerns beyond ourselves as atomised. Thoughts that are crowded by cultural stories and perhaps result in anxiety are alleviated as the toxicity of ideas and images that are imposed begin to lift and the

process of becoming de-colonised begins. This understanding supports Ridder's claim (2007) that naturalness "relates to the autonomy of the individual from abstract instrumentalism, which describes a particular form of influence ubiquitous in contemporary society. The value of naturalness reflects both dissatisfaction with these threats to personal autonomy, and respect for wild nature as the embodiment of a larger-than-human realm" (Ridder 2007, abstract).

The return to a wild space and the beginning of this opening up, mirrors cultures that exist with the wild as an essential condition of a value system (and recently asserted by Duncan 2018).

Wild Proposal 3: Nature disconnection (separation, severing) can be transformed by intense, immersive experiences based on traditional, indigenous practices resulting in possible transformation of the individual.

The survey of associated literature presented within the opening chapters of the enquiry suggested that indigenous practices have something deeply meaningful to contribute to alleviating issues regarding what has been labelled 'nature disconnection' (Berry 1994; 1999; Richardson 2016; 2018). However it is not easy to say exactly what that might look like as *pedagogical processes* despite indigenous practices (especially those based on rites of passage) being absorbed and adopted by contemporary programmes operating out of the USA (Blumenkrantz 2016; Plotkin 2008; School of Lost Borders 1992) and Australia. The presentation of the detailed account of the Sacred Fire Quest, based as it is on traditional First Nations, indigenous rites of passage processes, goes some way to clarifying what these practices may have to offer young people (and the field).

The structure of the Sacred Fire Quest was indebted to indigenous practices, practices that were described by the instructor (Gencarelle 2014), as having been kept alive in secret across generations. These structures and practices are then, not new ideas. Perhaps it is new ideas that are part of the overall problem regarding nature disconnection?

Richardson stated that, "there has been limited research attention to the problem of disconnection from nature in children" (2016; 2018). Wray-Lake, Flanagan and Osgood claimed that an "urgent need for society to address climate change coupled with declines in young people's concerns about the environment in general, and limited knowledge and investment in climate change in particular, call for educational and

programmatic interventions to promote environmental consciousness in youth” (Wray-Lake, Flanagan, and Osgood, 2010). Crucially Blenkinsop argued that

It appears that the trajectory to environmental action might not require the obvious childhood connection (Malone, 2016). It also appears that richly immersive childhoods aren’t sufficient as there are multitudes of people who have had them and yet are failing to act in any significant way. (Blenkinsop & Ford 2018, pg. 323)

Developing this line of enquiry further Blenkinsop and Ford issued the challenge. “What can/does a mature adult relationship with the myriad denizens of the more-than-human world look like? What are the tools that are needed to sustain relationship and how are they supported and developed in learners? (Blenkinsop & Ford, 2018). The argument that “simply placing children into natural or semi-natural locations either on their own or under the guidance of a caring adult, whilst a significant step, does not appear to be enough to change their behaviour significantly” exposed the possible structural difference between the programmes studied here with the current Forest School model as it is expressed within primary school contexts in the UK.

The accounts presented, in particular the Sacred Fire Quest, provide an indication of the type of sequencing, tools and practices that could be utilised in a bid to develop and sustain the above kinds of relationships alluded to by Blenkinsop and Ford, sequences, tools and practices that are here considered an original wisdom formulation but that are not widely practiced or understood from a pedagogic standpoint.

Structured rites of passage experiences and programmes are relatively new in the UK and are seen to be growing but are not as yet researched in any substantive way. Despite making way onto Government agendas for national citizenship service (NCS 2017) there is currently no rites of passage research being conducted in UK, with no qualitative research into the experiences of rites of passage being undertaken. The extended account of the Sacred Fire Quest appears to be the first ethnographic reporting of its kind in the UK to include the direct accounts of the young participants themselves.

This research has attempted to resist the tension inherent in education and environmental research where a desire to provoke relationships with nature feeds into how being in nature can support academic attainment (as see for example in Quibell, Charlton and Law 2017). Instead this enquiry has sought to present ethnographic case studies that shine a light on wild experiences for their own sake.

From the accounts this appears to require a pedagogic sequencing of skill acquisition, acclimatisation and extreme boundary-crossing experiences that may provide experiences of altered consciousness resulting in enhanced empathic appreciation of the wild world.

This aspect of the work may be important for adolescents. Sapolsky in his work *Behave* (2017) presents a compelling case regarding the relative extended period of development that childhood into adolescence prepares the ground for. This time of life in particular appears to create the conditions for the impression of culture to be made over biological development.

The ritualised nature of these interactions then appears to be critical. The entire structure of the Sacred Fire Quest ceremony (that the young participants described as beginning before the weekend even took place), the creation of sacred spaces in the form of altars, both the central community fire and the individual fire, the offering of tobacco to the fire whenever an intended action was about to take place (which in turn generated an enhanced attention and reverence), the practice of gratitude (itself an indigenous pattern of giving thanks), grounded and bound the participants as a community, to each other, the wild world and the present moment.

Surprisingly the Sacred Fire Quest was also didactic in style, at points, taking the form of a direct knowledge transmission. Yet this felt strangely autonomous with lots of listening, with mirroring and direct questioning, with the significant learning experience being a prolonged period of being completely alone without any taught input, then a return to be listened to and asked further questions in an attempt to clarify what was experienced and encountered. In this context the participants really listened and were especially attentive perhaps due to the daunting nature of what lay ahead. The participants became so receptive in this situation that everything appeared to take on significance and ideas sown earlier by the teacher began to take root.

Institutionalised teaching seen reflected in this context appears to be the organised imposition of ideas and concepts from one mind into the mind of another. Should we perhaps call any method of instruction, imposition rather teaching? During the fourth, unreported case study, the 'Wild Child' Boys Camp, a programme promoting itself as a rites of passage experience, I had witnessed a boy's mind having ideas imposed on and imprinted on by one of the instructors. This had not been teaching - it was the imposition of ideas by the strong over the vulnerable. It clarified for me why a clear pedagogic model is needed in these fragile (yet ripe) contexts. This had not been mentoring (as witnessed during the Sacred Fire Quest) but a clumsy transfer of ideas

and values despite the inappropriateness to the recipient. In fact it did not seem to hold the other in mind, rather it sought to justify its own belief system and overlay it on another. By comparison the Sacred Fire Quest illustrated the importance of structure and intention.

Structure, boundaries

The structure of the Fire Quest is also a riposte to the challenges of AbdelRahim (2013; 2014), that there can be no pedagogy of the wild, and to Jickling's suggested formulation of 'wild pedagogies' (Jickling 2018). AbdelRahim argues that

Wild relationships are based on the principles of diversity and life. Wilderness is the space where living and non-living beings exist for their own purpose, where the purpose for being remains with the being herself. Rooted in the principles of symbiosis, reciprocity and mutual aid, wilderness does not need an organised system designed to alter the behaviour of others. (AbdelRahim 2014, pg. 1)

Whilst I am in agreement with AbdelRahim that the wild itself does not require (or deserve) the superimposition of an organised system, it appears from the accounts that a degree of structure is required for safety and, most importantly, for participants to enter into these wild spaces and experiences fully. If the intention of the experiences was for the participants to be opened to the transformative quality of the wild, perhaps because they were not otherwise enabled, then we may consider this pedagogy *for* the wild a positive expression of the educative impulse on behalf of the participant *and* the wild. This is in opposition to what I thought I was looking for, or had anticipated that I would find, namely that of wild, free and unstructured programmes that contained no structure or organised system at all.

Here the structure of the indigenous practice of the sacred Fire Quest, appears to arise from the wild itself, the "place where life begins", and was an enabler. The pedagogic, structural tools used in Fire Quest can be summed up from the account as follows:

- Gratitude.
- Prayer.
- Ceremony.
- Cleansing.
- Ritual.

- Songs.
- Questions.
- Stories.
- Fasting.
- Sharing.

The practice of gratitude, songs, of time together and time alone was rooted in how AbdelRahim (2014) describes the wild above, that of “symbiosis, reciprocity and mutual aid”. The Sacred Fire Quest structure encourages a remembrance, a recollection, one that may heal and overcome the feeling of alienation, separation or severing from the wild world, a world that is of course the source of our liberty and life. In this way the wild world is a teacher, it prompts us to witness ourselves as freer than we thought and the practices, the pedagogy for this wild world, such as the Sacred Fire Quest, support this.

In contrast to the other two programmes, the Sacred Fire Quest possessed, what I am naming here as, a ‘fast-track structure’. Over three days and two night’s participants were launched into very potent, potentially dangerous, boundary crossing sequence of experiences, that included; 24 hour fasting, sleep deprivation, exposure to extremes of heat and solitude. This approach is perhaps urgently needed if our wider culture is to repair the severing (Morton 2017) or disconnection (Richardson 2018) that is currently being recorded in young people. Perhaps this approach also provides an enhanced direct experience superseding that of the slow accumulation of experiences typified by those engaged in Forest School. The approach of the Sacred Fire Quest as suggested above may be both - urgently needed by adolescents, whilst also appearing to be a compelling, engaging appropriate format that harnesses the needs of adolescence, of risk-taking, adventure, and danger.

Forest school in comparison is mainly accessible only to early years and on occasion co-opted, potentially acting as a social corrective rather than seeking outright to be a relationship enhancer (see also NCS, and Step Up to Serve). In this regard Forest School as a model can be considered limited as it is inaccessible to young people of tertiary age who require and deserve access to the wild world for its sake, and their own.

For the main part, the programmes that I entered into as a researcher did not seek to impose or socially engineer (despite having the intention develop relationships at their core). It is within reason that perhaps all educational encounters seek to socially engineer but these appeared to be more open to dialogue, negotiation, flexibility, and

were willing to change course, had a wider conception of ‘social engineering’, placing direct emphasis on the more-than-human.

Continuum of wild experiences

The continuum of these structures are revealing in themselves. Looking across the cases chronologically it can be inferred that the looseness of the structure increased from little direct instruction (John Muir Trust), toward an uncertain mixture of adult led activities and space to self-direct (Wilderness Foundation UK), through to the highly organised yet primarily non-directed extreme wild encounter of the overnight fast and fire vigil (Helpers Mentoring Society).

The horizontal adult structure resulted in an unusual degree of flexibility across all programmes with an intriguing exception perhaps in the format of the Sacred Fire Quest. This programme contained very few comparable features against the prior two cases. The Sacred Fire Quest included a sequence of fast track nature connection practices. Whilst certain features could be claimed to be similar, for example the practice of gratitude (Wilderness Foundation UK), and nature appreciation (all sites), these features had a critical role to perform in the overall experience itself, one that was geared toward creating an anchor for the quest itself and potentially beyond, after the conclusion of the quest.

These practices involved moving beyond boundaries both physically and psychologically into an altered consciousness where the participant was intended to slip between worlds. Here despite the strict ritualised structure of the experience there was ample space to be left alone, and ample space to be in physically. This in turn exposed the limits of personal comfort zones, which was claimed by all programmes to be the site, the borderland where true learning takes place, at the edge of experience. It is instructive however to consider how the stripping away of boundaries and comforts, appeared to bring all the groups closer together.

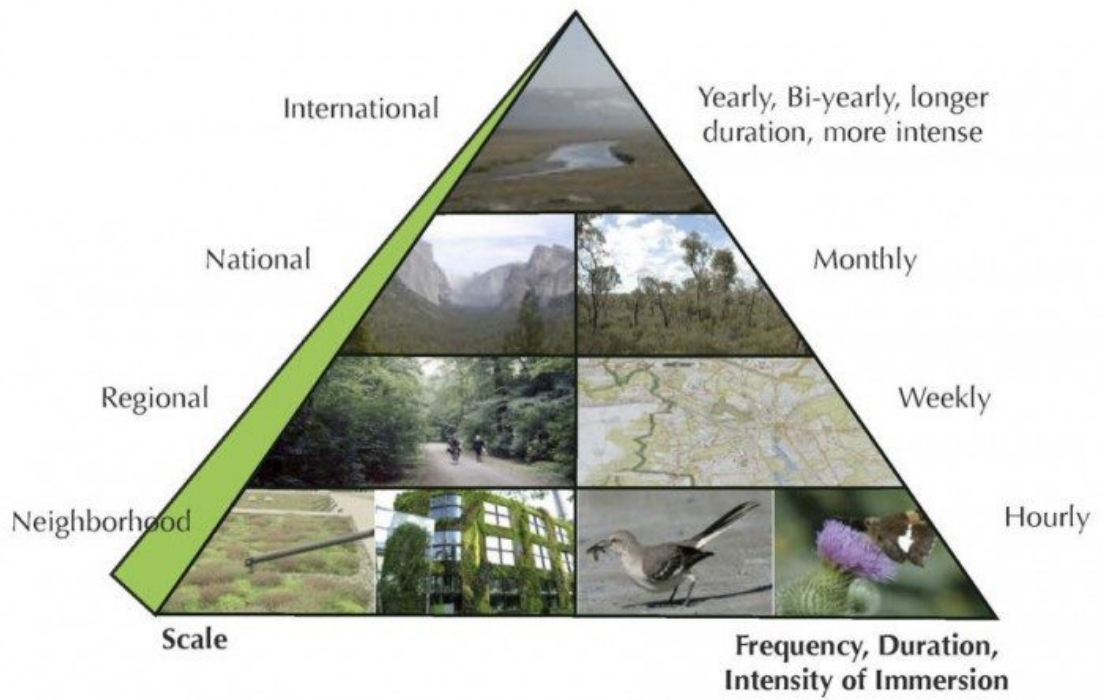
The programmes thought of this way can be considered to oscillate between quite wild to really wild. It is this really wild (e.g. fasting, sleep deprivation, time alone with fire) that is considered to be the significant difference between these practices and Forest School. This difference is enhanced when the age of the participants is also put into context. It would not be possible for Forest School practitioners, working as they do with early year’s children to expose their participants to these levels of danger.

Could this continuum be considered a template for those wishing to embrace these practices?

In her work *'The Nature Fix: why nature makes us happier, healthier, and more creative'* (2018), the journalist Florence Williams distils a range of contemporary research from the scientific community regarding the impact and effect of nature on a variety of groups and individuals. These range from the positive impact of indoor plants on patients recovering from surgery, through the therapeutic experiences of war veterans embarking on white-water river rafting, to the impacts on re-wilding Asian city structures.

In her epilogue Williams discusses the conception of a 'nature pyramid' (Beatley 2012 – illustration below), a model that echoes that of the widely known 'nutrition pyramid' with suggested benefits for physical and mental health.

THE NATURE PYRAMID



Concept by: Tanya Denckla-Cobb

Figure 1. A hypothetical depiction of The Nature Pyramid. (Beatley 2012)

What is not discussed throughout the work, or addressed by the nature pyramid, is how these doses might be dependent on pedagogical processes. Whilst it is perhaps increasingly pertinent to claim that “monthly excursions to forests or other restful, escapist natural areas...” should take place “one weekend per month – for immune systems” or that “essential doses of wilderness” need to be experienced “yearly or bi-yearly” (Williams 2017), there is no admission that these experiences may require a supportive, pedagogical underpinning in order to be met with and fully embraced. It is one thing to recommend to someone that they spend three days alone in a forest, quite another to provide that person with the necessary skills, experience and outlook to meet with that challenge and perhaps be moved by it to enter into a renewed relationship with the wild world.

Here the sequencing of the ethnographic accounts presented in my enquiry are suggestive of a pedagogic model that moves from the skill acquisition and environment acclimatisation of the Working Without Walls programme (where participants learnt to fell trees, chop wood, make fire, and start to spend time alone) through the led experiences of the Wilderness Foundation UK (where participants were accompanied in a potentially hostile wilderness environment, to forge a close knit community, and supported to have extended time in solitude), through to the boundary crossing experiences of the Sacred Fire Quest (where participants fasted, went without sleep, and spent a protracted time alone within deep forest).

There is of course tension within this suggestion. Notions of non-imposition, freedom and autonomy appear to be straightforwardly at odds with the notion of pedagogic structure and sequencing. However as alluded to above this combination, of structure on the one hand and freedom on the other, is not here considered to be an irreconcilable binary conflict, rather it is perceived as a relationship, a surprising interplay that focuses on developing self-will, self-knowledge, health and wholeness.

The following illustrates this as a ripple movement from one boundary of experience to another, and indicates how interlinked these experiences may ultimately be.

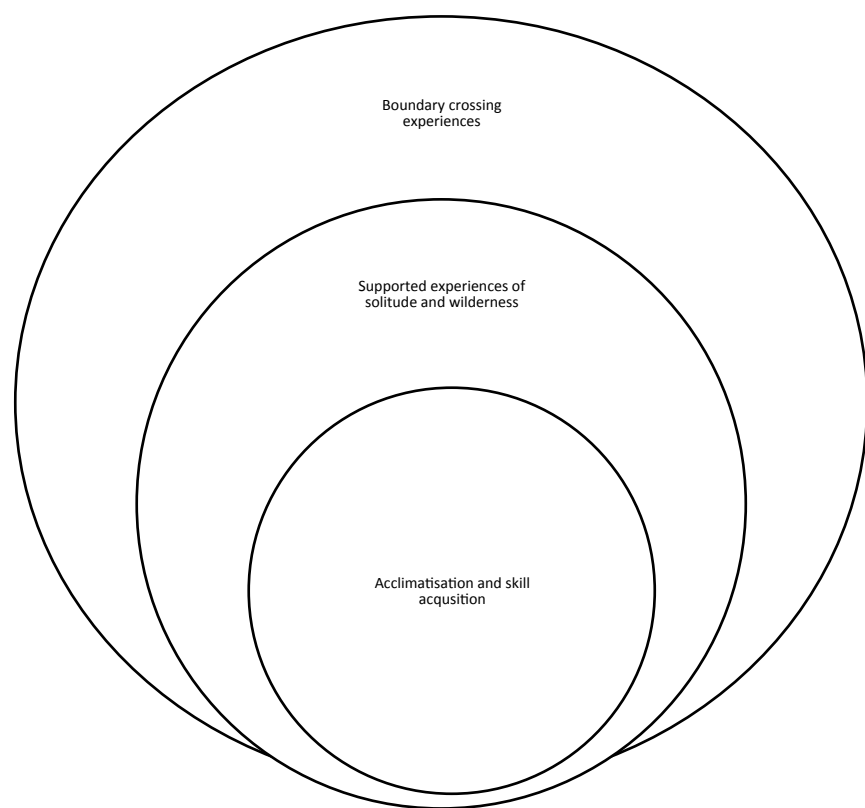


Figure 2: Pedagogy *for* the wild, illustration of possible sequencing. (Ford 2019)

It is important to state that each of the programmes accounted for in this research appear to have embarked on a central idea, that could be considered to be in line with new paradigm thinking, that of re-wilding (Monbiot 2012/2013; Corby 2015; Baker 2017; Barnes 2018 et al), both of the personal and environmental. The programmes had similar overlapping intentions; rather than harness the wild instrumentally (e.g. in order to improve grades or outcomes for students, or to simply improve the health of the human population), the experiences offered were intrinsically linked to the wild, to self-will, and to the notion that to experience the wild in an unbounded, non-imposed way, may lead to a sense of health and wholeness and that this in turn may be reciprocated by those experiencing these potential benefits, with health and wholeness being extended to the wild world in return.

That the participants acknowledged the benefits and were grateful for them is worth exploring a little further as this very notion of gratitude appears to have been a cornerstone of pedagogic strategy.

Practices of gratitude and of ritual

The extent to which being grateful would be a feature of the programmes and experiences was unforeseen. The degree to which this notion, of being, or becoming grateful, was a structured element is worth further exploration.

During the Wilderness Foundation UK programme participants were invited to offer personal reflections on their daily experience. This sharing took shape in the activity that the programme leader called, “Roses and Thorns”. This was a daily activity that reached its fullest expression during the final group sharing, the reflective activity described as the “Rosy Glow”. Here gratitude was expressed outwardly towards fellow participants, with each young person taking a turn to receive positive comments from every member of the group. This truly was a transformative experience for those participating. A reminder of the activity from the case study is worth revisiting here:

Hesitant at first the group soon embraces the moment and each participant takes turns to listen to the rest of the group say positive, and at times beautiful things about each other. These comments are directly addressed to the listener with each taking it in turns. It is a moving activity, close in feel to a ceremony. I can't help thinking what would happen to intelligence, empathy, and self-confidence if we spent more of our time like this, together, celebrating each other, talking, sharing, communicating, in dialogue, and being given the chance to listen and really talk with one another. At the end of the process Jordan says, “I feel more

confident now after that. I *never* say anything nice about anyone, so this is a first”. (Wilderness Foundation UK account)

It was not just that Jordan was encouraged to say something “nice” about the other participants. He had also listened to the appreciation offered up to each participant in turn, whilst also receiving a wealth of positive comments in the process. This process was a gift, whilst containing gifts.

The possibility of these practices of gratitude to transform and bind individuals into communities is compelling based on the accounts presented in the case studies. This was perhaps most potently expressed in the traditional rites based experience of the Sacred Fire Quest.

This explicit gratitude practice appears to be historically linked to the cultures of the First Nation people of what is now North America. For those responsible for the Sacred Fire Quest words of gratitude were, “the words before all else”. This instruction forms part of the ‘thanks-giving address’, a ceremonial liturgy that expresses the notion of wholeness in an exceptionally vivid way (see Appendix 5).

Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) suggests that despite its simplicity, or perhaps because of it, the invocation of the Thanksgiving Address is a revolutionary, radical idea (Kimmerer 2013).

You can’t listen to the Thanksgiving Address without feeling wealthy, and, while expressing gratitude seems innocent enough, it is a revolutionary idea. In a consumer society, contentment is a radical proposition. Recognizing abundance rather than scarcity undermines an economy that thrives by creating unmet desires...The Thanksgiving Address reminds you that you already have everything you need... That’s good medicine for land and people alike. (Kimmerer 2013 pg. 105)

That gratefulness could form part of the pedagogic process is worth consideration.

Sal talks about how we are all connected, “by threads of connection, like those cobwebs”, since the last gathering. He offers his own ‘gratitude’ for “the journeys we have all been on, and all that supports us being here”. He asks us to move our thoughts towards “the four directions, the ancestors, the past, the young ones and the children of the future, the six directions, the past, and the future”. Sal closes this opening by stating that, “we will bring our hearts and minds together in gratitude and we will say that our hearts and minds are one”. (Sacred Fire Quest account)

Bound together, equal, devoted to each other and wild world, recognising all that supports our growth, rather than being limited by notions of knowledge this practice appears to promote a healthy outlook (Comte-Sponville 2002).

The possibility of teacher and pupil “dying” to each other

The Sacred Fire Quest was informed by a commitment to the concept of what the programme called ‘the art of mentoring’ (Young, Haas & McGown 2010). Here the intention was, rather than providing answers, the mentor should act as a mirror, reflecting the shared experiences and feelings of the Questers with questions. This strategy was intended to lead the other toward self-discovery and self-knowledge, providing the space and the ground for answers and understanding to emerge from within in relation with the wild world itself. This role of mentor is dependent, contingent on the one mentoring being empathetic. This is in stark contrast to how most institutionalised educational transactions take place. It also included space for the participant to become the teacher, offering guidance, insight and instruction to the adults, and the programme leaders.

This process was also apparent in the two other programmes. When the participants of the Wilderness Foundation UK Imbewu programme talked about trust, and about the process of negotiating with the adult trail leaders, they were recognising this quality, for adults ‘teachers’ to not only act as instructors but also as peers, equally able to change direction and destination when necessary, to flex. When the participants of the Working Without Walls programme related how they had been granted permission to walk away from the group, to wander aimlessly, to find their own way, the participants testified to the power of spontaneity and the relief of non-imposition.

Paulo Freire speaks eloquently about these processes and how they disrupt the domesticating process of traditional, institutionalised education.

While in the domesticating practice the educator is always the educator of the educatee, in the liberating practice the educator must “die” as exclusive educator of the educatee in order to be “born” again as the educatee of the educatee. At the same time, he must propose to the educatee that he “die” as exclusive educatee of the educator in order to be “born” again as educator of the educator. This is a continual passage back and forth, a humble creative movement, which both have to make. (Freire 1971, pg. 8)

To raise and pursue their own questions it was essential that these questions were seen to be as valid, more valid perhaps, than that of the adult guides, and that the adults would listen intently to what was reported by those having been out on quest, as though they themselves had something profound to gain from hearing about what was experienced, and received, from ‘out there’.

When the curriculum, whose structure is based on the thematic investigated, becomes for the educatees’ a series of problems to be “unveiled” as such, education for liberation takes the form of the permanent unity existing between the investigation of the thematic and its presentation as a problem. If, in the moment of our investigation – which is already cultural action – we come on the thematic and the levels of perception of reality, in the moment when the problematisation of the thematic is presented as a knowable object, the perception of reality undergoes a change, and a new thematic emerges, through a new vision of old themes or through a perception of themes hitherto not perceived. (Freire 1971, pg. 9)

With the possibility of this renewed relationship the potential for that which lies beyond the immediate focus and concern of the “educator and the educatee” can emerge and be engaged in. This potential connects us with the notion of the wild world possessing the capacity to guide and act as another instructor, as an exemplar.

Wild Proposal 4: If included within the pedagogical process with intention then the wild world has the capacity to act as guide, teacher and exemplar.

The survey of associated literature presented within the opening chapters of the enquiry suggested that the wild world itself possesses qualities that might promote a different way of conceiving of education, learning, and by association of being human (Berry 1999; Duncan 2018; Ford & Blenkinsop 2018). Within this context (and supported by educators who have “died” to the educatee) the wild world may be encountered as an exemplar, acting as a corrective to the current dominant imposition of an exclusively human value system (one that appears to be sincerely damaging to both the ecology of the individual and to the environment). This appreciation of the wild, may in turn lead to pedagogic processes becoming guided by the wild, as well as the human.

The inclusion of elemental forces and elemental instruction

Whilst these experiences clearly cannot be totally separated from the structure of the programmes it is instructive to look across what has been shared and attempt to discern where the wild (that is the spontaneous, boundless, and self-willed nature of the wild) has been suggested or acknowledged (however tangentially) to influence personal growth (a requisite for learning as stipulated by John Dewey 1938) and significant self-revelation.

Whilst it is clear that the programmes themselves were designed in part to work in conjunction with the wild world, to harness the wild as a teaching aide, perhaps just being granted access to the spontaneous, untamed, unpredictable, self-willed aspect of the living world enabled the growth of liberty, self-reflection and self-direction?

Martin Buber has useful things to contribute to thinking about how the young participants (and their instructors) encountered the ‘other’ as well as supporting the idea that the environment itself, the world of plants and elements, is an indistinguishable part of the true pedagogic process.

The world, I said, has its influence as nature and as society on the child. He is educated by the elements, by air and light and the life of plants and animals, and he is educated by relationships. The true educator represents both; but he must be to the child as one of the elements. (Buber 1947, pg. 117)

This provides the opportunity to advance an idea of the ‘elemental educator’, as one who may synthesise place, values, and knowledge, calling forth that which is ‘educative’ for the ones in their charge.

This notion of the wild possessing the potential to act as teacher is one that has been adopted here in tandem with the emergence of literature from the philosophical perspective of ‘wild pedagogies’ and extended in my own contribution to this evolving concept (See Appendix 6 - Learning to speak Franklin: Nature as agent and co-teacher).

The writing of the Hebrew scholar Martin Buber, although influential in the early 20th Century, is seldom referenced by contemporary teachers or within current literature exploring education, despite the continued relevance of his sensitivity toward and insight into the plight of the child (1973). Buber is amongst the pioneering educators whom person-centred and human-centred education has taken as a catalyst for clarification of its overarching aims and values.

Buber's most celebrated and referenced work is his slim philosophical volume "I and Thou". First published in 1937 it developed from a philosophical and religious mode of thought. This work is composed in an unusual style, something akin to a poem or the recitation of a prayer. This presentation of the central idea, that we are only whole when we are in true relation with another, when we see that 'other' not as an object, not as an 'it' to satisfy our own needs, but as another in kinship, has profound consequences for pedagogy.

Relation is mutual. My *Thou* affects me, as I affect it. We are moulded by our pupils and built up by our works... How we are educated by children and by animals! We live our lives inscrutably included within the streaming mutual life of the universe. (Buber 1970, pg. 20)

Buber's promotion of radical relations with the 'other' has a growing currency in contemporary arguments surrounding our relationships with each other, others, and beyond the human into the more-than-human world.

Martin Freeman (2014), drawing on the philosophical work of Emmanuel Levinas (1987), Simone Weill (1986) and Martin Buber (1970) challenges our disconnection from the Other. He suggests that we look "instead to the various "objects" outside ourselves – other people, nature, art, God – that draw us beyond our own borders and thereby open up the possibility there of a larger, unbounded Self, one that knows, and feels, its kinship with the world" (Freeman 2014, pg. 2). For Freeman, "self is secondary; the Other comes first and is thus the primary source of meaning, value, and existential nourishment. This is the first and most basic meaning of the priority of the Other" (Ibid, pg. 5).

The concept of an elemental educator as a bridge between the human and the more-than-human is worth identifying here as it has ramifications for the practice of this work and it prompts questions regarding structure and the organisation of the activity and intentions of the programmes, about how the programmes assist in looking outside ourselves, beyond our own borders into a kinship with the world.

With some certainty the programmes sought to harness the adolescent impulse toward adventure and risk in their structure. In this regard there was little overt imposition amidst seemingly flexible goals that shifted as the experience developed. However there were goals and intentions and these were achieved through structured experiences, however elusive in regards to how they were presented to the participants awareness.

The participant, the elemental educator and the wild

A key component of this structure was how the wild was promoted as having agency, as providing an opportunity to learn with, from and in. In this sense the wild world was included in an interconnecting triad, a three-way relationship, that of the young person, the instructor and the wild world itself. This opened up the possibility of an alternative way of embracing learning, about what might conduct that learning, and where that learning might arise. This triad is demonstrated here with a simple diagram in the hope of illustrating the circular nature of this potential interaction

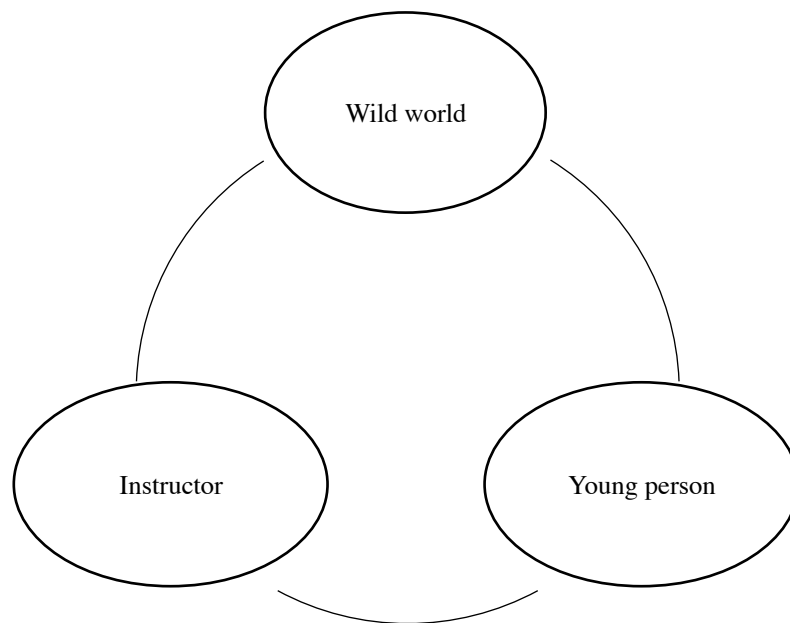


Figure 3: A tentative illustration of the elemental educator interaction triad. (Ford 2019)

The role of the instructor appears to be critical here. This ability to include nature relies on flexibility, spontaneity, and a valuing of the wild world that cannot be overlooked or underestimated. That the young people and the wild world affect the instructor is an exchange also worth considering, as is the potential of the wild world, to respond and be affected by those entering into this kind of deepening relationship. Key elements of this proposed triad include:

- Space, attention.
- Autonomy, freedom, liberty.
- Spontaneity, openness to random factors, flexibility.
- Profound respect for wild processes, and for young people as integral individuals.
- Ethical conduct – leave no trace, conservation, all our relations (this could be connected with care as a framework for these encounters = love, empathy, sympathy, kindness, kin, relationship).
- Gratitude.
- Questions arising from the participant in relation to the space the wild offered.

When thinking about and tentatively comparing one site against another the common factor is the wild places themselves. It is possible that the wild places ‘gentle’ the participants, from the strict style of the wilderness guide (John) to the boy classified as ADHD in school (Lucas). In this sense the wild softened, it levelled out.

It has been hard to restrain and step aside from the overwhelming background hum of the emerging ecological crisis (as pointed out by Hage 2017) and focus primarily on the problems associated with education. However the content of the educational experiences could be claimed to have been ‘ecological’ in that they have attempted to enable the participants to learn about themselves in relation to the more-than-human world, to move beyond individual alienation into new ways, new modes of understanding the web, or tapestry of all life, and that perhaps those participating will be moved to undertake action in defence, in solidarity, in relation with all life, including animals, trees, rivers, stones and stars.

David Bohm (2004) describes this process as participation and this has ramifications for those partaking:

The earliest meaning was, “to partake of,” as you partake of food... Symbolically, or even actually... it meant partaking of the source. The second meaning is “to partake in,” to make your contribution... it means that you are accepted, you are being taken into the whole. You can’t take part in something unless that thing in some sense accepts your participation. Taken together, these ways of thinking do not create a separation of object and subject. (Bohm 2004, p. 99)

If we can cultivate the ability to be open and aware, to really listen, *to participate* might we find the wild world directing us? Here the definition of learning is vital. If we agree that a critical definition of education is growth, as Dewey insists, if it is affective, in that it alters or shifts attitudes that may become new actions or approaches to the living world then these concerns cannot in the end be separated as they are enmeshed in the process or structure of the teaching and the designed experiences.

The forest itself fosters freedom

We have seen that for the young people granted access to it, the wild was seen as emancipatory. The wild appears to have created the space for those engaged to experience an unshackling, a loosening of the bondage of the cultural conditioning and imposition felt in school. This freedom may have had repercussions for the mental health of the participants and for their personal growth.

Hope and Montgomery (2016) provided a clear outline of how freedom in education “involves a complex interplay between ‘freedom from’, ‘freedom to’, and ‘real freedom’” (Ibid, pg. 310). Leaning on the insights of Berlin (1969) and Van Parijs (1995) they made the case that freedom

might be translated as (a) keeping restrictive bureaucratic systems and rules to a minimum (negative freedom); (b) actively enabling students to take responsibility for their own learning and own lives (positive freedom); and (c) supporting students to develop capacities (agency) to take advantage of freedom (real freedom). (Hope & Montgomery 2016, pg. 310)

These three notions of freedom have been explored and reported throughout the present enquiry and through both the physical and critical perspective of the wild world as it has intersected with the cases.

Looking across the Cases it has been possible to discern how both the programmes *and* the wild itself may have contributed to experiences of personal growth and freedom.

These accounts are complex and situated in both specific sites, in wild places amongst wild beings, and in specific communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Atkinson 2017) that are here considered to be pedagogic, communities that maintained a strong and oriented position towards the child whilst moving that orientation outward, beyond the child and towards the wild world. This is where the conjunction of the wild with pedagogy makes explicit sense as opposed to referring to these settings and practices as environmental education. None of these sites described their activity or outlook as being environmental. This assists in making the distinction between the need for a wild pedagogy and the existing framework of environmental education.

There are not instrumental ends in the sites that were visited, they do not seek to utilise the wild world in order to enhance the acquisition of maths skills, they are open and unforced, unhurried, it is not certain that all participants will have the same outcome, nor is it intended that it be so.

This is reflected in the publishing of recent research that looks at the wild and participants, yet never really talks about the reciprocity. More often than not research tends to focus on what the wild world does for us (see Nature Fix 2017) and (Quibell, Charlton & Law 2017, for explicit examples). These may on occasion contain an allusion to the idea that what is good for us may in turn benefit the wild world through some unknown future action for example, but this is never explicitly stated or appear to be an overriding concern. It is here anticipated that what the wild may receive in return from our pedagogy, should become a key feature of future research and practice.

Nature based research also often overlooks the relationship between subject and researcher, e.g. subject and teacher. Rather it tends to focus on the 'science' (for example the saliva swab) rather than the entanglement, the power of the researchers' ideas. It is an oversight not to consider the actual processes of being with other human beings and sharing, listening to their ideas and temperaments, to name only the obvious elements.

It is the contention of this enquiry that we do not just need to include nature in our lives for a set amount of time every month. We need nature to help us re-think our lives, how we live our lives, to put the brakes on our current behaviour, to step out of the human hall of mirrors and think again about what makes us human as Ellie, a participant in the Working Without Walls programme so eloquently helps us to recognise.

Going wild to become more fully human

Hans Peter Duerr, anthropologist and pacifist, dares us to “turn wild so as not to surrender to our own wildness, but rather to acquire in that way a consciousness of ourselves as tamed, as cultural beings” (Duerr in Oelschlaeger 1991). It is an unconventional challenge but one that supports the reported experience of several of the participants where experience of the wild supported new insights into control, coercion and conditioning.

Like many teenagers, Ellie, the girl ‘saved’ by her time in the wood, has had to withstand more than her fair share of cultural instruction. She claimed that the wild had in fact made her more human.

You’re just you here, your bare human self, we’re stripped right back from everything that we’ve set on ourselves, and we can become humans again in a place like this, well and truly just human, and I love it. (Ellie)

Ellie claims that whilst in the wood she experienced a stripping away of the taming forces of society through stepping aside from the imposed attendance and conditions of school, through the intangible structure of the wild programme, and the expansiveness of the wild itself.

What can’t you do in a place like this, you know you can go and just sit down and relax, you can run around, you can scream, there’s nothing saying you can’t be a part of it, you can’t be who you want to be, you know, you can be a part of anything that’s going on here, you know, you are part of all this life, and all this life here is doing its own thing, no one’s telling the trees to grow how they are, no one’s setting any rules out here, so you can come out here and be just as wild as anything else here really... (Ellie)

This theme was supported by conversations across the spectrum of the courses that addressed the concept of boundaries, both the physical and the personal and how experiencing a relaxation of the boundaries normally imposed resulted in new ways of conceiving of the self.

The poet and environmentalist Gary Snyder makes a statement about knowledge that can serve as a reminder that this quest for self-knowledge, for really valuable learning, may not have a map but it can lead to personal treasure of which many may benefit.

There are two kinds of knowing. One - that grounds and places you in your actual condition. You know north from south, pine from fir, how to shake hands, how to sharpen a knife. This sort of knowledge itself can enhance public life and save endangered species. The other kind of knowledge - comes from straying outside. One departs home to embark on a quest into an archetypal wilderness. This sort of encounter with the other – both the inner and the outer – requires giving up comfort and safety. It teaches humility. On the spiritual plane it requires embracing the other as oneself. (Snyder 2010, pg. 192)

The young participants appear to have been taught by their close contact with each other and this intangible other, with newts, with trees, with night, and with embers. On their quests, whether wandering in the wood, walking across wildernesses or tending sacred fires the young people all strayed outside giving up what they had thought was comfort and safety only to find there an extended peace, security and knowledge that had the capacity to reveal a larger picture.

As has been reported in the cases this appears to take the form of beginning again to think our own thoughts, to begin to think differently about our bodies, our neighbours, our surroundings, and about lives beyond our own, lives overhead and underfoot. It appears that thought then might start to turn towards how life could (should) be different and after an extended period of time in a wild place, it was often seen that participants might begin to make promises that on return to their normal lives they will remain changed, and that they would seek to incorporate this change into new or refreshed behaviour in the civil world that they live inside.

The wild as exemplar

What was witnessed and shared during the programmes suggests that it is the wild world itself that provided a significant structure and model, an exemplar.

Exemplar (n). Late 14c., "original model of the universe in the mind of God," later (mid-15c.) "model of virtue," from Old French *exemplaire* (14c.) and directly from Late Latin *exemplarium*, from Latin *exemplum* "a copy, pattern, model". Related: *Exemplarily*. (Online Etymology Dictionary 2018)

It was this very model offered by the wild, that appeared to have been adopted by those running the programmes and encountered by those participating, that has been shaped by their time spent within the wild world, a world inclusive of silence, song, solitude, activity, and non-judgement.

The apparent global re-emergence of nationalism and fascism, with its attendant outlook of detesting difference and anything ‘other’ than oneself, or one’s own affiliated group once again requires facing. For Ghassan Hage there is a connection between the violence of racism and violence committed against nature. Hage’s recent work *‘Is racism an environmental threat’* (2017) proposes, “That practices of racial and ecological domination have the same roots” (Hage 2017, pg. ix). Hage puts forward that these practices “emanate from what is today the dominant mode of inhabiting and making ourselves viable in the world” which he calls “generalised domestication” (Ibid). Hage argues that

Our aim, therefore, should not be “anti-domestication” or anti-dualism”; rather to should be to oppose their dominance and monopoly. We thus need to aim for a recovery of the multiplicities of modes of existence that capitalist modernity has excluded and marginalised. Anthropological research has a particularly important role to play here. (Hage 2017, pg. 117)

With this in mind it is possible to consider the wild world as a testament to difference and diversity, where all beings are connected and interdependent, rather than separate and isolated (Sheldrake 2017; Jung 2016; AbdelRahim 2014; Bohm 2002). Remaining in isolation and separation, even when operating as an idea rather than a lived reality, appears to be dangerously toxic, for individuals, communities and now nations, countries and continents, indeed for the whole living world, whether human or more-than-human. These notions are summed up here in the work in of David Bohm:

What I am proposing here is that man’s general way of thinking of the totality, i.e. his general world view, is crucial for the overall order of the human mind itself. If he thinks of the totality as constituted of independent fragments, then that how his mind will tend to operate, but if he can include everything coherently and harmoniously in an overall whole that is undivided, unbroken, and without a border (for every border is a division or a break) then his mind will tend to move in a similar way, and from this will flow an orderly action within the whole. (Bohm 2002, pg. 71)

This research has illustrated how the wild world can act as a disrupter of potentially insidious culturally imposed notions, and act as a unifier and catalyst. It is proposed that this disruption is achieved through exposure to processes and relationships that are inherently healthy, that is to say, *whole*.

Chapter 10

Beyond the Factory and the Forest: Concluding the enquiry

This research set out to find out what happens when young people have wild experiences in wild places within and alongside their formal education.

Summarising the research findings

The ethnographic accounts reported in this thesis presented distinct empirical evidence from three educational programmes whilst privileging the voices and testimony of young people, voices that remain under-represented in this area of educational research. These voices have had important things to say, reflecting perspectives about our current institutionalized education systems and our relationship with the wild world that may have significance outside of their bounded context. One of the participants stated, “I prefer being in the forest than in school and I believe the more important lessons can be found there”. This enquiry has worked towards understanding what this could mean.

In light of this exploration of meaning the enquiry has proposed that nature disconnection (Richardson 2018), separation (Fromm 1995), and severing (Morton 2017) can be transformed through pedagogic programmes seeking to re-wild (Monbiot 2013/2016). That these programmes were led by patient, non-imposing adults who are insistent on providing participants with freedom and on occasion intense, immersive experiences that take their structure from traditional, indigenous practices (Berry 1999; Duncan 2018) is seen to be critical. When sequenced with purpose these experiences can result in tangible transformation of the individual and can give rise to a “reverence for life” (Schweitzer 1965).

The discussion of the narrative ethnographic accounts reported throughout this research implies that a structured pedagogy *for* the wild, one that includes the wild as facilitator and exemplar, has the potential to contribute to the alleviation of mental health problems whilst transforming relationships with both the human and more-than human world (amongst other significant benefits). Through acting as an antidote to the domination and coercion of institutionalised education, these programmes have the power to be transforming for the individual (as opposed to being in the service of supporting or reforming the current educational system).

Throughout all the cases studied the activation of personal liberty, spontaneity and freedom without imposition appears to have been a critical method for creating these experiences and transformative consequences.

The discussion of the ethnographic case studies made four proposals:

- Wild Proposal 1: Structured (pedagogic) wild experiences can contribute to the alleviation of mental health problems (amongst other significant benefits).
- Wild Proposal 2: These experiences (and benefits) are connected to an emerging pedagogy *for* the wild, making learning possible with, from and in the wild.
- Wild Proposal 3: Nature disconnection (separation, severing) can be transformed by intense, immersive experiences, especially those based on traditional, indigenous practices.
- Wild Proposal 4: If included within the pedagogical process with intention then the wild world has the capacity to act as guide and teacher.

It is anticipated that these proposals will be developed further through dialogue with those that subsequently encounter this work and who may seek to challenge, enhance or expand upon it.

Contribution and significance of study

As the enquiry concludes and is shared it becomes crucial to address where the enquiry as a whole fits within the existing literature in the field, in order to make clear where the study coheres with existing arguments and where the study offers new insights and contributes knowledge, however tentative and cautious.

The case studies were presented and organised specifically to draw attention to *what* happens when young people have wild experiences within and alongside their formal education whilst illuminating *how* these experiences are shaped. It is this *how* that is felt to be of crucial significance for ethnographic reporting and research (Atkinson 2017). It is perhaps this *how* where the research makes its clearest contribution, closing the gap in empirical evidence whilst locating the educational transaction (as insisted upon by Pring 2000).

Reporting on the Sacred Fire Quest (a unique contemporary iteration of the traditional rites of passage) is a key example of this and provides a detailed account of what happens when young people enter into this kind of intense wild experience. As an ethnography focusing on the experiences of tertiary aged children it is very likely the first of its kind in the UK.

It is also felt that these contributions have met the “growing need for research and for building a knowledge base” within the area of Person-centred and Human-centred education. This has been stated as including “how to conceptualise whole-person learning and PCE, its pedagogical implications, and how to integrate the values of person-centred learning in typical day-to-day educative encounters (Gill & Thomson 2012; 2017). The result of this enquiry then has implications particularly for the person-centred, or human-centred educator. Within the context of this enquiry it has been suggested that the concept of a ‘more-than-human centred education’ required exploring and possibly developing. This would take into account the intention of educating for the whole person *and* ensuring that the notion of wholeness was extended “beyond humankind to the whole of creation” (Neville 2013) as the cases studies have tentatively proposed.

Pedagogy *for* the wild

The broad overall aim of the research has also permitted me to make a contribution to the emergence of a recent philosophical and practice based approach to wild experiences as they coalesce and intersect with education – that of wild pedagogy (Jickling & Jensen 2014; Ford 2016) and wild pedagogies (Jickling et al 2018; Ford & Blenkinsop 2018).

The present enquiry has assisted in the development of the terms in tandem with the development of a methodologically sensitive approach to this area of work. Progressing the theoretical concepts whilst challenging and working to clarify the pedagogical outlook of the philosophy has resulted in several key contributions to the field (Ford 2016; Ford 2017; Ford & Blenkinsop 2018; Blenkinsop & Ford 2018).

The emergence of wild pedagogies, both my own development of the conjunction, as a critical tool for thinking about education through radical reading (and now empirical investigation), and as a philosophy being developed by a small group of environmental educators, has been put forward as a refreshed critical tool for investigating the intersection of the wild and of pedagogy.

What has been reported and considered in the enquiry goes some way to closing the gap of missing empirical evidence, both verbatim and observed, of practices that here are considered to support a wilder pedagogy. Whilst the multi-dimensional philosophy proposed by wild pedagogies continues to emerge, gaining traction and weight, there has been little research that directly supports its claims for personal, societal, educational or environmental transformation linked to subjects or participants (children and young people).

This is seen to be philosophically and conceptually different to what can, at this point in time, be considered traditional (and even recent) outdoor and environmental education, whilst acknowledging a significant overlap of concerns. My exploration of wilder pedagogy has here been reported as being prefaced on a move toward a loosening of control, of domination, of enclosure, and in particular of the deleterious effects of domestication encountered within institutionalised education settings whilst moving toward spontaneity, freedom and self-will.

Wild. Pedagogy

After embarking on this enquiry I uncovered a small number of environmental educators and academics that were exploring similar territory and crystallising a turn toward what they were starting to define as wild pedagogies. Having been simultaneously working with this conjunction I have aimed at clarifying the philosophical ideas by looking directly at evidence of wilder educational practices already taking place in the UK. In particular I have focused on the pedagogical aspects of this emerging philosophy and reported on activity and instruction that might support the development of this philosophy. Whilst this can be seen as a result of my position as a teacher engaged directly with young people it is also a reaction to what I perceive to be a lack of evidential substance in the developing proposals associated with ‘wild pedagogies’.

It is instructive to consider the above, and the impact of indigenous practices, in response to the wild pedagogies manifesto as expressed in the recent ‘touchstones’ article. When I joined the wild pedagogies colloquium this was a draft paper of philosophical prompts, a series of vignettes and provocations addressed to ‘early childhood environmental educators’ (Jickling, Blenkinsop, Morse, and Jensen 2018). The document circulated amongst participants during our journey becoming the focus for further questions, conversations and extensions. After our journey the publication of

the paper included key elements discussed on the river, and shaped by the river. The resulting paper framed the touchstones metaphorically and asserted the potency of the link between the word will and that of its etymological root, that of self-will, a clarification of the pedagogic underpinning that I had offered as part of my involvement.

Historically, 'wild' has also been associated with the notion of the *will*, so to be wild is to be self-willed. And this idea appeals to us, both within the auspices of an educational practice that requires learners to change and adapt but also, and more importantly, to make themselves and their own re-creation part of the process. As such, in a wild pedagogy the subject matter includes the subjects themselves. (Jickling, Blenkinsop, Morse & Jensen 2018)

My concern remains that the subject matter of wild pedagogies does not yet adequately include the subjects, the young people, themselves. This enquiry is therefore felt to be a corrective, a substantial contribution to what I see as the current untenable position of proclaiming a philosophy with little empirical evidence or voices from the subjects of such proposals and potential enactments.

Limitations of method and methodology

In an effort to continually renew my commitment to the child, to the subjects of this educational research, I have tried to perceive of pedagogy as a methodology, as a study of how better to act as an educator.

Over the course of this study and my work as a classroom teacher I have embraced the challenges of Max Van Manen (1990) and his methodological approach to educational research. Van Manen is forthright in his critical stance toward educational practices that are divorced from what he sees as addressing the question of how to apply the measure of pedagogy to the standard of one's own work with children.

A methodological framework however has the potential to guide yet also to limit (Jickling 2018). A frame limits and creates choices about what is and what isn't included. What has been left out or overlooked? It is pertinent to reflect on this in relation to my own study, about the methods that I have deployed and how at times I have felt the need to leave the path of research for the tangle of the wild world.

There were of course strengths and weaknesses to my research approach. The testimony offered by the young participants is here seen to be an overarching strength. That I gained access and brought back these voices I do not take for granted. It was not

an easy area to access and in no way a straightforward thing to do. Nor was it an obvious outcome of my research trajectory.

This strength could also be perceived as a weakness. In regards to the Sacred Fire Quest, the activity itself was ultimately unobservable and ineffable (reflecting noetic mystical experience as reported in James 1985). The experience could not be directly witnessed, only the impact could be tentatively gauged and the testimonies of those that journeyed out and were willing to share their stories and experiences have to be taken on trust. In this way it is not possible to be empirical or rational about what was seen. This is perhaps why the organisers insisted that I undertake a personal Fire Quest in order to witness it from the inside.

These reflections relate to my position as a researcher and my attempts to permit my voice to permeate the enquiry overall. Looking across my field-notes I am struck by a passage revealing the extent to which the entry into unusual settings had an impact on my sense of self.

My identity. This work is taking its toll on my identity. It is fraying it. It is pulling at the edges, and stirring up the inside. (Personal Journal entry 2017)

Entering into the community of the Sacred Fire Quest was the most challenging of all the experiences that I witnessed and participated in. As an activity it was completely unknown to me ahead of the encounter. As a researcher I had many of my assumptions and preconceived notions overthrown. As a human being I was pushed toward, and at times beyond, my physical and psychological limits.

Recounting the story of the place, people and activity was not straightforward and not without its problems. Remaining critical or even marginally detached became at times conflicting. As I was swept up in the process of participating I was granted access to the experiences directly yet on occasion lost sight of my original purpose, my explicit search, which at times dissolved into a private one. At times this created a feeling of a sense of exile, that to some extent I am still recovering from (Van Maanen 2011).

The inclusion of my own voice as I navigated through these challenging encounters has been an attempt to reconcile a sense of returning home with something of value for those that may be in need of it, myself included. In this sense it is also a work of personal renewal and may not be appropriate or available to all who wish to work in this area of enquiry.

This context also meant that methods were at times messy and did not always work as expected but in this sense they were responsive and flexible, moving with the situation and the environment rather than fixed or excluding something ahead of encountering it. An example of this would be the imposition of not being permitted to use note-making materials during the experience of the Sacred Fire Quest.

I strongly suspect that the above would have been improved if I had been able to include the participants as researcher/subjects as Freire proposes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2003). Although I did seek to initiate this way of working I was often meeting the participants as they entered into an already unusual setting and was therefore unable to find the time to secure an adequate appreciation for this approach within the context of the programmes.

This limitation of time had other consequences. It is felt that the overall findings of this enquiry would have been emboldened if I could have had the opportunity also to return to the participants as a possible longitudinal study that sought to reflect the longer-term impacts of the programmes. This limitation appears to be an evergreen problem for this type of research and researcher and requires further work.

Combining a pedagogic orientation with the ethnographic was a crucial research decision. Subsequently I was guided by indigenous critiques of research methodology and as a result I committed to collaborating in an attempt to resist the colonial project of seizing knowledge. The combination of this research methodology enabled me to remain oriented to the subject, the life-world of the children and young people.

It was critical that my methodological approach did not alienate the sites and those leading the programmes. I was committed to studying how things work in education. Combining this orientation with prolonged immersion in the field of study it was considered that an ethnographic outlook, would enhance the focus on *how* rather than *why*.

Thinking and working ethically has provided positive outcomes. The commitment to collaborating over seizing knowledge has led to several published works, conference invitations, and many more current writing projects where I am co-authoring with the programme leaders and young people that I worked with whilst undertaking this research.

Possible problems

The positive outcomes must not be allowed to eclipse the possible problems that could arise from this enquiry and the nature of the programmes themselves.

That the sites and activities were potentially dangerous, or even life threatening, should not be overlooked. That the programmes were all conducted with no physical injury is seen as a testament to the instructors and the conduct of the programmes. This result is therefore particular to these programmes and in no way is a reflection, or an appraisal of all programmes of this type and resists generalisation.

Perhaps the most important issue emerging from the case studies was the concept of incorporation, itself a critical aspect of rites of passage (Turner 1969). This was particularly associated with extreme boundary crossing experience of the Sacred Fire Quest and its potential to generate feelings of vulnerability and a sense of exile.

In regards to Sacred Fire Quest, as an expression of a traditional rites of passage process, it is felt as a result of this enquiry that approaching the techniques of cultures that we have only stepped into rather than inhabited as part of our own cultural stories requires problematizing, and that these problems need to be urgently addressed as these practices expand in the UK. It is likely that these practices, whilst being claimed here to have transformative power, may not be appropriate for everyone and that the intentions behind groups (such as Band of Brothers 2019 for example) require looking at in detail. In the cases reported here it has not been claimed that these practices automatically lead to a more balanced life or enhanced connection with the wild world. It has been proposed that any transformation may be especially dependent on the pedagogical structure and sequencing. In some cases it may create a disconcerting disconnect from society as it is currently experienced and not all participants will be adequately equipped to deal with this.

Despite the clearly positive experiences being reported by the participants across the programmes it is important to acknowledge that this positivity appears to come at a price that speaks of the unanticipated risks of stepping off the well-worn path. A genuine vulnerability appears to have developed for several of the participants overall and with those experiencing the intensity of the Sacred Fire Quest in particular. Returning to Andrew's testimony speaks about this critical outcome:

Finishing with Fire Quest, I think, I felt slightly depressed, when I went back into the, back into where I was before... back into um the, society. (Andrew)

Clarifying what he meant by society Andrew went on to describe how he felt when he “went back in” to the society that he had left behind in the dark of the wood:

It seemed like it, there (in Secondary School) no one saw anything, no one could, everyone was looking but they weren't seeing. My friend, my good friend, (another participant from the Sacred Fire Quest), he was there (back at the School), that was lovely, so I got through that, but it seemed really boring, compared to what I had been through. (Andrew)

This extended passage from Andrew is presented here in the hope of showing the significance of this gulf opened up between the experience of the Sacred Fire Quest and that of school.

In comparison to the Fire Quest, I don't think there is anything wrong with the people who teach us, there's nothing wrong with them, it is the way that they have been taught to teach, to regurgitate facts that people have regurgitated to them in the past, but the difference between here and school is the love of learning. (Andrew)

The ritualised structure of the Sacred Fire Quest appears to have been helpful here in supporting the continuity of experience on return to the 'normal' world. The incorporation of gratitude practices, regular 'sit spots', and seasonal celebrations appear to be supportive practices of recollection if they are incorporated into habit and accepted by friends and family (who may struggle to appreciate and understand the experiences of the participant leading up to the need to maintain this deep connection).

Whilst I appreciate that experiencing these alter-native techniques may bring about a profound response, I also have an uncertainty about these 'wisdom practices', as they are adopted by third party groups and perhaps not so clearly linked to a living wisdom tradition.

In addition, being concerned with children and their experience, whilst understandable, is also troubling, in that it can sound as though that in this transformative arena adult's seek to dominate the choices of children. For example a key driver behind young people entering into these practices can be parental anxiety, and in particular concerns about technology when in fact 'screens' are being used by all ages, and in particular adults. Connected to this are the interlinking problems concerning imposition, domination, the decline of mental health and the decline of the wild world.

Recent developments

These arguments regarding domination, pedagogy, human wholeness and ecological health are again reflected in the most recent developments relating to the field of enquiry.

Since embarking on this work both the condition of the health of the wild world and the mental (if not physical) health of young people of school age and beyond have been reported as being in further decline by a growing number of reliable sources that are increasingly reaching the public (Hutchings 2016; YMCA & NHS 2016 et al). Mental health disorders reported by young people appear to be increasing exponentially (WHO 2018). This worrying trend appears to have correlated with an increase in the number of undergraduate University students reportedly committing suicide (Marsh 2017). Reports of environmental degradation have, if anything, erred on the side of the cautious with the recent IPCC report on climate change making stark warnings regarding what is now being seen as an inevitable catastrophic rise in global average temperatures, steeply declining air quality and the relentless destruction of habitat and biological life systems (IPCC 2018).

During the concluding stages of this research several significant new works have been published (Packham et al 2018) alongside an eruption of international direct non-violent action (Extinction Rebellion 2019), all of which have sought to draw attention to the growing ecological crisis.

During 2018 the naturalist and television presenter Chris Packham launched a '*People's Manifesto for Wildlife*' (Packham et al 2018). Financially independent, free from lobbying and with no party-political bias, the manifesto "calls for change in the way we treat nature in the UK" (Packham et al 2018, pg. 2). Of particular significance for this research are the recommendations made in manifesto with regards to education. The manifesto claims that, "we need nature for its own sake above all, but also because it is vital to our imaginations and our spirits. We think *with* nature. We learn *from* it and *in* it, as well as about it" (Macfarlane in Packham et al 2018, pg. 6), claims that this research has sought to clarify through ethnographic accounts and discussion.

The international activist group 'Extinction Rebellion' (2019) was launched in 2018 and has since succeeded in demanding that the UK Government publically declare an 'ecological emergency'. This directly relates to the release of a detailed study of

nature, a study that has been conducted over three years that warns, “humanity is facing an urgent threat from the loss of Earth’s natural life (ISP report 2019, pg. 29).

Whilst the reports warnings are deeply concerning it was also expressed that “nature can be conserved, restored and used sustainably while simultaneously meeting other global societal goals through urgent and concerted efforts fostering transformative change” (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (ISP) 2019, pg. 29). These efforts fostering transformative change are claimed in the report to be connected to education and indigenous knowledge. “Transformations towards sustainability are more likely when efforts are directed at the following key leverage points... visions of a good life... values and action... justice and inclusion in conservation... and education and knowledge generation and sharing” (ISP 2019, pg. 32).

Specifically, the following changes are mutually reinforcing: enabling visions of a good quality of life that do not entail ever-increasing material consumption... and promoting education, knowledge generation and maintenance of different knowledge systems, including the sciences and indigenous and local knowledge regarding nature, conservation and its sustainable use. (ISP 2019, pg. 32)

This sustained qualitative research, in particular that conducted into the educational transaction of rites of passage experience, suggests that a particular style of instruction, sequencing and structure arising from traditional indigenous knowledge systems, instruction that includes techniques to alter consciousness, may result in a loosening of the culturally imposed and endorsed narratives found in institutionalised education settings. This coincides with entry into an enhanced, personalised relationship with the wild world and the self. In relation to the ISP Report these practices may support the changes called for as outlined above.

What next for this field of enquiry?

It is possible that the nature of this enquiry has the potential to support the claims made in the above ISP Report and it is clear that more research will be needed for rites of passage programmes as the work continues to grow in the UK with a Band of Brothers (2019), and Rites of Passage boys and girls camps already underway. As this process migrates from the US and Australia it brings with it the possibility of transformation yet also of tragedy, of problems (discussed above) and unknowns. It is clearly a powerful

experience yet potentially harmful in that it can have a profound impact on the life choices of those that undergo it – this may be especially true for adults who have different needs from the experiences than the young people who seem to meet the activity with equanimity (mainly).

Perhaps the most crucial aspect of this would be to develop and provide after-care services that support the transition beyond the immediate fulfilling of the programme and the direct experiences themselves. This is based on the responses to the question regarding engaging with formal education. The cases themselves are suggestive of models for this but the competing commitments of time, energy and availability make the demands of this work challenging. However it is surely worthwhile. The future of the wild and our own liberty could be claimed to be at stake.

Fast-track nature connection

This type of transformative experience (transcendent) is most commonly associated with religious mysticism (Hollenback 1996), however none of the young participants could be claimed to be even approaching that personality type or disposition. Rather, it illustrates the potency of all instruction and exchanges that may be considered educative transactions, indeed of all teaching, however subtle, to impose its direction on the mind whilst permitting space to open up the mind to be directed by the wild world itself. The experiences recorded the possibility of developing, growing the self in relation to the wild, self-willed world which in turn supports the self-will of the participant and possibly toward a reverence for life.

It is highly likely that reporting on the Sacred Fire Quest is the first time research has been conducted into ‘Rites of Passage’ instruction in the UK, something that all the providers in this area are seeking as validation for the wider adoption of this unusual work. This sustained case study responds directly to the challenges of those committed to nature connection and to Blenkinsop & Ford’s (2018) challenges for environmental educators. Here the Forest School template is not seen to be robust enough in bringing about transformative experiences with the wild world. The account of the Sacred Fire Quest offers a detailed picture of fast track nature connection and its direct impact on the attitudes and outlooks of young people.

Whilst AbdelRahim (2014, pg. 1) argues that “pedagogy can thus have no place in the wilderness” it remains a striking possibility that what passes for formal education itself must change course if it is to turn toward the reality of planetary destruction and

all that implies for us and for all life on Earth. This enquiry has entered into the lives and experiences of those already engaging in pedagogy *for* the wild. Through bearing witness to these practices and reporting on the perspectives of those most often unheard, the voices of young people and the voices of educators working at the fringes of informal and alternative education, this enquiry finally argues that education must be concerned with life, with health and with the wholeness of all.

Beyond the Factory and the Forest

I titled this enquiry, 'Between the Factory and the Forest'. Throughout this work I have sought to resist the binary of indoor/outdoor learning, however the vitriolic arguments against domestication put forward by AbdelRahim are worth returning to.

In a recent interview the comparative anthropologist Layla AbdelRahim (2018) draws attention to “the evolution of the epistemic tradition from animism, toward domestication” by claiming that it is our stories that “uphold violence and predation as the basis of what makes us human” (Ibid, pg. 1). AbdelRahim does this by presenting one of human culture’s most ancient founding texts, that of The Epic of Gilgamesh (George 1999) and in particular a passage that “recounts the murder of the guardian of the forest, which is followed by the felling of the cedar trees and then the murder of animals” (AbdelRahim 2018, pg. 15).

At the close of her interview AbdelRahim appears to advocate an alternative version of the current impulse to re-wild. Abhorring the violence of domestication she offers a corrective, a call to arms for those who share her perspective and concerns.

To right this wrong we have to bring back the forest. I do not mean metaphorically or only in the abstract “out there”, but right here within our city spaces, our bodies, our minds and hearts. And thus, we need to disarm the gods of civilisation, these predators we have constructed, whom we feed, and in whose image we choose to see ourselves. We have to disable these gods, regardless of whether they masquerade in the robes of Justice, Piety, or Knowledge, and give back the world to those who know how to care for it. (AbdelRahim 2018, pg. 15)

What has been witnessed in the case studies is here claimed to be a bringing back of the forest, not only metaphorically, but also concretely. Specifically the case studies have reported and analysed how young people are being supported to access the forest, the wild world, and its medicine, through their bodies, their questions, quests, trials, songs,

stories and solitudes and the accounts have told how these experiences have moved into their hearts and minds.

Wild freedom

Despite Extinction Rebellions' international action to demand the UK Government change course in relation to the ecological crisis it does not appear that the State is going to reverse the degradation of the wild or the dissolving of our relationship with the more-than-human, or non-human, world. It does not appear that our institutionalised education systems will be transformed, rather it seems that this will be the responsibility of individuals and communities if the programmes witnessed here are anything to go by.

This enquiry began with a fragment of hope from the wild. It introduced a young woman on the cusp of adulthood who had overcome fear. Ellie had fallen in love with the wild world. She had found the courage to address and speak to a group. She had challenged her own boundaries. It was the dissolving and absence of physical and interpersonal boundaries that enabled Ellie to come into an acceptance of herself and in doing so come into a true relationship with herself, with others and with the wild world beyond. The fragment concluded with a question – could this experience be available to more than just this girl, in this wood?

I wish to draw the enquiry to a close (for now) by returning to this question. Leaning on the data, the stories, and the conversations, the testimonials of the young participants I want to respond to this question by creating a *'what if'* picture in response, a picture that illustrates an alternative to the violence of domination and domestication currently perpetuated in our society and within institutionalised education.

What if more young people could be given the opportunity to “trust everything around you, more than you've got to trust people, to appreciate it a lot more, because that's practically what keeps you on your feet, everything around you, the land, if that wasn't there, there would be nothing” as Ethan had in the lowlands of Scotland.

What if more young people were able to enter into the realisation that, “everything around you is practically exactly the same as you, just living its life, getting food, getting stuff for its family?” What would the consequences of this insight be if it were experienced as a living insight rather than as a regurgitated fact?

What if all young people could, “be with the fire” and understand what it might mean to care for all life “like a human being rather than a mere element that is acquired easily through technologies in daily life” as Eva had? What if our educative endeavors

had the potential to inspire the thought that *all* life be “treated as how we ourselves want to be treated?”

What if more young people were immersed in the wild world “where the trees outnumber you, and you see them, moving, and you hear them, and you can see all the different stages of their life, and you realise that they’re more than objects, they’re not objects at all, that they deserve respect as all other living things do” as Simon had?

What if more young people were supported to cross over into a renewed way of seeing the living world where “trees don’t tell you how you should be...like all these trees are different...they’re all different and that’s how society should be, we’re all different, none of us are the same and we should just accept that” as Mia came to appreciate?

What if more young people got “to explore here and make the answers ourselves” as Lauren had done whilst in the wilderness of Scotland?

What if more young people were granted the opportunity to experience the blessed freedom of the wild, to make contact with the peace of mind that this freedom can bestow, to have the chance to make sense of things for themselves and from their own perspectives? What if more young people were supported through adventure and boundary crossings to raise their own critical questions in the absence of imposed subjects and fixed answers? What if more young people had the chance to experience more expansive boundaries, places where the need for guidance was sought after rather than rejected? What if more young people had the support and structure to enter into the life of the spirit that close contact with the wild world appears to provide?

This enquiry had proposed tentative responses to these ‘what if’ pictures.

Finally I present again the words of Ellie, the girl in the wood who in the introduction spoke so eloquently about her experience of becoming more human within a wild place free of boundaries and impositions. I conclude this work by returning full circle to the voices of the young participants themselves.

There’s not really the words for it, like there’s so much freedom, there’s nothing but freedom, here, you know, you’ve got freedom of speech in your literal terms but actually, you can be *you* here, there’s no way you have to act somewhere like this, everyone’s treated as equal, you’re free to do what you want, when you want, but you’re free to just be free, that probably doesn’t make any sense but you’re just, you are free you know, everything here is a part of you, but you just, there’s not really the word to put on it really. (Ellie)

I began my research looking at *what happens when young people have wild experiences within and alongside their formal education*. Where this impulse took me and what I witnessed there I believe has presented examples of “educational alternatives” (Hope & Montgomery 2016, pg. 307) that seek to extend freedom and autonomy, sometimes radically so, to those participating. On occasion these cases have also presented ‘another way of being’ (Hage 2012), ways that are perhaps urgently needed by all those seeking to discover alternative ways of educating for wholeness and health, beyond the factory and the forest, towards a possible pedagogy *for the wild*.

Chapter 11

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Chapter 12

Additional Material

Appendix 1: Stepping off the Well-Trodden Path (extract).

Appendix 2: Post Graduate Training Scheme Certificate.

Appendix 3: Money (and self-confidence) do grow on trees. John Muir Story (extract).

Appendix 4: Sacred Fire Quest Testimonials.

Appendix 5: Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address (extract).

Appendix 6: Learning to Speak Franklin: Nature as agent and co-teacher (extract).

Appendix 1

Stepping off the Well-Worn Path (extract)

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Stepping off the Well-trodden Path: is a wilder pedagogy possible?

DANIEL FORD

ABSTRACT This article sets out to explore alternative approaches to education, wilder approaches that seek to embrace the innate self-will of young people as a positive starting point for enlarging personal freedoms in education. These alternatives are presented as a rebuttal against educational practices that portray young people's native autonomy as an undesirable trait requiring discipline and subjugation. The article considers the opportunity for learning to be led by the senses, a provocation for deeper environmental relationships that underline the value of opportunities to develop kinship and equality with the more-than-human world. The appearance and development of wilder teaching practices in recent educational research literature underlines the increasing significance of rethinking pedagogy for a twenty-first-century world and this article seeks to draw attention to this growing philosophy of wild pedagogy. Paulo Freire's concept of education as a process of domestication is presented alongside the idea of wild pedagogy, with an introduction to the methodology of this wilder teaching practice and a plea for embracing the self-will of those involved both as learners and teachers. The article concludes with an invitation to turn aside from worn-out educational paths and go wild.

Introduction

What If Teaching Went Wild?

In 2004 Anthony Weston published 'What if Teaching Went Wild?', an article that progressed a proposal for a *wilder pedagogy*, a wilder teaching practice that sought to 'unsettle our deeply-felt sense of disconnection from the world' (Weston, 2004, p. 31). Weston, an environmental educator working in Canada, argued 'that almost by necessity, school cuts us off from the experience of a larger world, from natural rhythms, natural beings, more-than-human flows of knowledge and inspiration' (2004, p. 31). For many, school life, regardless of reported educational, environmental and social progress, continues to focus on

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Appendix 2

Post Graduate Training Scheme Certificate

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL



THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

Daniel Ford

having pursued the prescribed courses of study

and having satisfied the Examiners

was today awarded the

Postgraduate Certificate

in Research Training

7 December 2018

Jeannette Strachan

Registrar



[Signature]

Vice-Chancellor

Full award details are provided in a separately issued official transcript of academic record

Appendix 3

Money (and self-confidence) do grow on trees. John Muir Story (extract)

John Muir Trust

John Muir Award Story - Money (and self-confidence) do grow on trees

Published: 24th January 2018

In 2017 a Hastings woodland hosted an innovative partnership between an educational charity and a bank, underpinned by the John Muir Award



Working Without Walls is an Education Futures Trust (EFT) outdoor learning course, well known

Appendix 4

Sacred Fire Quest Testimonials

Sacred Fire Quest Participant, Male, 15 Years Old

Quest

Right... I'm not really sure how to start this, but here goes. The journey started before I actually got to the site, the main 'quest' was just the paramount part. It started at the point when I got the letter. Perhaps even before. My question for this quest was what do I do after I leave school? Beforehand I had no idea what I was going to get from this quest and the question actually came to me quite early in the second morning. Going into something that I had never done before was actually, now I think about it, quite nerve-racking. Although I know nothing can physically harm me I was afraid of going into myself and I was scared of what I would find there.

It was a change from school, the fast paced world outside, social media, friends, responsibilities. You can just stop and actually take in your surroundings and not have to be anywhere, do any homework or be pressured. To be honest, I dislike the fact that school is so fast paced, I like the idea of learning but it's just too pressured. For me I also get more information that is to my liking to know what plants I can eat, to learn how to survive in the wild, to be able to make fire. They do one club at school which is slightly comparable which is the Duke of Edinburgh award. There, rather than making fire with a bow-drill or hand-drill you are given a gas cooker and premade food, which for me almost completely takes away the point of survival. It makes it seem so easy. We do also learn other useful skills, well, skills useful for society, a society that I think has almost completely lost touch with Mother Earth and Grandfather Fire, the basic principal of that is you take, you have to give back, and a society that has its senses so deeply buried. I believe that the world would be better place if everyone found the connection between the earth and them again, we would be a less violent peoples. Not everyone would feel this way, so there always be many different ideologies. To put that in one statement – I prefer being in the forest than in school and I believe the more important lessons can be found there.

In the first day of the quest, I was mostly getting ready for the night and making preparations for the fire, although not really finding anything new about myself in this stage, except for the fact that I need to take things slow and have patience. The highlight of this section was the inepi. Being in a hot, damp, steamy space, gives you an opportunity to go into what I would almost describe as a trance like state, a connection to the subconscious, Mother Nature. This was the stage where I found my question. It wasn't answered in this space, but asked. The night was warm and I found myself dozing off time to time, 10-15 minutes at a time with maybe 30 minute gaps. Time passes slower when you have no timepiece and several times I found myself letting the fire die down because I had thought that it was sunrise, but it turned out that it was only the moon coming up. On one particular section between the space of sleep and wake, I thought I felt a presence, heard a twig snap or something of the sort and out of the corner I saw something, human in form but not in nature, a pure white figure, a fleeting glance of something I do not yet understand. It was shortly after that experience that the answer came to me. But after that I did not fall back to sleep.

The sunrise brought a mixed set of emotions for me, kind of happy that I could go back to camp, but also quite longing for another night for more answers to come. As I walked in I remembered that I had not eaten for 24 hours but to my surprise, I was not hungry, something that I had not expected. We sat and talked, had the closing ceremony, packed up our things, said our goodbyes, and left. I personally would have liked another day to just be, not on quest but just to be in the woods processing my discoveries. When I got home I couldn't actually walk in the door; I had to go out and sit in a tree for three hours. Then I could come back, to somewhere where I did not want to be at that moment. I was a changed person and I think that I realized for the next few days the importance of peace. After about two weeks, I was whisked away with all the things that I had thought I would want to do again, but something inside of my still holds onto this experience and realizes its importance, even in the 'darkest' of moments.

'You don't know how much you miss something until it's gone.'

– a quote that came to me on quest.

Hope this is what you are looking for,

Peace

Sacred Fire Quest Participant, Female, 16 Years Old

My experience of attending the Fire Quest is meaningful and has affected me profoundly, as I am convinced, which will keep its everlasting influence on my attitude towards the events in my life.

If I were to define the Fire Quest I've been through, it would be "to be with the fire". In the process of our quest, fire was well attended and cared for like a human being rather than a mere element that is acquired easily through technologies in daily life. To be honest, everything (work, study, relationships, etc.) needs to be attended and treated as how we ourselves want to be treated by our surroundings. That's what brings out quality and equilibrium.

Fire was to be given attention, which enabled it to create an atmosphere that embraced the questers. Being only with the fire is not being alone, at least not as "feeling alone". Though I was physically parted from other people during the quest, the feeling that captured me when I saw the flickering light scattered in the dark forest was the connection between us through our deeds---the fact that we were carrying out similar action that had been done also by our ancestors thousands of years ago.

This feeling of belonging has been forgotten for a long time, as the communication nowadays relies more on intellect. I found it a lot easier to communicate with people after we have build up this sense of connection, which only occurs through actions but not thoughts.

Participating in the ESA course enables me not only to build up truthful and reliable relations with people, but also gave me a new perspective on being "alone". In my school life, the sense of lonely looms above and panics me even when there's no one around to judge my status. Through what I have experienced in this Fire Quest weekend, I am starting to understand that being alone or recessive from the crowd may bring complete different things from what has been existed. Being alone and having a space where one doesn't have to react to everything constantly doesn't mean being neglected by the world.

The ESA course gives us a chance to engage ourselves to the nature, and a space to reflect on our experience. Nothing "cool" needs to be done except to be yourself. And that's what I am still learning to do.

Sacred Fire Quest Participant, Male, 14 Years Old

My quest was over, I could relax and wait for the flow of emotions and knowledge that would follow and know that I had successfully spent 24 hours alone with nothing more than a few sticks which I could use to make fire and a sandwich in the woodland which dominated the Laughton area. Yet another challenge loomed ahead, the sacred fire quest. It will be good fun, it will be fine. But is it the right time?

The sacred fire weekend offered the opportunity for people like myself to spend a night sitting around a fire reflecting on their lives and journeying deeper into themselves. This is exactly my sort of thing I thought when my training group E.S.A notified me of its upcoming, but as the time grew nearer I began to discover an anxiety which had probably been cultivated weeks before when I embarked on a solo survival rights of passage camp. My first thoughts were, 'well I have these feelings, I wish they would go away but where are they coming from and were they purely cultivated during my previous quest or did that experience simply open a door to a deeper fear embedded somewhere in my past?'

For me wilderness skills go far far deeper than the mere physical learnings, I was surprised on my first solo survival quest to discover a part of me which I had only glimpsed briefly in times of deep reflection and dreams. Psychologists have a scale which registers various mental frequencies ranging from: 'gamma state' a high frequency state of mind accessed by the brain in situations of high danger or perceived danger potential, through to 'delta state' ;a state of very low mental frequency in which physical happenings have no bearing on our conscious thought process. We spend most of our lives today in 'beta state' a state which comes after gamma state but before the three states 'Alpha' 'Theta' and 'Delta'. It is evident then that we spend a vast majority of our waking lives in a state which in animals and prehistoric humans used only in situations of risk, I find this fascinating and discovering such things is part of my drive to do the sorts of activities that I do. To me alpha state opens up a possibility for a very deep type of learning yet what became evident to me leading up to the sacred fire quest was that if an unconditioned, conditioned stimulus pairing took place within alpha state it became much harder to eliminate the resulting anxiety by means of linear thought as the situation in which I had learned my response provided very little rational context as I was operating from a very different place when the conditioning was taking place.

I arrived at the woods in which the fire quest would be taking place and enjoyed seeing my friends again and talking to people over a meal, yet the following morning whilst I was preparing my site in which I intended to spend the night I experienced some very blurry and in many ways uncomfortable emotions. In retrospect these emotions are a result of me not dealing with my previous experiences In a positive way, yet at the time I felt like I was scared of being 'on my own' even though this was an unjustified fear and thus an anxiety. Boredom is a demon and unless you present it with some activity with which to play it will grow and grow and eventually drive people insane hence the effectiveness of solitary confinement, although I was sure I would not experience this demon to the extents that I have before on other more lengthy quests, the feeling was there, a huge uncontrollable sensation to avoid, and aggravating as it was that I could not rationally exclude it from my thought process, I used many techniques which have proven strong in my past experience in an attempt to throw it off but try as I may I could not, I would have to face it.

I talked to one of my teachers about this for a while and whilst I was talking I came to the realisation that whilst my objective in going on this course was to spend a night round a fire, in perusing this objective I had led myself to realise that there was another super objective at hand. To deal with an experience from my past in a way which would not just cover it up that it would again resurface later in my life but that would let loose any trapped emotions which were clearly present as I embarked on my project. And so I thought... maybe these two objectives do not compliment each other. Perhaps embarking on my quest that night from a motivation led by determination was not the best for me. And respectively not doing my quest that night to give room for more to be made of my last quest only weeks before would of course mean not completing my original objective. Which one of my objectives did I value more, to complete a night by my fire (which could potentially reinforce my fear) or to deal with my emotions and present a solution in a healing way. I decided the latter. I think by doing what I did I did give way to a better way of healing my past and now that I have given this energy more time to flow I am working towards doing a three day survival quest in the winter during which I will pay close attention to my feelings and emotions

I now feel that what I did was the right thing to do and whilst I wrote the last sentence something that another teacher of mine once said came to mind: "We gain far more from the pursuit of our goal than in actually achieving it" I turned the pursuit of my goal into my goal and I learnt a lot but would I have learnt all that I did without the trees, the fresh air, and the earth? I think not.

Sacred Fire Quest Participant, Female, Adult

On the night of the harvest full moon I sat in an ancient woodland with a small fire. I was undertaking a traditional ceremony to seek insight into some personal questions, to deepen and strengthen my relationship with fire and to have the sweet bonus of a night outside on my own. Known as a Fire Quest, I was going to keep a small fire going all night, offering a small pinch of tobacco before adding any wood to it and another pinch after each interaction and, hopefully, staying awake to commune with the fire.

That morning I'd found the site, under an ancient oak that felt like the right place to spend the night. I cleared the ground, encircled the space with branches to create a sacred area, carried in enough wood for the whole night and then built a small fire ready for lighting. At dusk we gathered at the main Sacred Fire where all the helpers and supporters were going to spend their night. I was given a hot coal from that fire which I then carefully transported, nestled on a King Alfred's cake in a little ark of bracken and bark, down the trail through the woods to my oak. As I got to my site it was already dark. I knelt down in front of the little teepee that I had prepared during the afternoon and put the coal into the tinder bundle that I then blew into flame. The kindling began to crackle and the flames lit up the shadows around me.

There was a group of teenagers scattered in the woods around me, each at their own fire site too. As I sat watching mine take hold, the flickering flames of theirs began to light up the woods also. Those young ones were going to be sitting out on their own all night in the dark, feeding their fires - I was aware of the difference between my quest and theirs. For me, it was to be a sweet sojourn and a moment of retreat. They had never done it before and I knew that they were entering into it with some trepidation and, maybe, just a little fear.

It was a glorious night, with the strong light of a full moon and a sweet breeze. It passed slowly. I dozed occasionally, my fire dozing with me but rising back up every time I tended to it. I watched the fires of the young ones around me, rising and falling similarly to mine. I tracked the length of the night with the moon as it passed over us and with the change in traffic noise. We were near a main road and as the night wore on, the sound of traffic dropped until we were finally in total silence. In the depth of the night I heard a tawny owl call out a few times and the sound of a fox barking.

The moonlight was so bright that I found myself listening out for a chorus of birdsong to confirm the approach of morning. We had been given strict instructions that our fires needed to be fully extinguished before we left them and tending the fire down to cold was an important element of the whole. I sat there, spreading the coals around with a stick and watching the embers sparkling up at me. I heard a crow call. I heard a great tit. And then I heard the traffic start up again, and the sound of traffic increasing. There was no further birdsong... The commuters were already on their way towards London and I knew that morning was upon us. And that's when I began to drop into a well of grief. I sat there. Where were the rest of the birds? What were we facing as humanity? Going to work day in day out, by car, coming home by car, windows and doors closed to the elements, the wildlife leaving us... What have we done to the Earth? Stirring the last of the hot coals, listening to the traffic, pondering and feeling, I could not leave my site - I did not want to return. I just sat there in my well of sorrow.

At my most grief-stricken I heard the sound of movement in the branches above me. A few leaves fluttered down and then acorns started landing around me. As I looked up I saw a squirrel on one of the branches, looking down and scolding me in a way that only squirrels can. I had to laugh at myself. If nature communicates with us through signs and symbols, the different metaphors that emerge from a flying acorn brings us much information. Who knows what will happen in the future after all. Those young ones out there all night, tending to their own fires, igniting their passion and their personal fire - what acorns were being planted in them that night? How the Earth is now is how they know it to be. They have never seen a murmuration of starlings, chased butterflies or tripped over hedgehogs nightly. I realised that my grief was for how it was when I was a child and how it used to be. The weight of age.

Many, many people around us today are committed to doing what they can to change the world. We are planting acorns, both arboreal and metaphoric. With the energy and the optimism of youth - well maybe there is still hope for the future of my grandchildren and the future generations of all living things. I'll keep praying that is so.

Sacred Fire Quest Participant, Female, Adult

Fire Quest reflections

It is Monday morning the day after returning from my Fire Quest at Sacred Earth. I'm writing this up so I have a good record, can add to it later if I want and it's easy to share with Dan for his research. I hope that somehow this record will contribute to the growth of others and benefit some that may experience this type of event, which otherwise may not have happened. And ultimately contribute to healthy Life on this Earth for generations to come. My gratitude for the invitation to share my story. Writing this up has given me so much more insight. There are different strands to this reflection and story and they may get a bit muddled together as I go.

Starting with beginnings there are the intention(s), which are a huge part of any quest, ceremony and conscious life event. They form the backbone of my reflection so I commented on each one. I've numbered them to keep track, as there seems to be so much I keep adding. I wanted to connect deeper with fire, through spending a whole night sitting with it and being conscious of each interaction and wood adding through the offering of tobacco. In this way I wanted to lay a foundation of consciousness and gratitude that will stay with me at (hopefully all) future fires. I can't report back on the effect in the future yet, other than to say that during the night itself I felt I had to hold back more than I usually do with fire. I would normally tweak slightly more, moving wood slightly to give more air and better positioning to burn and give good flame. It felt too much to give tobacco for the smallest tweaks I would normally do, so I learned to leave it alone a bit more, or do all the interactions I felt were needed in one go. This might create a more peaceful experience for people attending any fires I tend, more stillness.

There was also the practical aspect of learning about fire and in particular preparation and all the teachings that brings, which also links to the next intention of holding others, so I'll cover it in the next section. For me this fire quest is about experiencing the fire quest in this format so I can hold others from a place of experience in the future. I have sat and contributed to the communal fire which holds the fire questers twice before. I have done a 4-day survival quest with Trackways in 2012, which partly became a fire quest with 1.5 days of rain and keeping a fire going through that. As someone who holds Inipis I also am very conscious of the requirements of fire and starting it under pressure, which is a journey in itself each time.

Firstly I wanted a very conscious experience of this particular format, so I can deeply empathise with future participants from a place of knowing. This splits into some of the experience of what happens during any quest process, from the moment you decide to go, to the getting up at dawn to meet the sunrise, fasting and also the send-off and receiving back, support during the preparation day and the 'catching of the stories' (see next intention for this last one).

And secondly the practicals of the fire itself, how to prepare for that, transporting the coal, transforming the coal into the fire, how to tend it and how to tend it out by a specific time: sunrise. Other things to prepare for the night, like clothes and kit.

So firstly some learnings about the quest process were around the reminders that a lot of people, especially young ones, have not fasted before and how much discomfort that can bring. For adults there are usually other habits / addictions that come into full awareness, like coffee and smoking. So it reminded me to be conscious of that and very gentle as it can be such a strong discomfort (zone) to be in. My personal challenge was about staying present and awake. I'm reasonably used to staying up but that's when I have a focus. I found it hard to stay fully awake and present when there wasn't so much fire keeping to do. I tried to stay sitting up straight without support of the tree and occasionally getting up. I slightly gave myself a hard time over not staying focused on my prayer / intention or purely in my sense paying attention. I was wondering how I could possibly feel like this and expect to do a vision quest again some time if I couldn't even sit up one night. Even though last vision quest that aspect was actually one of the most enjoyable, as I did manage to stay focused. We talked about this also in our small groups the day after as others also met this challenge. We wondered about how sleepiness can be a distraction from what we could be focusing on. I found it really easy when there were rustles and I could employ all my senses to try to discover which animals were around. I didn't quite find out what a small animal close by was, but think I saw a fox towards dawn a little further away. It was also easy when tending the fire down, which needed almost continuous attention.

It was also good to hear Sal's words, which seemed adjusted for a younger audience, therefore slightly simpler and aimed at a new experience. His explaining of what to expect and what is part of the quest and anticipating some experiences that may be perceived as failures, but are simply part of the learning. It was sad to hear that despite those words one girl stayed out all night without a fire after not being able to get her fire going after two attempts, because she felt ashamed. It also felt a good experience to hear how Sal dealt with and introduced the Inipi as there were these young ones. This is useful for me for when I hold lodges for new people. For me there was an unexpected surprise in the cooperation between questers in their preparations and helping out by helpers. I shared my thistle down with M and J and received a King Alfred's cake from C for transporting coal. And it felt good both ways to share resources rather than holding on to them. P also gave me some dry bark for transporting the coal and red cedar bark for tinder, so I felt very well-resourced with back-ups too.

Sal talked a few times about humans being tight in their solar plexus and throat, being protective and not able to speak and share. About how this night might crack us open a bit. I felt in quite a pragmatic way throughout. Early in my sit I did feel & express a lot of gratitude for the Oak and the magic of the moon and the clear sky, for the fire, for how well it got going. But generally it didn't feel like big things were happening or revelations came. It wasn't until I was received back with a hug by P and then L, that I cracked and felt how often I can isolate myself and expect not to be wanted, not to belong. Feeling that, then seeing others, especially the young ones welcomed back in that way felt very touching and there were more tears. This is certainly something I will remember for welcoming back others. Also the being looked after and being offered to have a cup of tea made for me. Simple but so touching nurturing. I recognize this as a bit of a theme of my quests, that everything feels 'normal' and nothing's happening during the quest. Then as soon as the threshold is crossed afterwards, it makes me feel the container I was in and I crack and cry.

Secondly learnings about the practicalities of fire. How there is effectively a need for a nest to receive an ember like with the bow drill, to receive the coal from the communal fire. How some hadn't realised you need plenty of small sticks of various sizes to get the fire going and again to tend it down. How to transport the coal in a bark sandwich. I was given the King Alfred's cake to extend the coal, though despite drying it out, I don't think it quite caught. What did help was some semi-rotten but very dry bits of wood I added to my sandwich which helped extend the coal without going into flame and burning up, like small tinder would do (and did for some).

I wondered what else that taught me and am reminded that good preparation ensures more likely success. I definitely need reminding of that in my life sometimes when I just wing it and how much better it feels and goes when the preparation time has been put in. And taking time for proper evaluation & feedback, like in this reflection process, gives much deeper learning. So often I don't complete my learning in that way and miss out. That includes Sal's teachings from which I have notebooks full of notes, but haven't made time to read them again, knowing full well how much difference that would make to my learning.

Also regarding prep for the fire, I usually am really on it and wherever I go, I pick up tinder or 'nest' material for my next bow drill fire. This time I only brought in some dry cleavers, even though I had other tinder materials in the car, because I wanted to gather from scratch. I felt happy about having the cleavers because it connected me to my daughter who I recently helped move house and I weeded them from her old house. It then gave me a reason to thank & remind her of that and tell her about the fire quests and suggest that she might like to do it sometime, after I recently supported her to sleep out alone for the first time.

I also was amazed at the abundance of dry wood after we arrived on site the night before and had lots of rain and everything was wet. I felt a worried how we were ever all going to have enough dry wood. I noticed how that lowered my spirits. But the woods at Sacred Earth were hugely abundant and dead wood does dry out and is usually only wet on the outside. There was also an abundance of foraging foods, which was even more noticeable as it felt myself naturally moving to pick it, and I had to really stop myself for the fasting. And there were some lessons about preparing camp and having enough dry space and tarps for people to shelter under.

I asked for clarity, Health & Happiness and trust in relation to the 2-day Visions Quests / Hanblechia I did a year ago as part of these trainings. The theme / intention then was about doing the work I love and being supported / getting paid for that and getting the physical place I need to work from.

Attached to this there has been an issue with not having my story of that quest received by anyone and not understanding what came out of it, so feeling stuck in being able to progress and act on it.

During this fire quest, I had an abundance of offerings and opportunities to share my experience, and feel I am able to process last year's quest too. This includes this reflection and Dan's very clear and genuine invitation, as well as small group sharing, staying at S's and him being in the support role, which also felt like an extra anchor and arranging with K to have some follow-up chats by Skype to support each other and hear our stories as we did the 2-day quest together last year. Other conversations also contributed, including with M. I had a (slightly rushed) catch my story meeting with my partner on the beach in Cornwall last week and it feels like that conversation is now open and more can flow through that. I also caught up with M and S by staying there and it helps to catch up on previous conversations about life and work and see how things have moved since last time. I also had a mentoring session with Sal by Skype very recently that helped a bit with understanding what I asked for and how I may have been too specific and there's been a strong message of more trust in the universe.

All this has given me with some clarity in the last days about the place I currently live and how that is supporting my work at the moment in terms of giving me what I need, like being easily able to hold events there, being in such a beautiful, wild place, having an Inipi there and having a community of sorts so I'm not isolated. How it is not supporting me is in the lack of space to be able to receive others spontaneously much of the time, both for work and socially and there not being enough space for me to do what I love, including growing my medicinal plants (feels like a need a more permanent home) and for example hosting a women's group or arranging coaching or healing or other work and personal meetings.

I wanted to build my connection with Oak.

I am lined up to do a 3-day initiation with Oak, including 'dieting' and have been noticing and learning lots already in anticipation of this. I wanted to take this opportunity to sit by an Oak for this night to build on this. This spot with this Oak stood out for me when I found it. It turned out to feel very special to sit with this strong Oak at my back and within the space of its beautiful hanging branches, which created and beautiful large room, through which the moon light shone in. The spot was great as it was a little higher up, had good views to different directions and had dry ground.

Appendix 5

Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address (extract)

Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address ***Greetings to the Natural World***

The People

Today we have gathered and we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now, we bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as people.

Now our minds are one.

The Earth Mother

We are all thankful to our Mother, the Earth, for she gives us all that we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk about upon her. It gives us joy that she continues to care for us as she has from the beginning of time. To our mother, we send greetings and thanks.

Now our minds are one.

The Waters

We give thanks to all the waters of the world for quenching our thirst and providing us with strength. Water is life. We know its power in many forms- waterfalls and rain, mists and streams, rivers and oceans. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to the spirit of Water.

Now our minds are one.

The Fish

We turn our minds to the all the Fish life in the water. They were instructed to cleanse and purify the water. They also give themselves to us as food. We are grateful that we can still find pure water. So, we turn now to the Fish and send our greetings and thanks.

Now our minds are one.

Appendix 6

Learning to speak Franklin: Nature as agent and co-teacher (extract)

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ORIGINAL PAPER



Learning to speak Franklin: nature as co-teacher

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Abstract

Through the personal this article seeks to extend the lived experience felt by the authors that all-inclusive nature, the more-than-human world, is agential and possesses the potential to be considered as guide and co-teacher. As a combination of vignettes and reflections it is auto-ethnographic (Holman-Jones 2013) in tone and method. Yet this personal ethnography is extended by an attempt to include the voice of the river and its more-than-human inhabitants. Throughout the paper there is a persistent concern for the etymological roots of the terms wild and pedagogy that anchors the article in its core concerns of self-will and agency. Twin voices are utilised in parallel to explore several touchstones of wild pedagogies.

Keywords Wild · Pedagogy · Child · More-than-human · Nature · Co-Teacher

A tentative introduction

The river was so generous. We drank of its water and slept on its beaches. Its inhabitants lit up our camps at night and flew over our rafts by day. The river was also dangerous and we travelled with it as respectfully as we could. On occasion our dreams became infused with its roar and thunder. Over the course of our journey we began to think alongside, and with the river. This thinking was at times as refreshing as the cool draught that we received from its waters, at others as troubling and as challenging as the rapids themselves. What follows is an attempt to honour our experience with the river and the thinking that it supported.

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