

From Reticence to Resistance:  
Understanding Educators' Engagement with Indigenous Environmental Issues in Canada

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in

*Environmental Education Research* on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018, available online:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13504622.2017.1422114?needAccess=true>

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### **Abstract**

Educators who introduce critical socio-ecological issues into learning contexts often experience formidable internal and external challenges. This is especially true when intersecting Indigenous and environmental issues are involved. Compounding such difficulties in Canada is an inadequate level of pre-service, curricular, resource, and research support in this area. As such, while an increasing number of bold educators are incorporating discussion of Indigenous environmental issues, activism, and related history, law, and policy into their teaching practice, many others are interested, but remain understandably reticent. This study explored the experiences of educators in a variety of contexts across Canada with attempting to incorporate critical consideration of Indigenous environmental issues into their teaching practice. Findings include discussion of challenges encountered, successful strategies employed, the societal significance of these considerations, and future research possibilities.

**Key Words:** Indigenous – Environmental – Justice – Education – Activism

**Acknowledgements:** This study was supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Insight Development Grant.

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Educators who introduce critical socio-ecological issues into learning contexts settings commonly experience tension with their students, colleagues, and administrators (Jickling, 2003; Niblett, 2008). This is especially true for educators attempting to facilitate consideration of environmental issues linked to Indigenous contexts as they are often faced with the challenge of not only providing historical and contemporary information, but also with disrupting deeply rooted colonial prejudices (Battiste, 2005). As presented in the following, such difficulties are often compounded for educators in both formal and informal educational contexts in Canada by an inadequate level of pre-service, curricular, resource, and research support in this area (Jardine, 2012; Ottmann and Pritchard, 2010; Tupper, 2014).

While an increasing number of bold educators are incorporating discussion of Indigenous environmental issues and related history, law, and policy into their teaching practice, many others are interested, but remain understandably reticent (Lowan-Trudeau, 2017a). Similar to those working in other sociocritical areas related to ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and economics, they may be hesitant to engage with controversial topics due to a lack of confidence in their preparation, a desire to avoid conflict, and the potential for intersectional tensions and burnout faced by activist educators (Gorski and Chen, 2015). Building on a previous inquiry into the pedagogical experiences of leading Indigenous and allied environmental activists (Lowan-Trudeau, 2017a), this article reports on a recent study that explored the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators of

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both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in primary and secondary school (K-12), community-based, and post-secondary settings with attempting to incorporate critical content and discussion related to Indigenous environmental issues and associated activism into their teaching practice. While this study focused primarily on participants' experiences in Canada, several participants also emphasized the transnational nature of many Indigenous struggles (Alvarez, 2008) through reference to time spent in and insight gained from other countries such as the United States, Guatemala, and Portugal.

In my experience as a Métis professor of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry with a background in land-based outdoor and environmental education, socio-ecological conflicts not only raise regional and national tensions, they also hold the potential to stimulate increased dialogue and pedagogical opportunities for individuals, communities, and institutions across the sociopolitical spectrum (Lowan-Trudeau, 2017a). Whether they realize it or not, protestors often serve a pedagogical function by drawing attention to and raising awareness of contemporary issues (Hall, 2009; Kahn, 2010). Similarly, as considered in detail below with reference to Marcuse's (1965) theory of repressive tolerance, educators who engage students in sociocritical topics are often, depending on their context, enacting resistance, whether consciously or unconsciously, to administrative, curricular, and societal pressures. In consideration of such dynamics, this study was grounded in the theoretical traditions described below.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework informed by decolonization (Battiste, 2005; Simpson, 2002), Eisner's (2002) concept of the explicit, implicit, and null curricula, and Marcuse's (1965) notion of repressive tolerance guided this study.

#### **Decolonization**

The critical deconstruction and disruption of colonial institutions and ideologies is a key consideration for decolonizing Indigenous environmental education (Simpson, 2002). Battiste (2005) argues further that decolonization must involve both the contestation of colonialism and oppression in concert with sincere efforts to build relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and educators to support the respectful sharing of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives. As such, critical consideration of the curricula guiding contemporary pedagogical practices is vitally important.

#### **The Three Curricula**

Eisner's (2002) concept of the three curricula was also useful for framing examination of policies, institutional dynamics, and pedagogical practices relevant to this inquiry. Eisner's three curricula include the explicit—that which is taught overtly and mandated by curricula; the implicit—that which is taught by implication through the structure of the institution; and the null—that which is taught by not being taught at all.

Critical educators facing challenges to their teaching approaches encounter and grapple with Eisner's three curricula on a regular basis. For example, while curricula may mandate Indigenous topics that are less controversial such as traditional knowledge,

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practices, cultures, and historical treaties (Jardine, 2012; Ottmann and Pritchard, 2010), educators attempting to make explicit connections between historical treaties, contemporary Indigenous issues, and associated activism may still encounter tension with their students, peers, parents, and administrators (Tupper, 2014). Both the implicit and null curricula in such a scenario are clear: Indigenous topics that threaten the foundational assumptions of colonially dominated Canadian society have no place in contemporary educational discussions. The implications of such dynamics in educational institutions and society at large are profound; as Eisner (2002) suggests, “what schools do not teach may be just as important as what they do” (p. 97). As explored in further detail below, educators who choose to introduce controversial topics that aren’t explicitly mandated by curricula are enacting a form of societal resistance.

### **Repressive Tolerance**

Marcuse’s (1965) theory of repressive tolerance also contributed to the conceptual framing of this inquiry. With reference to dominant socio-political systems, Marcuse theorized that those in power will often allow a modicum of public activism and resistance in order to promote a false sense of democracy. However, this tolerance does not extend so far as to allow meaningful exchanges of power in a given society. As such, repressed communities often continue to suffer under a false sense of freedom. This is what Marcuse termed “repressive tolerance”. Under such a system, he proposed that it is admirable to first seek transformation from within (Kahn, 2010). However, in the face of repeatedly failed attempts to create change from within, one might then seek transformation through more radical resistance. This proposition led me to wonder how educators, in particular, might respond when the dominant societal discourse and

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associated curricular mandates do not encourage, or perhaps even allow, them to meaningfully broach controversial topics such as Indigenous environmental activism?

In addition to the dynamics and theoretical framework described above, this inquiry was guided by the following questions:

- What educational policies, practices, initiatives, and resources are required to provide greater support for and understanding of educators attempting to introduce discussion of Indigenous environmental activism in their practice?
- What tensions, challenges, and barriers do educators working in this area encounter?
- What strategies might educators employ to overcome such difficulties?
- And finally, what are the broader societal implications of such considerations?

Such questions and considerations were reflected in the methodological decisions that guided this study as described below.

### **Methodology**

In keeping with the theoretical framework described above, this inquiry was informed by critical, interpretive, and Indigenous methodological paradigms (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Wilson, 2001). Collaborative ethnography, a methodological approach developed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers and community members that aligns well with contemporary approaches to Indigenous research (Lassiter, 2000), was a particularly strong influence. Common tenets and practices within Indigenous

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methodologies that were incorporated in this study include respect for participants' stories, reflexivity, reciprocity, researcher accountability, geographical contextualization, problematization of critical issues, and awareness of and respect for the protocols of the Indigenous participants with whom one is engaging (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2001, 2008).

Collaboration with research participants can take many forms—it may simply entail in-depth member checking opportunities to thoughtfully discuss, guide, and confirm the interpretation of participants' narratives in such a way that their voices emerge authentically in representative texts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2012). However, when inspired by collaborative ethnography, the researcher and research participants may go beyond simple member checking to co-develop publications, presentations, theatrical performances, or artistic creations (Lassiter, 2000; Papa & Lassiter, 2003). As such, a collaborative ethnographic approach often produces findings that are accessible to a wider range of people outside of the academic world and, most importantly, the research participants themselves. Indeed, both Lassiter (2000) and Australia-based Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2001) encourage us to question our fundamental motivations along such lines—are we merely pursuing research to advance our own careers and gain status in the academic world? Or, are we truly committed to pursuing research as a form of activism, committed to our participants with the hope that the research will also be of emotional, social, and/ or cultural benefit to them? As described in further detail below, this study provided participants with opportunities to both participate in ongoing member checking as well as to contribute to collaborative visual presentations.



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Similar to past projects that I have conducted that were inspired by collaborative ethnography (e.g. Lowan, 2009), my experiences with this study reminded me of the limits of both collaboration and broad ethnographic description in relatively smaller scale and shorter-term projects as well as the ultimate responsibility of the researcher. However, in keeping with the expectation in many Indigenous cultures that listeners are ultimately responsible for seeking the inherent lessons held within oral stories on their own terms (Kovach, 2010), this study provides readers with the reflexive opportunity to both critically interpret and, perhaps, find themselves within the broad community of educators and individual experiences described as mediated by the methods presented below.

### **Methods**

Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators who have experienced internal reticence to and, in some cases, negative reactions from students, colleagues, or superiors to incorporating critical content and discussion related to Indigenous environmental activism into their teaching practice were recruited through professional networks, snowball sampling, and a general call for participation.

Following recruitment, 10 semi-structured audio-recorded interviews of approximately 60 minutes were conducted in-person, by phone, or via videoconference. These conversations were gently guided by an interview guide consisting of 9 open-ended questions related to participants' thoughts on and reactions to both challenging and successful experiences with incorporating consideration of Indigenous environmental issues and associated activism into their teaching practice. Participants were also invited to consider and discuss the broader policy implications and potential societal impact of

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such experiences. If participants anticipated or naturally spoke to questions outlined in the interview guide in the course of the discussion, those questions were not repeated in order to maintain conversational flow. I also maintained a field journal to remind myself of key insights and quotes from each interview that were subsequently considered during the interpretive process described below.

Interview transcripts were created and sent to participants for review and approval along with an invitation for any further commentary that they wished to provide. Approved transcripts subsequently underwent thematic coding and interpretation based on the original research questions and emergent themes (Lichtman, 2010). Kovach (2010) notes that such an approach is acceptable in Indigenous research as long as individuals' stories have also been preserved and respected; for example, extended dialogue with and possibly written portraits (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005) of participants in this study will be presented in a book currently in progress. In keeping with a collaborative ethnographic approach, participants in this study were also invited to contribute images to a collaborative visual project representative of their experiences with and perspectives on the key themes of the study. Some of these images have already been shared, with permission, during oral presentations (e.g. Lowan-Trudeau, 2016). Further member checking was and will continue to be conducted for participants' approval of how they are represented in this and any subsequent publications.

Participants referred to in the following include:

- **Brad**, a Euro-Canadian professor and community activist in eastern Canada;
- **Melanie**, a community-based artist of mixed European descent raised in Central and South America, now based in Canada;

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- **Bob**, an outdoor and environmental educator of Métis and European ancestry based in southern Alberta;
- **Jim**, a retired school teacher, professor, and outdoor educator originally from the United States, now based in British Columbia;
- **Jeff**, a university instructor, visual artist, and retired teacher and administrator of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry based in southern Alberta;
- **Alison**, a Euro-Canadian professor now based in Portugal;
- **Martha**, a Euro-Canadian professor and filmmaker in southern Ontario;
- **Miranda**, a land-based educator of Cree and European descent in the Northwest Territories;
- **Nick**, a Euro-Canadian professor in the Pacific Northwest;
- **Sam** (self-selected pseudonym), a Euro-Canadian university instructor in southern Ontario

### Findings

Significant findings soon emerged upon interpretation. Themes of note presented below relate to overcoming common pedagogical challenges; land-based, inter-generational, and locally grounded pedagogical approaches; the pedagogical potential of storytelling; and experiences with administrative activism.

### Common Foundational Challenges

When asked about the challenges that they have encountered while attempting to engage with Indigenous environmental issues, a number of participants from a variety of perspectives discussed common struggles also faced by educators in other contexts such

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as the persistent difficulty of feeling unable to cover all of the concepts and issues they would like to due to finite time and resources (Collinson and Fedoruk Cook, 2001). Several participants also mentioned the related challenge of keeping up with current events in order to incorporate them into their pedagogical praxis. This challenge is sometimes further compounded by a lack of confidence and grounding in the foundational concepts relevant to contemporary Indigenous environmental issues. For example, Sam shared not only her successful experiences, but also the ongoing challenge of the work required to stay up to date with current events while striving to facilitate informed consideration with students:

I think I still have some issues with being able to bridge contemporary events .... [For example] as Idle No More was going on I was including little bits here and there, but I didn't know how to reach the topic. And I guess 'cause I didn't really want to provide a forum for the students who were gonna be like, "Oh what they're doing is blah, blah, blah, blah ... They're just complaining." ... I didn't want to open that up and so I chose instead to keep it on the surface and I put in little things here and there about what the Harper government was doing so that they would maybe have some understanding on why it was happening. But I do feel like there [are] some unanswered questions for me there about when that was all happening, how could I have brought it in?

Other participants also discussed their desire for in-service support and training related to Indigenous environmental rights and issues. Sam suggested that freely available and reliable online resources and virtual meeting places would also be a welcome development. In response to Sam's suggestion, I am currently developing a website [web address blinded] with a research assistant that will share a range of foundational and curriculum-linked information for understanding Indigenous environmental rights and issues across Canada in a variety of subject areas.

In the face of the persistent foundational challenges describe above such as limited time, a lack of subject background and confidence, and limited curricular support,

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most participants also discussed further strategies that they employ or aspire to overcome or circumvent such difficulties and others as described below.

### **Local Resources and Connections**

All participants in this study discussed, in various ways, the importance of seeking out and adopting locally relevant resources and forging personal connections to support their work related to Indigenous environmental issues.

Several participants, such as Brad, discussed the value of local case studies in assisting students to make connections with more general principles of course content. In a manner reminiscent of Indigenous scholars of decolonization such as Battiste (1998, 2005), Alison also emphasized the importance of striving to design courses from the beginning through a critical Indigenous lens with readings from Indigenous scholars and opportunities to include and possibly team teach with local Indigenous knowledge holders. As Eisner (2002) might surmise, such approaches hold the potential to transform both the explicit and implicit curricula—by changing what is overtly taught and who does the teaching, we also teach important values through example.

Sam also shared a strategy that she employs which is to begin by engaging with cases from the recent past that are still relevant, like the Oka conflict, which she finds elicits somewhat less negative student reactions, before moving into more contemporary concerns. Other common strategies mentioned include adopting practices such as recognizing the traditional Indigenous custodians of particular regions—a seemingly simple, but surprisingly unsettling act which Bob, a land-based Métis educator, shared can raise questions and tensions with students and colleagues alike in certain contexts.

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In a thoughtful comment that resonates with my own perspective and experiences, Nick, a non-Indigenous professor, also emphasized the importance of normalizing recognition and awareness of, and engagement with local Indigenous peoples and cultures while remaining cognizant of the objectifying danger of over-romanticization. In a manner reminiscent of both decolonizing theory (Battiste, 1998, 2005; Simpson, 2002) and Marcuse's (1965) concept of repressive tolerance wherein those in power may allow superficial changes to preserve a democratic façade as described above, Martha also noted that, while practices such as acknowledging local land holders can be significant, they can also prove superficial if not accompanied by shifts in power dynamics between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. She stated:

I hear the land being recognized here, there, and everywhere, at the beginning of events and so on. [However,] I don't see power being given, I see power being taken, you know? .... It's a very interesting moment in terms of the openness, in terms of the conversation, in terms of the cultural shifts that are happening. Whether those will effect a power shift as well ...? The fact that I am not completely pessimistic about it, and I am generally completely pessimistic, is perhaps telling.

In a similar spirit, Bob discussed how moving beyond routine acknowledgement of land to expanding students and colleagues' understanding of local people and practices through, for example, locally relevant storytelling and informed historical narratives can serve to not only raise local awareness, but also reduce overly general and romanticized conceptions of Indigenous peoples.

Nick also provided strong examples of both administrative and pedagogical initiatives at his institution that he believes are mutually important and beneficial. Examples he provided include efforts to increase the number of Indigenous students on

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campus while also supporting initiatives such as a summer field school which finds Nick and others leading students on an expedition across the Salish Sea, connecting with Indigenous peoples on both side of the colonially imposed US-Canada border.

**Engaging with Elders.** While the importance of including Elders in meaningful ways in Indigenous education programs is well established in literature (e.g. Simpson, 2002) and practice (e.g. Sutherland and Swayze, 2012), Miranda, a land-based educator of mixed Cree and European ancestry, astutely clarified that, despite misinformed stereotypes to the contrary, most Indigenous Elders carry quite specific teachings in certain areas, but may not in others. For example, an Elder with ceremonial knowledge may not be as deeply versed in local plant or animal knowledge as another who is, but doesn't hold extensive ceremonial or historical knowledge. Miranda also noted that different Elders in the same region may hold differing perspectives on certain topics or knowledge systems. As such, she respectfully shared that it can sometimes prove challenging to find someone with the knowledge required to support a particular initiative. She also suggested that bringing multiple Elders together for discussion can prove to be a successful strategy that encourages the sharing and recognition of multiple perspectives both between the Elders themselves and others who may be in attendance.

In a comment that resonates with my own past experiences, Bob also cautioned that, while open sharing of traditional knowledge seems to be increasing, some Elders and knowledge keepers remain understandably reticent and cautious to share certain aspects of traditional knowledge due to the historic misuses and abuse of Indigenous environmental knowledge (Simpson, 2004). Such insights gained during time spent with Elders led Bob to a deeper understanding of these dynamics and also highlighted for him

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the importance of considering and respecting protocol to demonstrate trustworthiness when approaching Elders.

Nick also shared the insight that, while many educators look to Indigenous Elders when seeking support, other knowledge holders, such as carvers, may also be available and interested in working on educational initiatives. Miranda also lauded the development of resources such as the Dene Kede curriculum for the Northwest Territories, which includes, among many other things, suggestions for respectfully working with Indigenous Elders. Like many others, Miranda noted that such resources are often more difficult to find in the southern provinces. One might consider such dynamics through Eisner's (2002) lens of the Three Curricula—the presence of and ease of access to authentic and local Indigenous resources arguably teaches students and teachers alike explicitly and implicitly that these topics are valued. However, what about regions where such resources are not readily available or mandated by the curriculum? What does such conspicuous absence imply and teach through exclusion about the value of such topics?

### **Land-Based Approaches**

In a related theme, several participants also discussed the power of land-based, intergenerational approaches. While such information may not be surprising to many familiar with Indigenous and decolonizing scholarship as this is now an established area of practice and theory (e.g. Simpson, 2002; Tuck, McKenzie, & McCoy, 2014; Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox & Coulthard, 2014), many participants specifically discussed the potential value of land-based experiences for fostering more harmonious discussion



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of critical Indigenous environmental issues, an emerging area of practice and underexplored area of literature.

As most experiential educators, including myself, know well, facilitating land-based approaches is not without challenges. For example, two participants, Jeff and Jim, both long time educators, discussed the generally negative reactions and discouragement from colleagues that they experienced earlier in their careers regarding taking students out of the classroom for environmental science lessons. For example, Jeff noted that he was often criticized for “not teaching science.” Both also acknowledged persistent, though not insurmountable, barriers such as risk management and cyclically variant levels of institutional support, but firmly advocated for its ongoing place both within and beyond our educational systems.

Other participants discussed transformational experiences that they have had and observed as leaders of land-based learning experiences. For example, Nick shared several stories from his time with a land and water based, transnational initiative that brings university students and professors into contact with various sites and groups of people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, around the Salish Sea that spans the US-Canada border. In the quote below, Nick describes how one iteration of the program, and one unplanned cross-cultural learning experience in particular, had the unintended outcome of creating students who became deeply invested in the issues raised during the course as future advocates:

The exposure to that experience, even though it was a simple introduction ... was profound ... It was the moment where we tipped the balance over ... the discussion that we were having earlier about the idea of like, “Well are we just romanticizing Indigenous peoples,” when they were face to face with the Indigenous people who were introducing themselves, that's their land and their parents, and their way of being, and their views and their goals and aspirations for

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the future, and their thankfulness, their absolute deep gratitude for just being in the circle. My students ... immediately flipped into that role of, “now I need to be an advocate for this, for this cause, for this idea of Indigenous rights.” And it was just this simple little activity that we did. And I feel like the more we do that sort of stuff where ... we don’t necessarily even have some overarching goal, the more we are just simply in each other's presence and sharing things, food or air, we can break through some of the stigmatized stereotypes that we get trapped in often.

Nick’s insights are reflective of Battiste’s (2005) suggestion that decolonization must involve the transformative efforts of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Many participants also described how land-based approaches facilitated in partnership with Elders can help to engage students in critical consideration of contemporary issues in a less confrontational manner. Miranda eloquently suggested that “land helps kids grow” and also build confidence. She used contemporary controversy regarding caribou herd populations and hunting and resource development regulations in the Northwest Territories as one example of a potentially tension-raising local issue that she has successfully discussed with a range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students while on the land much more effectively than in a standard classroom. Like Miranda, Melanie and Sam strongly advocated for such approaches in facilitating intergenerational dialogue between Elders and youth. Miranda and Sam both also emphasized that time spent together on the land can prompt students of all ages to not only consider the legal and political aspects of critical environmental issues, but also to deeply ponder on their own relationships with the Land and the narratives that they have absorbed from their sociocultural surroundings.

### **Storytelling**

Storytelling has been widely discussed and emphasized as a central Indigenous pedagogy for some time (Cajete, 2017); indeed, several participants mentioned

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storytelling during our conversations. However, what was of particular interest is the way that they discussed the role of storytelling in various forms (e.g. oral, written, visual) as an effective strategy for reducing negative reactions and associated conflict with students related to discussions of critical Indigenous environmental issues and, as a result, promoting deeper awareness and understanding, along with supporting First Voice (Graveline, 1998).

For example, Melanie discussed what she perceived to be a common, but not entirely pervasive, disconnect in artistic circles, as well as academic institutions, between aesthetic concerns and social and environmental justice. She also noted that engagement with Indigenous knowledge and issues in general is lacking. However, drawing on her own experience as a collaborative community-based artist, Melanie shared several inspiring stories and insights regarding the potential power of art as a medium to share important stories and connect people from various perspectives in less confrontational ways. For example, her first collaborative art initiative, during a visit with family in Guatemala, was a spontaneous banner painting project with young adults whose communities were adversely impacted by the activities of a Canadian mining corporation. The banner was eventually displayed upon Melanie's return to Vancouver, the location of the company's headquarters, to give voice to the young adults' stories and concerns, a privilege that they did not have at home in the face of considerable corporate power. Such an approach also highlights the interconnected and transnational character of many Indigenous struggles (Alvarez, 2008).

Reflecting further on that particular project which set her on a path towards many more, Melanie reflexively noted:

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I spent a few weeks [in Guatemala], and that's when I started ... seeing the direct impact on folks, and seeing how there [are] all these stories that were misrepresented and were misleading or even untold completely, and seeing the fear of the folks of being able to voice these stories because of the menaces that they were receiving. And then tying that to the self-teaching that I was doing ... myself, the readings and seeing how this colonial history was still very alive today, like in front of my eyes. And then personally going through a lot of questions of how do I reconcile inside of my body all these things that I am witnessing but just feeling that I don't have the power to do something, and what does that power mean and what [are] the implications of acting? And so ... how do I use my privilege and this money to give it a meaning that can benefit the movement and that can really question where this money is coming from?

With reference to this and other projects, Melanie discussed the subtly subversive potential of art; for example, mural projects that portray alternative historical and contemporary imagery that contest grand colonial narratives. She also discussed her experiences with visiting both K-12 and post-secondary institutions to use art to open critical conversation and consideration of social and environmental issues with particular emphasis on Indigenous concerns. Melanie also mentioned how such initiatives can transform public spaces by drawing attention to the absence of Indigenous peoples—a manifestation, in my interpretation, of the societal null curricula. She further emphasized the potential for such initiatives to bring together diverse groups of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Martha, a non-Indigenous academic and filmmaker, also emphasized the interpretive potential of visual storytelling through film; she suggested that less meaning is lost when stories are shared through film when compared to translated texts from Indigenous to non-Indigenous languages and contexts. Other participants such as Sam also discussed the value of visual art and film. She noted:

I find videos such a powerful medium because it really connects people's minds and their hearts. And I really like to work in the emotional quadrant a lot of the time in my courses. And so that's, as I said, another reason for my reticence is not

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wanting to hurt their hearts with stories that are so painful .... I really like to be ... mindful of their hearts in that process. And so video, I find, is a good method of waking their hearts up a little bit, calling to them, saying, “Hey .... these are people with, you know, emotions just like you and me, and this stuff is really important,” and I find video can do that.

Jim, whose experience includes teaching English in a college access program for Indigenous students in the 1980s and early 90s, echoed Eisner (2002) in describing how he would simultaneously transform both the explicit and implicit curricula of his classes while also supporting First Voice (Graveline, 1998) through introducing works by Indigenous authors in his course to stimulate student interest, a well established practice now, but perhaps a controversial one at the time as it deviated from the typical English cannon. Jim noted that this strategy typically led to a more informal learning environment that not only allowed him to develop stronger relationships with the students in his courses, but also to facilitate a higher rate of student success.

In a manner reminiscent of Cajete (2017), both Jim and Jeff also discussed how they have used storytelling to connect Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) with Western Science. For example, Jeff, originally a geologist by training, described how he forged connections between geological processes and Indigenous stories while Jim related a well-known salmon story that teaches an ecological lesson from his time spent teaching in the Pacific Northwest.

Finally, Miranda discussed encouraging youth to speak openly during her courses, something she finds easier to facilitate when out on the Land; she also mentioned that she consciously strives to build relationships with her students through, for example, a shared love of music.

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While all of the strategies discussed above are admirable and very effective in certain contexts, we also must also heed Marcuse (1965) in considering what educators and administrators might do when faced with oppressive pressure from those in power.

### **Administrative Activism**

In dialogues that brought to mind Marcuse's (1965) notion of repressive tolerance, several participants with a background in educational administration shared their experiences of working within and around educational bureaucracies to promote and effect the transformative socio-environmental changes they felt were necessary. For example, Jeff, an experienced administrator, discussed his experiences with and strategies associated with advocating for marginalized students. Jeff related that he often found himself fighting for the rights and well-being of such students both with senior administrators as well as social workers ostensibly hired to work in the students' best interests. He shared strategies such as building alliances with similarly minded administrators and leading by example to demonstrate that something is possible before asking permission. He also emphasized the importance of fighting for important causes when necessary, knowing when to back down, and learning from one's mistakes.

Brad, a university professor, also discussed the importance of choosing one's battles while also sharing that he is often motivated by his students' passion and enthusiasm to use his position of relative power within his institution to affect administrative actions such as the strategic selection of keynote speakers for high profile events.

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Jim, another highly experienced educator, shared similar insights. Still active in community boards since retiring, he suggested that, while at certain times it is important to speak out in an attempt to confront racism and injustice, it is also acceptable to remove yourself from a group that isn't hearing your voice in order to invest your time and energy elsewhere.

Several participants such as Martha, a professor and filmmaker, also discussed strategies such as working to effect formal and long-lasting changes to curricula and institutional policies for the benefit of both students and educators. Over time, such efforts will not only assist and encourage educators to incorporate Indigenous environmental issues into their teaching more regularly, they may also produce a new generation of citizens and teachers who are much better versed in basic concepts and their application in contemporary situations. Such insights assisted in articulating the scholarly and societal significance of this inquiry as discussed below.

### **Significance**

This study was guided by overarching research questions related to policies, practices, and resources that might support educators of Indigenous environmental issues; tensions, challenges, and barriers encountered by such educators; strategies employed to overcome such challenges; and the broader societal significance of these considerations. The Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators profiled in this study shared numerous insights in response to these questions. Findings related to the pressing need for stronger and more easily accessible resources, variable region-dependent levels of explicit curricular support, and a lack of pre- and in-service training for K-12 educators along

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with similar experiences for those in other learning contexts, may not have been entirely surprising, but they were important to note and consider. These dynamics also relate to the key finding that a paucity of resources and support may result in a lack of confidence for educators that are interested in, but hesitant to engage with Indigenous environmental issues.

Several participants also discussed persistent tensions and discouragement that they have encountered in their efforts to provide experiential land-based learning opportunities. However, they also related their commitment to and belief in such approaches while sharing inspiring stories and insights from such endeavours. Although land-based approaches are increasingly documented in the literature, Miranda's discussion of the potential of such environments, especially those of an intergenerational nature, for facilitating less confrontational consideration of socio-ecological topics expands our understanding of the pedagogical potential of this realm.

The relatively indirect, but often powerful, potential of oral and visual storytelling and other related art forms was also emphasized by many participants in a manner not extensively explored in previous scholarship related to Indigenous environmental education.

The stories shared by those participants with administrative experience are also insightful examples of both working within and around the system in order to build relationships while shifting institutional practices with the best interests of students in mind.

With reference to the final research question regarding the societal significance of this work, several participants had important thoughts to share. For example, Jeff



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suggested that engaging with critical socio-scientific, and environmental issues builds students' civic and global awareness that eventually leads to increased societal understanding. In a manner similar to Nick's earlier observations, Bob also commented that increased awareness of contemporary injustices can often prove motivating for both educators and students.

While several participants echoed recent literature on activist educator burnout (e.g. Gorski and Chen, 2015), Melanie provided a unique insight from the perspective of a collaborative community artist and educator regarding the highs and lows of such work:

There [are] tensions all the way. And I think it's the tensions that have made me stop and review and relearn, you know, and do all that shifting and movement. And sometimes the tensions get so intense that I ... retreat from creating for like a year or two .... feeling kind of without tools and without resources and without really knowing mentors, without really knowing if I'm doing the right thing. [But then opportunities arise such as one particular call] for artists to do a mural ... that connects people with each other [and] nature, and they wanted a community process. And so I saw it as an opportunity where I could ... use my privileges, and ... that opportunity to open spaces for folks to tell the stories that are often mistold or misrepresented.

As demonstrated in the preceding quote, despite such challenges and her own occasional bouts of cynicism and burnout, Melanie also expressed optimism and discussed the importance of focusing on and celebrating successful initiatives. She also noted that her desire to connect with, learn from, and facilitate voice for others is often motivating.

Reflecting on recent instances of Indigenous resistance and general societal dynamics and trends, Martha commented:

Where is this heading? I don't know .... I see power becoming more concentrated. I see the resource extraction agenda being intensified, but at the same time, you know, I see pipelines being blocked, I see a new generation of youth who are growing up proud and reconnecting to their cultures and reclaiming their territories. Is that going to happen on levels beyond the symbolic? I don't know, you know?

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Martha's point is well made and one might rightly ask what Marcuse (1965) would suggest in such a context—should we strive to work within the system to effect deep change slowly over time? Perhaps we should simply sidestep at times, working creatively on the fringes if needed as demonstrated by several of the participants above? Or is something more radically transformative required? Persistent questions such as these may lead to future inquiries of note.

### **Future Possibilities**

My hope is that the findings of this study will support and inform educators, academics, administrators, and leaders of government and Indigenous communities in developing future initiatives, resources, curricula, and partnerships in the area of Indigenous environmental rights and education. Enhanced critical discussion and education in this area will promote broader societal understanding of and support for Indigenous rights in future conflicts. As a relatively unexplored area of research in Canada and internationally, the findings of this study contribute to a limited, but growing area of the literature.

Further iterative questions and possible lines of inquiry have also arisen. For example, intersectional issues of gender, sexuality, cultural (mis) representation (Gorski and Chen, 2015), and associated power imbalances in administration (Marshall, 2004) as well as connections between resource extraction, environmental degradation, and violence against Indigenous women (Lowan-Trudeau, 2017b; Awasis, 2014; Carrington, McIntosh, and Scott, 2010; LaDuke, 2014) also require further exploration, consideration, and responsive action in educational research and practice.

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As Ceaser (2014) notes, the formative and professional experiences and life histories of environmental educators from historically marginalized groups also requires further exploration. While this was not an explicitly motivating factor for this study, the experiences of several Indigenous participants with experience in a range of educational contexts were presented. One might also consider insider-outsider dynamics (Innes, 2009) in applying a comparative lens to explore the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators in a study such as this, however an inquiry of this nature would have to be conducted with great care and clear justification for imposing such a dichotomous approach.

Educational researchers and practitioners serve important roles in such developments, assisting individuals and communities in their endeavours while deepening societal understanding through stories of struggle and hope. Over time, such efforts will not only assist and encourage educators to incorporate Indigenous environmental issues into their teaching more regularly, they may also produce a new generation of citizens and teachers who are much better versed in basic concepts and their application in contemporary situations.

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