



6 July 2020

An open letter to educators,

Hello. We really hope that you are surviving and thriving in these challenging times.

We're writing to you with an invitation to be part of **Rewilding Education**, a new project that grapples with some of the complex questions about how to make education better for people and planet. We want to radically change our education and create healthier, fairer and *wilder* ways of educating children, young people and adults. We know that our conventional education system is damaged, and we also know that the planet is under severe strain as a result of the way that human beings are interacting with the wild world.

The journalist and activist George Monbiot describes **rewilding** as "resisting the urge to control nature and allowing it to find its own way". As educators for more than 20 years, we have been arguing for greater freedom in education and we have worked hard to support children, young people and adults to be self-directed or *self-willed* (which is one definition of 'wild'). Personally we have also been transformed through wild experiences and being immersed in deep nature connection work, and we are convinced that we need to incorporate some of the wisdom from wild educators into the ways that we educate all children, young people and adults.

We are inviting you to be part of a small community of educators who will work together, over the course of several months, to develop a vision for a 'rewilded education'. We want this community to include people who are involved with alternative schooling, wild education and community projects, such as alternative educators, wild educators, innovative mainstream teachers, bush-craft folk, vision quest guides, nature connection leaders, democratic school staff, forest school practitioners, radical teachers, outdoor expedition guides, and more.

As well as being a unique and exciting journey for all involved, we also want to create a new set of principles which educators can use to underpin and guide their work, whether they operate from classrooms, forests, beaches, houses, cabins or elsewhere. We want this set of principles to address the following questions:

- What is the overall aim and purpose of education?
- What learning theories underpin our teaching and facilitation practices, wherever we are based?
- How do we see the role of 'educator' (or 'teacher', 'facilitator', 'guide', 'instructor', 'leader') in our work, especially if we want to encourage self-directed or self-willed learners?
- How do we offer fairer, inclusive and socially just learning opportunities?
- What can we do to grapple with the challenge of decolonising education, and are there any risks with using activities which draw from the 'indigenous wisdom', such as rites of passage rituals, circling and restorative practices?
- What is the balance between offering freedom (self-will) and structure (boundaries)?
- How can we work with nature and for the benefit of nature, rather than as seeing nature as a resource for us to use?
- What could a 'wilder pedagogy' look like (pedagogy = way of teaching)?

We want to co-create a structure that will work for everyone involved, and so we do not want to be too prescriptive at this stage. **We imagine that we will start by meeting together, initially online, on a monthly basis.** We want to use the expertise and experience of everyone in the community, and so we will hold the space in such a way as to build connections and to enable everyone to share ideas, challenges and questions. We will share written resources, reading materials, podcasts and videos, as well as our own research and previous work. **When the Covid-19 situation allows, hopefully in the spring or summer of 2021, we will offer a face-to-face immersive community experience, over 5 days, at a wild location in the UK.** We hope that this will enable people to deepen their understanding of this work through experiential learning, as well as to strengthen their connections with one another, and to ignite new ways of building on what we have learnt together.

If you are interested in joining us, we ask you to write back to us and let us know what you would hope to get out of being part of this group by responding to the this question: **Who are you and what draws you towards this project?** We are looking for a maximum of 16 people, and we would love for half of these to be involved in 'wild education' and half to be involved in other forms of 'alternative or progressive education'. We appreciate that these terms are clumsy and might not fit everyone. We would love for most of the group to be active educators or practitioners, although we

also welcome hearing from those who are researchers or students. **Please contact us by the end of July to express your interest in being involved.**

If you know of anyone else who might like to be involved with Rewilding Education, we would be grateful if you would forward this letter to them or ask them to contact us directly.

Please do get back to us with any thoughts, comments, questions – and of course, to tell us whether you are interested in working with us.

With gratitude,



Dr Max Hope

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Dr Dan Ford

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Ref: Monbiot, G. (2013). Feral: rewilding the land, the sea and human life. London, Penguin. p13.

Max (she/her) was a youth worker for 15 years before becoming a university academic at the University of Hull, where her hunger for changing the system led her to specialise in teaching and research about inclusive education, equalities, freedom, democracy and social justice. She co-founded the Freedom to Learn Project, an international research project which explored whether innovative, radical and alternative ways of educating could improve mainstream schools and reduce social inequality. Her book, *Reclaiming Freedom in Education* (Routledge), was published in 2018. She lives in Devon and enjoys listening to birds and spending time around campfires.

Dan (he/him) has worked in further education for over 15 years and is deeply committed to human-centred education that seeks to meet the needs of all young people. Alongside this, he recently completed a PhD, entitled 'Between the Factory and the Forest', an exploration of contemporary educational programmes seeking to provide young people with experiences of the wild. He has worked closely with an international team exploring the concept of 'Wild Pedagogy', publishing 4 academic papers on the topic. He lives in Sussex and loves being outside, wrapped in a blanket, waiting for the first stars to appear.

