


COMMUNICATION

# Imagining Advancement of Wilding Educational Policy: Reflections and Possibilities in Botswana

Yaone Duduetsang Matsagopane 

Faculty of Education, Southwest University, Chongqing, SC, China  
Email: [yd.matsagopane@gmail.com](mailto:yd.matsagopane@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

This paper examines the notion of wilding pedagogy and its potential for comprehensive transformation through educational policy. This paper argues that given current unsustainable human practices, significant changes can be achieved by aligning education and policy. This paper begins by defining wilding pedagogies and providing an overview of Botswana's background and prospects. It contends that Botswana has the potential to enhance the quality of education by promoting active and transformative learning experiences. Furthermore, this policy can lead to improved academic performance by acknowledging cultural linkages, honouring land, returning to a holistic approach aligned with the principles of the wild in education.

**Keywords:** Re-wild pedagogies; education policy; Botswana context

## Introduction

This paper examines the potential implementation of the wilding educational policy in Botswana's mainstream schooling system. Quay (2020) and Aikens (2020) observed that the wilderness is rarely considered in educational policy discussions. However, it has been argued that education has a moral responsibility to advocate, adapt, and mitigate changes in order to protect the wild. One way in which education can fulfil this responsibility is to equip students with the cognitive, emotional and behavioural skills necessary to engage with nature. Aikens (2020) also emphasised the importance of recognising that humans are not the sole inhabitants of the planet and that other living entities have a place on Earth. This recognition is crucial for addressing the environmental challenges caused by human activities. Currently, human dominance puts many forms of life at risk (Jickling *et al.*, 2018; Segall, 2012). Although the association between wildness and educational policies has been historically limited, it is argued that this connection is imperative in the present context. Therefore, this paper advocates the value, potential and purpose of incorporating wilding pedagogies into Botswana's educational system.

## Definition of wilding pedagogies

Wilding pedagogies emerged as a response to a shift in perspectives among educators who began questioning humanity's relationship with the natural world and exploring ways to promote inclusivity and change in this interaction. Aikens (2020) defined wilding pedagogies as the process of reconnecting with and reclaiming wilderness, not just as an abstract concept but as tangible places and ways of being in relation to these places and other self-willed beings

(Jickling *et al.*, 2018; Affifi *et al.*, 2018). The author emphasises that education policy plays a crucial role in the acknowledgement of the self-will and responsibility of individuals, which in turn shapes their habits, practices and humanistic objectives. Furthermore, the concept of humanity extends beyond humans alone. As Abram (1996) argued, the non-human world is an integral part of the community. Integrating this perspective into education poses a challenge to existing policies as it requires a shift and retracing of steps to the old (Sterling, 2017). Embracing wilding pedagogies involves a transition from a colonial curriculum to a more holistic curriculum, providing educators with the opportunity to critically examine their teaching practices and explore new possibilities.

### The wild at risk

The natural world is currently experiencing significant losses, and projections indicate that further devastation is likely to occur in humans and other living organisms. The interconnectedness of various systems is risky. One notable concern in recent times is the potential extinction of bees as well as the mass extinction of other plant and animal species (Ceballos *et al.*, 2015; Colla & Packer, 2008; Young *et al.*, 2016). Jickling *et al.* (2018) and Blenkinsop *et al.* (2018) proposed six dimensions for the implementation of wilding pedagogies that reflect their practicality and potential. These include: “nature as a co-teacher (the collaboration of specific living beings), the complex, unknown and spontaneous (challenging ideas of control), locating the wild thus understanding the wild can be located anywhere; time and practice (developing new relationships and skills takes time); sociocultural change (embracing thoughtful activism); building alliances and human community (recognizing interdependence, intersections and the collective)” These dimensions can serve as a framework for educators, guiding and supporting them as they engage with wilding pedagogies and highlight the practical nature of such pedagogy. Biologists have also emphasised the need for a shift in human perceptions of biological systems to fully comprehend the significance and contributions of the natural world (Papworth *et al.*, 2009). In this regard, indigenous and local knowledge can play a crucial role in fostering attitudes and behavioural changes towards the wild, with schools serving as important catalysts for such transformations (Aikens, 2020).

### Changing and challenging Botswana’s education system

Botswana is part of the developing world and still has the opportunity to focus on nature. The concept of wild pedagogy is in its introduction phase and, therefore, has the potential to be easily adopted, as it can be tweaked and adapted to the context (Jickling *et al.*, 2018; Ketlhoilwe & Velepini, 2021). The shift in re-opening a larger window to the wilderness, not just as an extracurricular activity but also as a planned and policy-driven initiative, is important to the wild. Future and present generations come into contact with a world different from the past (UNESCO, 2016; Schleicher, 2018).

Pre-existing policies in Botswana align with the implementation of wilding pedagogies, as emphasised by Ketlhoilwe and Velepini (2021). The United Nations Conference for Development (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992) called for increased awareness of desertification and drought, particularly within primary and secondary school curricula. Additionally, Africa Agenda 2063, promoted by the Africa Union Commission in 2015, advocates for Africa’s prosperity through the sustainable management of ecosystems, including wildlife and wetlands. In Botswana, the National Environmental Education and Strategic Action Plan, along with the School Environment Education Policy, promotes environmental conservation through education. These global, continental, and regional efforts complemented and reinforced the implementation of wilding educational policies. Consequently,

there is an urgent need to incorporate wilding education policies as highlighted by Ketlhoilwe and Velempini (2021). Moreover, in their scholarly article entitled “Misplacement between policy and practice: Initiating environmental education in school curricula in Botswana,” Kitso *et al.* (2015) discovered that the implementation of environmental education in schools was not particularly successful. The researchers observed that the responsibility for incorporating environmental education into classroom instruction fell primarily on the teachers. However, the teachers demonstrated limited comprehension of environmental education and exhibited a lack of motivation and willingness to engage in such initiatives. Furthermore, the activities in which students were involved were predominantly confined to the school premises and included litter picking and occasional tree planting lacking broader community engagement.

Botswana is a signatory of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the government of Botswana also came up with the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan as a way to inform the health of Botswana’s ecosystems and related species. These initiatives are in line with the Botswana Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and are compatible with wilding pedagogies. The primary objective of the strategy is to establish a harmonious relationship with nature, thereby ensuring the well-being of the present and future generations. This strategy emphasises the significance of preserving Botswana’s biological heritage and associated knowledge, including the sustainable utilisation of its biodiversity (Ministry for Environment, Wildlife and Tourism, 2007).

The strategy emphasises the need for commitment and active involvement of all stakeholders. It also emphasises the importance of raising awareness and understanding among individuals about the significance of preserving biodiversity and utilising its components in a sustainable manner (Ministry for Environment, Wildlife and Tourism, 2007). This paper argues that the implementation of wilding pedagogies policy can contribute to the achievement of the goals outlined in the Botswana Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. By incorporating wilding educational policies, students can be educated on the value and importance of the natural environment. This education can help students develop an understanding of how to utilise and preserve natural resources responsibly (Velempini & Ketlhoilwe, 2022; Damoah & Omodan, 2022). Furthermore, engaging students in wilding education can lead to a positive shift in their attitudes and behaviours towards the natural world (Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021; Muraina, 2023). Lastly, environmental education has the potential to facilitate actionable research and on-ground practices, which in the long term can inform future policy decisions (Ardoin, Bowers, & Gaillard, 2020).

### **Wilderness spaces in Botswana**

Botswana’s wild side presents abundant opportunities to adopt a wild educational policy (Ketlhoilwe & Velempini, 2021). Thirty-nine percent of Botswana’s territory consists of protected areas; thus, Botswana exhibits an exceptional level of conservation (Barnes, 2001). Protected areas include Moremi Game Reserve, Chobe National Park, Nxai Pan National Park, Makgadikgadi Pans National Park and Central Kalahari Game Reserve (Magole, 2009; Taylor, 2000; LaRocco, 2019; Bolaane, 2013). Areas in the north have larger wildlife populations. Among these famous features is the Okavango Delta, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Affordable sites, such as the Mokolodi Game Reserve, Gaborone Game Reserve, Moremi Game Reserve, Khutse Game Reserve, Crocodile pool river safaris, Khama Rhino Sanctuary and Nata Bird Sanctuary, are among the areas in which wilding pedagogies can be carried out (Tripadvisor Nature & Wildlife Areas in Botswana, 2022).

### **Acknowledging the land**

The acknowledgement of the land serves to recognise the interconnectedness between individuals, the land, language and attentive listening. However, it is crucial that this acknowledgement is not merely superficial but is accompanied by tangible actions (Robinson *et al.*, 2019). Indigenous land

philosophy is significant in acknowledging the wild. In Botswana, both the country and its people have unique historical and cultural relationships with land. Incorporating community knowledge into a curriculum allows for a deeper and more enriched understanding of local narratives, histories and community experiences regarding interaction and preservation of the environment and its resources. This can be achieved through the inclusion of cultural practices, such as totems, taboos, songs and other relevant objects (Kethhoilwe & Velepini, 2021). The authors also draw attention to the fact that these components, as emphasised by other scholars, are rarely present in educational materials, resulting in a curriculum that fails to reflect local knowledge that is directly applicable to the local population. Consequently, the local community is overlooked as a valuable source of information and may not feel a strong sense of attachment to the environment (Styres, 2011). Wilding pedagogy supports the interaction of students with community members, from which they can learn, rather than relying solely on textbooks and other traditional methods (Blenkinsop & Beeman, 2010; Renshaw, 2021).

This pedagogical approach enables students to gain knowledge of the historical context and the local transformations of their environment. For instance, in countries such as Botswana, where oral traditions are prevalent, older generations can share stories about land, plants and communities with the younger generations. The implementation of wilding pedagogies in education has the potential to bring about revolutionary changes and to foster constructive and progressive advancement.

### Return to the holistic

The acknowledgement of land can facilitate the return to a more harmonious relationship between humanity and the natural world. Friedel (2011) argues that Eurocentric perspectives on nature experiences are problematic because they fail to recognise the interconnectedness of traditional territories with urban spaces and identities. Cronon (1996), a well-known critic of the concept of wilderness, has long challenged the representation of wilderness by settler-states and neocolonial powers, particularly in regions such as South and North America and Australia, which have been impacted by settler colonialism. It is essential for educational approaches that promote the restoration of natural environments to confront the historical legacies of colonialism and acknowledge that the wild is not simply a recreational destination but a living entity with the right to occupy spaces. The colonisation of Botswana has resulted in the loss of precolonial traditional cultures that valued the preservation of nature and the abandonment of practices that supported environmental flourishing.

This paper argues that re-wilding pedagogies can foster the acknowledgement, appreciation and recognition of the diverse environments and cultural heritage they encompass. Education should promote sustainable economics based on the unique ecosystems and geographical features of each community (Oguri & Takano, 2020). Therefore, wilding pedagogies provide a platform for acknowledging nature beyond its recreational and creative aspects (Manning & Harrison, 2018; Morse *et al.*, 2021; Sarra & Shay, 2019).

The post-humanistic perspective drives the positioning of humanity as part of the world and not as a dominant feature. Post-humanists argue for a more-than-human world (Snaza, 2013). As noted by Quay (2020), post-humanist ideals can be used to investigate the wilding of educational policy. The post-humanist stance helps dialogue over the problematic prioritisation of 'subject-matter as the object of education.' The author explains the inherent difficulties associated with other elements of the natural world as objects subject to human dominance. Proposing the extension of moral and obligatory consideration via educational means to non-human living entities presents a formidable challenge to the prevailing hierarchical nature of the status quo.

Policy and education have centred decisions on human needs. This positioning of post-humanism calls for the joint, shared, and mutual prosperity of all forms of life, embracing

a more-than-human world. Wilding educational policies can be a tool that questions existing assumptions and helps in sustainable development and rethinking educational possibilities. This new train of thought, as suggested by post-humanists, would allow the education system to embrace new learning possibilities that include a world that is more than human. Exposing students to the wild can and will enable them to recognise and understand diverse communities beyond humans and have a deeper understanding of themselves and their interactions with the wild (Morse, Blenkison, & Jickling, 2021). The African philosophy of *Botho* or *Ubuntu* is strongly aligned with the post-humanistic perspective, understanding nature and humanity as interdependent. The interconnectedness is communicated under the saying “I am, because you are” this highlights that all living things depend on each other for survival (Coetsier, 2022). The *Botho* philosophy recognises all forms of life. Re-wilding, which is informed by indigenous and local knowledge, has the potential to maximise contemporary wild management.

### Conclusion: Practical implications of re-wilding education for Botswana

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the significance, relevance and potential of wilding pedagogy. Wilding an educational policy can improve the quality of education; promote student-centred, active, and transformative learning, and ultimately improve academic achievement (Kethloilwe & Velepini, 2021; Nature Play QLD, 2019). Most importantly, wilding pedagogies can aid teachers and students in a much-needed reconnection with nature and the stewardship of the natural environment (Mannion *et al.*, 2013). In their study Kitso *et al.* (2015) found that environmental education was often limited to picking litter in schools and occasionally planting trees. Many activities are limited to environmental clubs. New constructs, such as principles of the wild, can be coupled with existing principles, standards, and values to effectuate-wilding practices. Students should be taken outside the school compound on visits to the wild through activities, such as camping and hiking. These seven principles of the wild, may also be suitable for wilding education. The principles, namely, plan ahead and prepare, travel and camp on durable surfaces, dispose of waste properly, leave what you find, minimise campfire impacts, respect wildlife and be considerate of other visitors. The seven-principles approach highlights how humanity should interact with the wild. It is important that humanity is aware how their actions impact the wild as an ecosystem (National Park Service, 2022). Humanity must see the wild as an equal market rather than a consumerism market. There are unique opportunities exist for Botswana to participate in wilding activities. The lack of a clear direction from educational administration through the establishment of a policy on wilding pedagogies is a barrier to the innovative implementation of pedagogical approaches. Educational administration and leadership should embrace and encourage growth through policy. In conclusion, it is imperative to acknowledge and designate wilding pedagogies as a strategy for constructing and situating it within the realm of education and instructional practices.

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## Author Biography

**Yone Duduetsang Matsagopane** is a PhD candidate, in the Faculty of Education at Southwest University. Her major research interests lie in the area of educational leadership, health and well-being among students, nature and African studies.

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