

Activism and Environmental Education

Greg Lowan-Trudeau, University of Calgary, & Blair Niblett, Trent University

Environmental education has a long and complex relationship with activism. Scholars of environmental education have explored this current of our discipline both explicitly and implicitly from a variety of perspectives. While some have proposed that environmental education is, by its very nature, political and activist-oriented (Stevenson, 1987/ 2007), others have critically pondered the role of environmental educators as activists (Jickling, 1991; 2003). Others still have advocated for the explicit rooting of environmental education in critical theory and pedagogy (Kahn, 2010). Additionally, or as an alternative, they have engaged in scholarship that questions and/or resists neoliberalism (Hursh, Henderson, and Greenwood, 2015), anthropocentrism (Loro-Bidart, 2017) and anthropomorphism (Timmerman and Ostertag, 2011), colonialism (Tuck, McKenzie and McCoy, 2014), heteropatriarchy (Martusewicz, 2013; Russell, Sarick, and Kennelly, 2002), and other manifestations of social and ecological oppression. In this scholarly context, activism remains an important, yet controversial, mainstay of environmental education theory, research, and practice. As such, we sought submissions for this special issue from diverse perspectives that specifically investigate the relationship between environmental education and activism.

In the call for papers, we asked authors to consider questions such as:

- What counts as activism, and how does it relate to environmental education?
- What is the role of the activist-educator?
- How do we navigate the tensions of integrating activist environmental education into educational milieus that are viewed as politically objective spaces?
- What are the educational implications of the intersections of environmental activism and specific social movements (e.g., queer, Indigenous, decolonizing, environmental justice, anti-racist, feminist, animal rights, anti-poverty, anti-capitalist, peace)?
- What are the implications for environmental education of increasingly visible activist movements such as Occupy, Idle No More, Standing Rock, Black Lives Matter, Arab Spring, and ongoing resistance to global trade accords like the G20 and NAFTA?
- What are the pedagogical elements, possibilities, or pitfalls of environmental activism?
- How might we be simultaneously subversive, caring, and compassionate through activist environmental education?
- What are the impacts of social media platforms and corporate culture on

activism and environmental education (e.g., slacktivism, corporate greenwashing of activism)?

We received a broad range of submissions that explicitly and implicitly engage many of these and other important questions and tensions in both Canadian and international contexts. As noted in our original call for papers, we were also open to general submissions not related to the special issue theme. As such, we are pleased to present the following articles. We have divided the journal into two categories. The first category comprises five papers that were submitted specifically for the special theme issue on activism and environmental education. The final two papers constitute general submissions, but both papers in their own ways gesture to the inherently activist qualities of environmental education.

In the opening paper entitled, “Apprentissage social et mobilisation citoyenne pour une gestion démocratique, équitable et durable de l’eau au Mexique,” **Gerardo Alatorre-Frenk** discusses the recent rise of advocacy related to water rights and management in Mexico. Alatorre-Frenk considers the collaboration of grassroots organizers, scientists, academics, and Indigenous peoples in their interactions with government agencies and elected officials through a lens of environmental justice. He then juxtaposes a landscape characterized by significant natural beauty with one that is scarred by socioeconomic disparity and environmental degradation. Alatorre-Frenk also discusses the learning that occurred both during and as a result of an increasingly organized grassroots movement that emerged with the goal of fostering equitable water management in a spirit of “buen vivir.” This is an approach that acknowledges the importance of multiple voices in the pursuit of universal social and ecological well-being (Gudynas, 2011).

In her paper titled “Cultivating an Aesthetic Sensibility and Activism: Everyday Aesthetics and Environmental Education,” **Wanda Hurren** extends the ongoing conversation about the place of activism within environmental education by introducing possibilities for activist aesthetics as environmental education. She compares and contrasts public kinds of activism (like joining political parties and signing manifestos) with more private activism that individuals enact in everyday ways, including how we view and tell stories about the world around us. She notes that one thread that connects all forms of activism is heartfelt engagement. She maintains that heartfelt and intentional engagement with the aesthetics of the world we inhabit is not only a legitimate form of activism itself, but also stands to inform the ways that individuals and communities come together in more publicly demonstrative activist undertakings. Hurren seizes on the notion of heartfelt engagement to characterize and explore the aesthetic sensibility as a personal activist engagement, which she takes up through her own narrative process called Mapwork. Mapwork is an aesthetically intentional drawing together of words and images that are “taken up as a way to promote embodied knowing, specifically within research and pedagogy on notions of

place and identity. It is a process that acknowledges how places and selves are interconnected” (p. 28).

Employing phenomenological analysis, **Rachelle Campigotto and Sarah E. Barrett** focus on teacher induction as experienced by teacher-candidates who have “a background, passion, or interest in environmental issues” (p. 45). Titled “Creating Space for Teacher Activism in Environmental Education: Pre-service Teachers’ Experiences,” this study’s findings show environmentally-engaged teacher candidates wrestling with what it can mean to be both a teacher and an environmental activist. The findings emphasize participants’ discomfort in claiming the identity of activist-teacher (or a complete refusal to accept the identity at all). Their discomfort originates in a variety of sources, but the most notable was in an internalized spectre of radicalism, extremism, and dubious teacher professionalism related to activism within educational contexts. It is significant that these findings show alignment between pre-service teachers’ experiences and existing literature on practising teachers’ conception of activist-teacher identities (Marshall & Anderson, 2009; Niblett, 2014; North, 2007; Picower, 2012). To close their article, Campigotto and Barrett offer recommendations made by their participants for pre-service teacher training programs. These teacher candidates suggest that B.Ed. and equivalent programs could make their programming more conducive to the development of activist-teacher identities by: emphasizing experiential approaches to teaching and learning; foregrounding environmental education content across their curricula; and honouring teacher candidates’ prior activist or environmental experiences as valuable professional knowledge.

In **Thomas Macintyre and Martha Chaves’** paper titled “Balancing the Warrior and the Empathic Activist: The Role of the Transgressive Researcher in Environmental Education,” the authors explore the existential stances adopted by scholars of environmental education. In a manner similar to Alatorre-Frenk as discussed above, Macintyre and Chaves also cite “buen vivir” as a motivating concept for scholars and community visionaries throughout Latin America. However, in reflecting on their experiences with participatory research in an alternative living community in Colombia, they grapple with their own eventual disillusionment and discuss the complex relationships encountered by many “transgressive researchers.”

In the final paper submitted specifically for the special issue theme of activism and environmental education, **Lewis Williams and Nick Claxton** report on a gathering that brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples from Canada and elsewhere for several days on the traditional territory of the Tsawout First Nation on southern Vancouver Island. Titled “Recultivating Intergenerational Resilience: Possibilities for ‘Scaling DEEP’ through Disruptive Pedagogies of Decolonization and Reconciliation,” the paper discusses a “Summit” that was developed with the support of the International Resilience Network (IRN). As described in their abstract, the IRN constitutes:

a community of practice which aims to collectively impact social-ecological resilience, in part through transformative pedagogical practices which simultaneously support Indigenous resurgence and develop epistemological and relational solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. (p. 60)

Williams and Claxton raise important questions and share illuminating insights regarding the possibilities and tensions inherent in the work of the IRN and other similar initiatives.

The final two papers in this special issue are general submissions but, as noted above, allude to an inherent activism in environmental education. In their article titled “Untrodden Paths: A Critical Conversation About Wilder Places in Outdoor Education,” **Jo Straker, Tom Potter, and Dave Irwin** nuance place-based education discourses in New Zealand and Canadian contexts. They challenge contemporary place-based education calls for “IMBYist” (“in my back yard,” Linney, 2010) outdoor-environmental learning experiences, arguing that wilderness learning experiences are neither better nor worse than local outdoor learning, and that wilderness offers unique opportunities for learning that may not be accessed through more “front-country” programs. The authors’ dialogical method unfolds through literature-informed conceptual analysis that is interweaved with their decades of combined experience as practitioner-researchers of ecologically-conscious outdoor education. For these theorists, “wild” places offer rich and powerful opportunities for learners of all ages to think relationally about the world, and yet at the same time they challenge simplistic dichotomizations of “wilderness” from more developed or densely inhabited places, noting that what many Settlers would consider wilderness may simply be thought of as home for many Indigenous peoples. As editors, we hope that outdoor educators (and the broader readership) will find Straker, Potter, and Irwin’s conversation a helpful prompt for thinking about how humans can live more sustainably in both front-country and back-country contexts.

In our final paper of this volume, **Laila Mnyusiwalla and Michal Bardecki** offer a comprehensive content analysis of place-based environmental education within Ontario’s secondary school curriculum. In addition to analyzing the scope and frequency of compulsory curriculum expectations across school disciplines, the authors also assess student enrollment in courses that include place-based curriculum expectations. Their findings indicate an inconsistency in both the presence and emphasis of place-based environmental education in secondary school programming. The authors reason that such unpredictable inclusion of place-based environmental education may be connected with low student enrollment in courses where place-relevant topics are most frequently addressed. As well, they posit that many curriculum expectations that could be considered either place-based or environmental—or a combination of the two—are written so broadly that a teacher could “cover” an entire course’s curriculum without engaging students in place-based environmental learning at all. The study’s findings provide evidence of curriculum design problems that

pedagogues and policy advocates can use to challenge gaps between educational authorities' rhetorical commitments to environmental education and its quality implementation in Ontario and elsewhere.

In summary, the contributions made by the authors whose work constitutes this volume of the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* are both exciting and provoking. Their actions and ideas provide evidence for our supposition that environmental education is complexly bound up in socio-ecological change for a more just planetary future. This volume serves as a much-needed documentation of activist environmental education. Importantly, though, the most significant aspects of that work lie not in the digital pages of this (or any) journal, but in the agency of learners, researchers, teachers, and theorists to effect change. We stand in hope that in documenting such agency, we spur the enterprise of activist environmental education onward.

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