

**PROTEST AS PEDAGOGY:  
EXPLORING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN INDIGENOUS  
ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS**

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**Abstract**

This article reports on a recent study into the experiences of Indigenous and allied environmental activists with teaching and learning during and as a result of Indigenous environmental movements. This inquiry is grounded in a theoretical framework informed by decolonization and cultural revitalization, social movement learning, and repressive tolerance. Interviews with ten participants across Canada produced rich insights related to significant life experiences, the tensions encountered by activist educators, the complexity of inter-activist relationships, interaction with police agencies, the plurality of protest, and the revitalization and sharing of Indigenous traditions as the ultimate form of resistance.

**Key words:** Indigenous – Environmental – Justice – Activism – Pedagogy – Canada

## Introduction

Indigenous peoples and allies in Canada and around the world are currently resisting a wide array of natural resource developments that threaten both the cultural and ecological integrity of traditional territories (Alfred, 2009; Hall, 2009; Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014; Lane, 2006; Ornelas, 2014). This resistance takes many forms ranging from protests and blockades; engagement with social, popular, and independent media; advocacy and legal action; artistic initiatives; reclamation and revitalization of cultural and ecological systems through land-based education; and, increasingly, the re-visioning of traditional knowledge and wisdom through community-based environmental initiatives. Sustaining such efforts often requires the cooperation of Indigenous peoples with each other and non-Indigenous allies.

As a Land-based Métis scholar and educator of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry originally from Treaty Seven Territory in southern Alberta, Canada, an economic and intellectual centre of oil and gas development, I have participated in many instances of Indigenous environmental activism ranging from organizing university teach-ins during Idle No More (Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014; Lowan-Trudeau, 2013), a nation-wide grassroots Indigenous movement that began in the fall of 2012, to on the ground protests against the Northern Gateway Pipeline (Lowan-Trudeau, 2015a). In my experience, these kinds of socio-ecological initiatives not only raise critical awareness of issues amongst activists, but also hold the potential to foster increased dialogue and pedagogical opportunities for individuals with diverse perspectives and opinions, representing various communities and institutions. Social movement learning scholars such as Hall (2009) and Clover (2010) concur and suggest that there is great pedagogical

opportunity inherent within activist activities, an underexplored area of literature. More specifically, Haluza-Delay (2013) calls for increased inquiry into the intersection of Indigenous environmental activism and pedagogy.

Inspired by the tensions described above, my personal experiences and observations, and these underexplored areas of literature, the purpose of this study was to explore the teaching and learning that occurs during and as a result of Indigenous and allied environmental activism through conversations with leading activists and educators in order to gain a deeper understanding of the pedagogical potential of such movements.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework incorporating decolonization (Battiste, 2005; Smith, 2012) and cultural revitalization (Alfred, 2009; Simpson, 2008), social movement learning (Clover, 2010; Hall, 2009), and repressive tolerance (Kahn, 2010; Marcuse, 1965) guided this study.

### **Decolonization and Cultural Revitalization**

Battiste (2005) suggests that decolonization involves not only critical challenges to colonialism and the ongoing oppression of Indigenous peoples, but also cultural and linguistic revitalization, partnership building, and the respectful sharing and recognition of ecological knowledge for the benefit of all members of society. Battiste emphasizes that this process must involve both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and educators working together in local contexts. Alfred (2009) and Simpson (2008) also

suggest that the ultimate form of decolonization and resistance is, indeed, cultural revitalization.

Fortunately, despite the ongoing plethora of socio-ecological conflicts across North America and around the world, inspiring examples in this spirit are rapidly emerging. In some cases, renewal of traditional philosophies and practices is also part of a direct response to encroachment on traditional territories. For example, well known Anishnaabe activist and scholar LaDuke (2014) describes her community's efforts to not only resist further encroachment by oil and gas companies into their territory, but also their efforts to revive and share traditional farming, harvesting, and intergenerational pedagogical practices.

### **Social Movement Learning**

Many cases of Indigenous and allied activism involve the intersection of social and ecological issues under the banner of environmental justice (Agyeman, Cole, Haluzadelay, O'Riley, 2009). Environmental justice movements often result in a variety of both intentional and unintentional learning outcomes for participants and observers alike (Clover, 2010; Hall, 2009). For example, Hall (2009) highlights the individual, collective, spontaneous and (re) generative pedagogical nature of social movements and proposes three common forms of social movement learning:

- a) informal learning occurring by persons who are part of any social movement;
- b) intentional learning that is stimulated by organized educational efforts of the social movements themselves; and
- c) formal and informal learning that takes place amongst the broad public, the citizens, as a result of the activities undertaken by ... a given social movement (p. 46)

In a manner similar to Indigenous scholars of decolonization (e.g. Alfred, 2009; Battiste,

2005; Simpson, 2008), Hall also states that social movement learning involves “deconstructing relations of power” (p. 58) and through transformative resistance, the recovery of traditional wisdom and creation of new ideas and even societal institutions. Clover and Stalker (2008) also highlight the artistic and creative nature of many social movements while Scandrett et al. (2010) suggest that social movements often involve much more than mere protest; rather, they become “epistemological communities engaged in the generation and distribution of knowledge, theory and culture through 'cognitive praxis' and the creation of spaces for social learning” (p. 125).

Such efforts to not only resist, but also revitalize and recreate the world as we want to see it resonates strongly with the efforts of Indigenous scholars and community leaders such as those described above. As Hall (2009) emphasizes, “They are not the indirect struggles for power that will one day make a change; they are the world we want experienced right now!” (p. 49).

### **Repressive Tolerance**

Marcuse’s notion of repressive tolerance provides further insight for framing this inquiry. Marcuse (1965) proposes that a dominant sociopolitical system will often tolerate a certain amount of resistance in order to preserve a democratic façade. However, this tolerance only extends so far and does not actually allow meaningful change to the status quo. As a result, it continues to repress subjugated groups who in turn tolerate this repression under the guise of perceived freedoms.

Marcuse therefore suggests that the only way to overcome repressive tolerance is first, through working within the system to promote change (Kahn, 2010) and, if that is

not successful, through radical resistance and “extralegal means” (Marcuse, 1965. p. 11). While I share the concerns of those who worry about Marcuse’s endorsement of extralegal means (Kahn, 2010), in the context of this inquiry I question how activists and educators might then respond when the system does not allow them to meaningfully broach critical socio-ecological topics such as Indigenous environmental issues. I also wonder if the political elite’s tolerance for a certain amount of resistance is merely another form of “greenwashing” (Scandrett et al, 2010, p. 130) to momentarily let the pressure out of an otherwise oppressive societal and educational structure that has effectively institutionalized protest (Ramos and Rodgers, 2015) in order to absorb and further control activism.

Finally, I am intrigued by Van Heertum’s (2009) proposal to reconsider repressive tolerance with a view to focusing on the constructive potential of protest and critique; as he invokes Freire in noting, “we are always struggling [both] against ... and for something” (p. 114).

In consideration of such dynamics, my own experiences as an activist educator, and the literature and theoretical framework described above, the research questions that guided this study include:

- What characterizes the pedagogical experiences of Indigenous and allied environmental activists?
  - What is being taught? What is being learned?
- What role might educators play in such endeavours?
  - What tensions might they encounter?
  - What strategies might they employ to overcome systemic resistance to engagement with critical socio-ecological issues?
- What are the broader societal implications of such considerations?

These questions were explored through the methodology described below.

## Methodology

The methodological approach of this study was developed in close relationship with the theoretical underpinnings described above, providing due consideration for Indigenous, interpretive, and social justice approaches to research. This study was methodologically informed by foundational concepts common to both Indigenous and interpretive approaches to research (Kovach, 2010; Lowan-Trudeau, 2012) such as:

- Reflexivity
- Reciprocity
- Narrative engagement
- Geographical positioning of researcher and participants, and
- Awareness of and respect for the protocols of Indigenous participants

This methodological approach is what Anishnaabe scholar Ray (2012) would call a convergent Indigenous methodology as it seeks common ground and critical resonance between Western and Indigenous traditions.

Ray (2012) builds on the foundational work of leading Indigenous theorists Kovach (2010), Smith (2012) and Wilson (2008) to provide an insightful overview of contemporary Indigenous methodologies, which she describes in two related forms: strategic and convergent. She suggests that strategic methodologies are:

Motivated by anti-oppressive and anti-colonial agendas ... This type of Indigenous methodology may contain Traditional knowledges, but these are not a requirement for it to be considered an Indigenous methodology. Thus, the meaning of Indigenous within this context does not have to be directly attached to Traditional knowledge systems, but to Indigenous agendas and contemporary Indigenous experiences of oppression, colonization and resistance. (p. 89)

Consequently, strategic methodological approaches often draw primarily from Western research traditions in order to “speak back” to repressive systems and create space for

Indigenous perspectives in academic and societal dialogue. Ray (2012) subsequently explains that convergent methodologies are more explicitly guided by traditional Indigenous approaches to knowledge collection and interpretation, but may still employ Western methods to varying degrees.

One might also add to Ray's discussion by recognizing those researchers who have begun to move beyond convergent approaches to rely primarily on Indigenous languages, protocols for knowledge gathering, approval, and dissemination in their research. For example, Indigenous scholar Alfred Metallic (2010) made history when he composed and defended his doctoral dissertation at Canada's York University entirely in the Mi'kmaq language. Metallic's doctoral committee was composed of Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics as well as Mi'kmaq Elders and cultural protocols were followed in his final defense (McLean, 2010). This precedent has led others to pursue graduate work using Indigenous languages and protocols. Such approaches are especially appropriate in cases where an individual is seeking knowledge from a particular Indigenous community that is able to not only provide the information, but also guide the process of knowledge evaluation and validation.

As stated above, this study is an example of convergent Indigenous research, guided by a spirit of decolonization and reconciliation (Battiste, 2005; Smith, 2012), motivated by social and environmental justice and informed by both Western interpretive and Indigenous research traditions. Such an orientation is reflected and described further in the methods described below.

## Methods

The first stage of this study involved semi-structured audio-recorded interviews with ten participants of approximately 60 minutes in-person, by phone, or via videoconference. An interview guide consisting of 6 open-ended questions asked participants to share stories related to their personal, professional, and activist backgrounds and motivations, experiences with teaching and learning during and as a result of activism, and perspectives on the relationship between formal and informal education, leadership, and activism.

Participants from a broad range of cultural and professional backgrounds were recruited from across Canada through my personal and professional contacts as well as further snowball sampling. Consent was achieved through a Western-style consent process using written documentation. However, prior to some interviews, according to the preference of individual participants, tobacco was also offered in recognition of traditional North American Indigenous protocols for the solicitation and provision of knowledge (Lowan-Trudeau, 2012; Lickers, 2006).

Participants included:

- **Marie** (pseudonym), a lawyer, musician, and academic of mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry from central Canada
- **Brad** a Euro-Canadian academic in eastern Canada;
- **Paul** a Euro-Canadian academic from central Canada;
- **Chantal** a community and political organizer of mixed Cree and European ancestry from western Canada;
- **Rita** a Chinese Canadian academic from western Canada;

- **Rajan** a graduate student and community organizer of mixed South Asian, European and Cree ancestry from western Canada
- **Bill and Heather** a Euro-Canadian couple active both in academia and civic governance in eastern Canada;
- **Sophia** (pseudonym) a Euro-Canadian scientist from central Canada; and
- **Ryan** a graduate student and university instructor of mixed Anishnaabe and European ancestry from central Canada

Transcripts of each interview were prepared and subsequently sent to participants for review and approval. Approved transcripts were then individually and collectively interpreted based on the original research questions and emergent themes (Lichtman, 2012) while also drawing on Denzin's (1989) interpretive biographical methods to search for epiphanic "aha" moments where significant learning occurred related to key concepts.

I also continued to revisit the transcripts throughout the interpretive phase of this study in response to iterative learning that emerged from further review of pertinent literature. This circular process led to the creation of this article, a dialogue drawing on my own experiences and perspectives in relation to those of the participants with support from relevant literature.

All publications related to this study are shared with participants in advance for approval of their representation and any further thoughts that they might wish to share. While this reciprocal and reflexive approach is more time intensive than simple member checking, it often adds further layers of depth and interpretation. It is also in keeping with Indigenous approaches to sharing and gathering stories, wherein respect for the knowledge holder (participant) is paramount (Kovach, 2010).

As presented below, this interpretive approach resulted in some predictable themes that relate directly to the original research questions, but also allowed for unexpected themes to emerge that may not have been originally anticipated.

## **Findings**

The findings presented below respond to the original questions guiding this study related to the teaching and learning that occurs during and as a result of Indigenous environmental activism, the tensions encountered by educators who engage with critical these issues, and the broader societal implications of such considerations. Notable findings that arose in conversations with participants include insight into the significant life experiences of Indigenous and allied activists, the tensions encountered by educators, the complex relationships between and within activist organizations, relationships with law enforcement agencies, and the promise of individual and collective cultural revitalization as the ultimate form of resistance.

### **Significant Life Experiences**

At the beginning of every interview, I asked participants introductory questions related to their motivations for becoming involved with Indigenous environmental activism. This often led to discussion of their significant life experiences (SLEs). While the significant life experiences of environmental activists and educators have been explored extensively in the literature, the overwhelming focus of these inquiries has been focused on the lives of “white, male conservationists” (Ceaser, 2014, p. 1) rather than those from marginalized communities. While I did not actively seek to explore the SLEs

of Indigenous, female, and allied activists in great detail at the outset of this study, they provide important contextual understanding.

As Ceaser (2014) anticipates, most participants in this study shared positive memories of and associations with the natural world in addition to negative and marginalizing experiences as catalytic motivations for becoming involved in activism. For example, Ryan described early experiences on the Land and water and a familial tradition of social justice advocacy as formative in his concern for and connection to the natural world and ecological justice issues. However, he also ascribed his rapid immersion into Indigenous environmental activism at the beginning of his doctoral studies to acute exposure to injustices occurring near his family's territory and an abrupt shift in federal politics that negatively impacted Indigenous peoples across Canada.

Ryan's experiences reflect what Ollis (2011) calls "circumstantial activism", wherein people react intensely to an acute social or environmental crisis and, as a result, learn a significant amount of issue-specific information through self-study and organized events in a short period of time which often leads to longer term involvement in related actions.

Other participants like Brad and Paul also discussed their negative reactions both to federal and provincial politics as well as specific local instances of environmental injustice as motivating factors for their activism. This is a trend that I can most certainly relate to as my involvement with environmental activism is rooted in early positive experiences with my family on the Land, but also motivated by contemporary local, regional, and national politics. As Chantal commented in reference to our previous federal government:

I'm really worried about what's happening to Canada ... We went from top of the heap as far as environmental protection and legislation to, in two omnibus bills [C-38 and 45], the very bottom ... I'm worried about my kids. I'm worried about their job security. I'm worried about their health. I'm worried about their future, really, and the environment has everything to do with that. But I'm also worried about them connecting to their roots.

Rita described her ever-increasing awareness and work to raise awareness of the intersectionality of social, gender, cultural, and ecological oppression. She described an early epiphanic or “aha” moment (Denzin, 1989) that set her on this path:

I was born in and grew up in Calgary, which ... is the traditional homelands of the Tsuut'ina, Siksika, and Stoney First Nations ... As a Chinese Canadian woman growing up there ... I didn't really learn about that history; it was something I had to learn outside of school in many ways ... A moment for me that was really important was the Winter Olympics, when the Lubicon Cree started protesting [oil company sponsorship] ... It really made me realize how little I knew about Alberta.

Rita and others (e.g. Brad and Chantal) discussed how their personal confidence and “alternative networks of power” (Ceaser, 2014, p. 8) have grown over time as they became more involved with activist initiatives. This trend is reflective of Ceaser's (2014) proposal that environmental justice advocates often experience three related SLEs:

- The recognition of their social/environmental marginality;
- The embodied knowledge produced from their experiences;
- And the empowerment that comes from working with others in a community for [environmental justice] (p. 1)

As reflected above, most participants in this study discussed the formative influence, both positive and negative of early and significant life experiences on their involvement with and positioning within environmental activism. Understanding participants' motivations and past experiences helps to provide greater context for the study. As Ceaser (2014) suggests:

By giving greater focus to the contexts, situations, and positions that subjects are placed in, we can obtain a greater number of different kinds of experiences as well as a larger understanding of why such experiences are considered significant.

However, individual activists do not exist in isolation and, as such, relationships between educators, activists, and organizations also arose as common points of consideration.

### **Teaching the Tension**

One of the primary questions guiding this study inquired into the experiences of educators who attempt to introduce Indigenous environmental issues into their teaching and work environments. Ollis (2011) proposes that workplaces often serve as rich contexts for both intentional and unintentional learning through informal conversations with colleagues and others in addition to more structured initiatives. As such, Ollis also argues “activism which is informed by even the smallest acts of resistance in the everyday work of community workers is just as significant and important as the mass mobilisation of thousands of people in direct protest” (p. 22). This theme of both the potential for, but also inherent tension associated with, workplace learning around critical issues came up extensively in my conversations with participants in this study, most especially for those engaged in educational environments.

While several participants, such as Marie and others working in post-secondary settings, described the difficulties and tensions that they encounter on a regular basis as critical educators, many also discussed the inherent privilege and potential power of their positions. For example, Brad discussed being “tugged” by his students to walk the talk and become more involved in the issues that he raises in his classes. He also highlighted

the role he now often plays as a spokesperson and liaison with media during protests and other activist initiatives. Paul also discussed the potential for administrators to engage in activism through initiating and leading curricular and administrative reform.

Several participants also emphasized the importance of linking educational institutions with their surrounding communities in a variety of ways beyond protest. For example, Bill and Heather discussed their outreach work in schools and other community settings to raise awareness of critical environmental issues such as hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”). Bill commented:

It’s important that we be engaged -- we need to understand the big picture that government is "us", and so many people see it as "them". And the only way we are going to solve our problems is by working together.

Others such as Paul and Rajan also shared stories of hosting community events related to Indigenous and environmental issues on university campuses.

All of the initiatives mentioned above have the potential to create great tension for these educators and community leaders. However, many participants also shared insights to successfully avoid, diffuse, and re-frame conflicts with colleagues and students related to critical socio-ecological issues such as:

- Seeking out resources to ensure that you have the content background and confidence to support your students’ learning;
- Valuing controversy and fostering critical discussion rather than oppositional debate;
- Embracing ambiguity and maintaining a sense of humour;
- Facilitating case-based inquiry connected to current events;
- Fostering interaction between your institution and a variety of stakeholders from the broader community; and
- Reaching out to form relationships with supportive allies and even perceived opponents, an approach that Niblett (2008) describes as “appreciative resistance.” (Lowan-Trudeau, 2015b, p. 46)

Related considerations pertaining to acknowledging and addressing tensions between and within activist groups also arose throughout this study as described in the following.

### **Activist Relationships**

In response to questions inquiring into the learning that occurred during and as a result of their involvement with Indigenous environmental activism, many participants discussed extensive lessons learned related to the importance and complexity of building and maintaining relationships in Indigenous environmental movements. These insights are somewhat reflective of discussion in the literature related to the importance of attending to relationships in social movements (e.g. Hall, 2009). However, unexpected findings, such as some participants' positive experiences with police, also emerged that respond to my original interest in the broader societal dynamics of this inquiry as viewed through a lens of repressive tolerance (Marcuse, 1965).

### ***Intercultural Relations***

Many of the participants discussed the delicate and dynamic nature of intercultural relationships during Indigenous environmental activism. Several of the non-Indigenous participants also shared stories both of learning from their mistakes as well as epiphanic moments (Denzin, 1989) when relationships were successfully built and/ or deepened.

Rita and Sophia also discussed their realizations related to the multiple levels of leadership demonstrated by their Indigenous partners. For example, while some community members have authority due to elected processes, others hold influence

arising from traditional and hereditary roles as Elders and community leaders. Sophia described this as a constant and dynamic process where individuals may step forward at one point, then move back to allow others to lead in certain situations.

Several non-Indigenous participants also mentioned significant learning related to traditional cultural protocols and ceremony that they experienced during activist events. For example, Brad shared the story of his first talking circle, a profound experience that challenged his comfort level with sharing personal details, but also transformed his understanding of himself and Indigenous cultures where he lives, and served to strengthen relationships with Indigenous partners. Paul also related the story of cultural protocols and practices (e.g. smudging) that were carefully shared by an Indigenous participant during a pipeline resistance walk in central Canada.

Others, such as Indigenous participants Chantal and Marie, also discussed the tensions that can arise during intercultural activist partnerships. As such, Marie and others (Sophia, Paul, Brad) emphasized the important support, but not lead, role that allied activists can play.

On a related note, several participants (Marie, Brad, Paul, Sophia) also shared experiences and observations related to disagreement and in-fighting between individuals and groups of activists. Chantal described her difficult, but very important, position as a mediator during such disputes. Such a role can be especially challenging in intercultural situations where not only personal, but also cultural nuances must be taken into consideration. In response to such considerations, many participants emphasized the central importance of clear communication in intercultural activist endeavours.

Bill and Heather recalled the experience of being unexpectedly brought together with their Indigenous and Francophone neighbours during circumstantial activism related to common concerns regarding natural gas exploration. They also shared “aha” moments from this experience wherein they gained great insight into the prejudice still faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada on a regular basis.

Several other participants related similar experiences of cross-cultural bonding during circumstantial activism (Ollis, 2011). However, Marie also commented that while large crowds occasionally gather for high publicity activist events, it is most often a small core of people who carry out sustained advocacy. Ryan seemed to concur when he noted:

The folks who are actually willing to put on the boots, and to go out continuously, not just for a one-day ... mass rally ... but to continuously put their feet on the ground in direct activism, is [usually] a very small core.

However, many participants also described their optimistic observations of a slowly building allied momentum and critical awareness across Canada and around the world. Marie, a very experienced Indigenous activist, noted that she has observed increasing decolonization amongst non-Indigenous activists. Others also described surprisingly positive relationships with the broader community, including police as described below.

### ***Police Relations***

One unexpected sub-theme that arose relates to interaction between activists and police. This theme is especially relevant in relation to Marcuse’s (1965) notion of repressive tolerance and the initial research question related to broader societal implications that deeply informed the theoretical framework that guided this study. Predictably, some participants did describe tense encounters with and negative

impressions of police, however others also spoke quite strongly about positive experiences and productive long-term relationships that they had developed with individual officers and entire police forces.

This positive dynamic is reflected to a limited extent in the literature, however, as might be expected, police-protestor relationships are overwhelmingly portrayed in oppositional terms, while examples of collaborative policing and “negotiated management” of activist events (Gorringe and Rosie, 2013) are scarce. This is reflective of a growing trend, especially in Europe, of police forces making intentional efforts to build local relationships and nuanced understanding (Waddington and King, 2007) to work proactively with activists to anticipate and diffuse conflicts during protests through various means (Gorringe, Rosie and Stott, 2012). However, given a past history of largely negative experiences, a certain amount of hesitation to place full trust in police forces remains understandable.

One participant in particular, Chantal, spoke at length of her positive experiences with police in a western Canadian city. Chantal discussed the development of long-term relationships with individual officers during and in anticipation of various protests related to Indigenous and environmental issues. She mentioned the designation of an Aboriginal liaison officer and an open hearted community-building mentality as key to building and maintaining these relationships. As Chantal stated, “When you’re doing activism, or standing up for something, it becomes a community. And if it’s not becoming a community you’re not doing it right”.

Chantal also described instances where the police had protected protest groups from the aggressive actions of bystanders and also helped to calm overly agitated

protesters. Chantal's description of such police action also reminds me of the respectful actions of the RCMP in their dealings with Elders during the Trans Mountain Pipeline protests in Vancouver last year (Prystupa and Uechi, 2014).

However, given many other instances of negative encounters with law enforcement, this is not to say that other activists' reticence to trust police is not warranted. Indeed, in keeping with Marcuse's (1965) notion of repressive tolerance, some scholars rightly question whether such tactics are, in fact, merely a shrewd method to infiltrate and control social movements (Gorringer and Rosie, 2013; Ramos and Rodgers, 2015). As Bill stated:

Far too often it's been the case ... in my experience, where ... police action has been politicized, where they've been told to do something for political reasons. That's what they did when we were up there [at a protest], they blocked off the roads, they showed overwhelming force to intimidate a bunch of [elderly] people, and it was shameless ... I had a long conversation with the RCMP officer in charge of this area, saying that I think they made a really bad mistake because the RCMP, the police, have to be above the fray. They can't pick sides.

Given mistrust for police and the potential for conflict during traditional protests, many activists have begun to express themselves through a creative variety of methods.

### **The Plurality of Protest**

Another common point of learning expressed by many participants in this study that carries broader societal implications is that activism can take many forms beyond traditional rallies and protests. Several participants discussed employing various forms of "cultural activism" (Buser, Bonura, Fannin, and Boyer, 2013) such as musical and artistic approaches, while others cited other creative approaches such as long distance swims or

walks, satirical events, and installations in addition to the aforementioned practices of educators, administrators, and civic leaders.

Paul discussed a variety of serious, artistic, and satirical events organized by a local climate change awareness group with whom he is involved. One event in particular, a “Pipeline Café”, brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous speakers and musicians. Paul described how this event resulted in substantially enhanced relationships with Indigenous Idle No More organizers who subsequently attended and supported other climate and environmental awareness events and even a multi-day walk along a proposed pipeline route through Indigenous territories.

Marie also described her work as an Indigenous musician through a critically joyful lens. She described her own struggle to reconcile anger with past and current cultural and environmental issues with a sense of joy and humour. Marie shared an “aha moment” related to feelings of guilt and lateral violence wherein she finally came to realize that, amidst such critical considerations, it was okay to have fun with her music and in life in general. She also noted the importance of working to build peaceful relationships and that even supportive allies can become overwhelmed and tired of negative messages. As such, she wisely commented that:

This is about my relationship to the environment and Mother Nature ... as long as we breathe the same air, and we have to drink the same water, it all is part of a connected system, and ... if you hurt one person you hurt all of us. I knew that. I got that big time [and] some of these messages have to be wrapped in a really, really, really sweet package, otherwise they're not going to get heard at all.

Marie’s perspective aligns with subsequent discussions related to individual and collective awareness of our interconnection and the related revitalization of Indigenous practices and protocols for the benefit of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike.

## **First Protest Yourself: Towards Revitalizing Indigenous Traditions**

Perhaps most importantly, in keeping with themes of decolonization (Battiste, 2005) and revitalization (Alfred, 2009; Simpson, 2008) described earlier, several participants also discussed the realization that, before we can presume to advocate for or towards others, we must first “protest” ourselves, reflexively considering our own habits and actions in light of those societal dynamics and practices against which we struggle.

As Rajan noted:

As we come to understand how things are interconnected, the person we start "protesting" is ourself – addressing our own pathologies and negative tendencies, and responding with love, tenderness, and compassion – and then our family, and our community, ... if we get it right, if we act in accordance with these universal principles, these universal laws ... of interconnection, our world will come right ... So I guess in that sense I believe ... that our first priority is to educate and transform ourself, and as that occurs, our community will transform and reflect the goodness that we are awakening inside.

This process of moving from self to community awareness was also described by several participants who shared individual and collective practices of honouring and revitalizing Indigenous traditions to reconnect to culture and place as the ultimate form of resistance and learning. This theme manifested itself in several ways as examples of both teaching and learning.

For instance, while Chantal discussed the centrality of drumming and sharing traditional songs as part of her activist leadership and participation, others like Paul described learning that he experienced related to ceremonial and land use protocols during a multi-day walk along a proposed pipeline route. He stated:

One of the other people said, you know, the first thing we need to do is ... ask the First Nation in the area if we can be on their traditional territory. And that was another immediate and large learning for me ... I feel embarrassed that I, you

know, I study, I work in Indigenous education ... and I should know that sort of protocol.

On a related note, several participants in this study also discussed development of a collective sense of place from Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives in both rural and urban contexts. For example, Rajan discussed the common sense of place that was articulated by a diverse group of rural Euro-Canadian farmers and Indigenous peoples during a locally focused environmental conference that he organizes on a yearly basis in the same region. Sophia also mentioned the collective sense of place that was expressed by a collective of urban residents as a foundational and motivating factor behind an intercultural environmental initiative that she was involved with in western Canada.

Buser, Bonura, Fannin, and Boyer (2013) note that a collective sense of place is often both a motivating factor and a result of land-based activism. This perspective is also in keeping with Hall's (2009) position described earlier wherein activism is a manifestation of the kind of world in which we wish to live. Such experiences also align with the work of Indigenous scholars such as Alfred (2009) and Simpson (2008) who describe cultural identity and protocol reclamation as the ultimate manifestation of resistance.

### **Final Thoughts and Future Directions**

This study was motivated by my own experiences as a Métis educator and activist with teaching and learning during and as a result of Indigenous environmental movements. Insights offered by the participants responded to guiding research questions related to the experiences of activists with teaching, learning, and relating to one another during Indigenous environmental movements; the experiences, tensions, and successful

strategies to overcome resistance encountered by educators working in this area; and the broader societal implications of such considerations.

The experiences and insights shared by the participants were subsequently interpreted through a theoretical and methodological lens built on decolonization, social movement learning, repressive tolerance, and Indigenous and interpretive research traditions. As an interpretive researcher, I also allowed myself to remain to “aha” moments (Denzin, 1989) of my own when unexpected themes and insights emerged during and as a result of interviews. Such instances subsequently led me to revisit and further explore pertinent areas of literature. This circular process helped me to clarify and further understand the meaning and depth of the wisdom shared by participants. It also assisted me in articulating the significance of this study in addition to identifying lines of inquiry that might be followed in the future.

For example, while exploring the significant life experiences of marginalized activists in great detail was not an original goal of this study, rich discussion in this area emerged in most interviews. As such, this study has contributed to this underexplored area (Ceaser, 2014) that could still benefit from further focused inquiry.

The experiences of leading educators and other activists with encountering and overcoming tension between themselves and in their workplaces were discussed in great detail in this study. Inspiring stories from several participants demonstrated critical intersectional awareness and the development of “alternative networks of power” (Ceaser, 2014, p. 8). However, one area that remains to be explored in detail is the experiences of educators who are interested in, but still hesitant to raise critical Indigenous environmental issues in their pedagogical contexts.

Another finding of note was participants' descriptions of both positive and negative experiences with and perspectives on police officers in Canada. As discussed by a small group of scholars (Gorringer et al, 2012; Waddington and King 2007), amidst seemingly endless cases of police brutality in North America, collaborative policing is gaining ground, especially in Europe, however more case-based inquiry is required to fully understand this shift. Marcuse's (1965) cautionary notion of repressive tolerance is also instructive in this regard as it leads us to question whether such actions are truly grounded in a collaborative spirit or simply a shrewd tactic of the neoliberal establish to gain greater control over contrary elements of society. Given the limited amount of literature available in this area (Gorringer et al, 2012; Waddington and King 2007), further inquiry into such dynamics would be a welcome addition to this ongoing discussion.

Diverse forms of activism ranging from street protest to teach-ins, art, music, and long-distance walks were also recognized and described by many participants. Several participants also discussed the importance of first "protesting yourself", critically examining your own practices and beliefs before looking outwards to build and engage community. This line of thought naturally leads to the central importance of revitalizing Indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions as the ultimate form of resistance (Alfred, 2009; Simpson, 2008).

Hall (2009) suggests that there are three different types of social movement learning: that which is learned experientially through participation, that which is intentionally taught and learned through structured initiatives, and that which is learned through observation. This study revealed significant amounts of the first two types of learning as most participants shared extensive detail regarding the teaching and learning

that they have experienced and facilitated during and related to Indigenous environmental movements. However, the third type of learning, observation, is much harder to ascertain. For example, it would be compelling to gain insight into the perspectives of both sympathetic and antagonistic observers of Idle No More (Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014) and other recent Indigenous socio-ecological movements in North America and beyond.

In Canada and elsewhere, Indigenous environmental rights remain a constant source of societal misunderstanding and tension with new cases of resistance to resource developments arising on a regular basis. However, as suggested by the scholars, educators, and activists profiled in this study, this struggle must involve not only a fight *against*, but also *for* the world in which we wish to live, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike.

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