



## Adult learning, circumstantial activism and ecological habitus in the coal seam gas protests

Citation of final published version:

Ollis, Tracey. 2020. Adult learning, circumstantial activism and ecological habitus in the coal seam gas protests, *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, pp. 1-16.

DOI: [10.1017/ae.2020.32](https://doi.org/10.1017/ae.2020.32)

*This is the **accepted manuscript**.*

©2020, The Author

This version is reproduced under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 Licence](#). No commercial re-distribution or re-use is allowed. Derivative works cannot be distributed.

Downloaded from DRO:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30145071>

## **Adult Learning, circumstantial activism and ecological habitus in the Coal Seam Gas protests.**

### **Abstract:**

Recently the government of Victoria became the first state to ban fracking in Australia. This significant legislative outcome, could not have been achieved without the concerted campaigning of activists through the Lock the Gate Alliance (LTGA), in Central Gippsland. This paper outlines adult learning in the space of an important campaign against mining for coal seam gas. The campaign is mainly comprised of *circumstantial activists* who have come together due to the serious threat from fracking to the quality of their land and water supply. This case study research examines the knowledge and skill development of protestors as they learn from one another. It draws on Bourdieu's theory of practice to interpret the data. This research found the activists develop knowledge and skills as they protest, they learn to think critically about the environment and the impact of fracking for coal seam gas. They learn communication skills, group work and networking skills. They develop a *feel for the game* of activism by *learning informally* through socialisation with experienced activists from the LTGA and the environmental non-government organization (ENGO) Friends of the Earth (FOE). The experienced activists resource the coalition and provide informal learning opportunities and workshops to the protestors. Of note, is the suspension of the doxa of antipathy towards 'greenies' as the newcomer protestors learn to work closely together. The paper provides a case study of circumstantial activism and provides new insights into the practices of activists and social movements by applying Bourdieu's theory of practice.

### **Key words:**

*Adult learning, informal learning, environmental education, social movement learning, coal seam gas, ecological habitus, Bourdieu*

## Introduction

In Australia and internationally the environment has been the focus of social movements and activism for some time. In the United Kingdom, the group 'extinction rebellion' have blockaded the streets of London, in response to government inaction on climate change. Globally, youth protests through 'the school strike for climate' have seen thousands of young people taking to the streets to campaign for environmental change in response to the climate change. The recent 'Stop Adani' campaign against the proposed Adani mine in Queensland has been a key environmental issue in the Australian national federal election. Here activists are educating the community about the need to move away from coal-based power resources because it is one of the key contributors to global warming. These and movements for change are purposively educative because they are educating the world about the impact of climate change and the importance of environmental sustainability.

Adult education has long represented a tradition of learning outside the confines of formal education and schooling. Places and spaces of learning such as neighborhood houses, museums, libraries, community gardens, adult and community education centres, art galleries, community campaigns, public protests and social movements are all sites of adult education, although not widely recognised as such Burdick, O'Malley, and Sandlin (2013).

In recent years, it has been recognised that learning in communities, campaigns, activists' groups and social movements are significant sites of adult learning (Branagan & Boughton, 2003; Brookfield, 2005; Crossley, 2008; Foley, 2001; Jasper & Goodwin, 2004). In Australia, the work was led by Griff Foley in his important book 'Learning in Social Action', where he explored the incidental learning that occurs informally in sites or spaces of rich activity, such as Neighborhood Houses and Centres, environmental campaign groups and women's organisations. Learning was identified as incidental, informal, tacit and applied and not always recognized as real adult learning (Foley, 1999). Jesson and Newman (2004) claim people learn both individually and collectively through their engagement in community development activities and by their participation in social movements. Walter (2012) argues that central to these concerns has been the role of social movements in facilitating collective and individual adult learning; and the significant role of activist educators in advancing the important work of social movements.

My research has focused on the educational dimensions of activism and what activists learn as they participate in protest. They learn community development skills such as how to network, be an advocate, use the media, and lobby politicians. They also learn event

management skills such as crowd control, how to run a picket line, how to work with police to manage traffic in public spaces and so on. They learn high order critical cognition skills, such as understanding the political, social and economic dimensions about the issue that they are protesting about, often informally through their own self-learning. They learn through socialisation and observing the practice of other activists. In particular, the more experienced activists, named 'lifelong activists' pass on the dispositions, habits and practices of activism to the newcomer activists (Ollis, 2011, 2012b). The 'lifelong activists' are experienced activists, they have been involved in a range of campaigns and social movements over a long period of time. Some are influenced by parents or significant mentors, who were involved in politics or activism, others became involved in activism in student politics at university. The newcomer activists I have referred to as 'circumstantial activists'. They have not followed the usual path to activism by having early socialisation into politics through parents or significant early mentors. They are not necessarily aligned with progressive left politics, political organizations and social movements (Ollis, 2012a). They have come to activism due to a disruption, a crisis, a series of events that have motivated them to act. In the case of the Coal Seam Gas protesters, the serious threat to the quality of their land and water supply has motivated them to take action.

I am interested in the knowledge formation of adult learners in fields of learning such as activist groups, campaigns, communities and social movements. Whilst the literature on education and activism frequently refers to learning which occurs in social movements and sites of popular education (Branagan & Boughton, 2003; Burgmann, 2003; Couch, 2004; Crossley, 2002; Crowther, Martin, & Galloway, 2005; Earl, 2005; Foley, 1999; Jesson & Newman, 2004), there is a significant gap in the literature which explores the learning of 'circumstantial activists'. These educational experiences are largely ignored as these activists don't necessarily align themselves with radical left politics or alternatively identify themselves as being a part of social movements (Hamel-Green & Ollis, 2015). If we can understand the educational agency of these newcomer activists, there is the potential to build stronger and more resilient social movements for progressive social change, because as Walter (2012) has stated, activist educators advance the work of social movements.

## **Methodology**

This qualitative case study research was conducted with activists from a coalition of anti-coal seam gas groups through the 'Lock the Gate Alliance' (LTGA) with the NGO Friends of the earth (FOE). This research uses case study methodology to explore the educational

experiences of the protestors (Yin, 2012). In-depth interviews were conducted with 23 protestors to gain insight into the knowledge and skills that were developed in the campaign. The interviews for this research were conducted in the central Gippsland towns of Poowong, Seaspray and Koo Wee-Rup in Victoria, Australia. Access to participants in the research was facilitated through FOE. Interviews were primarily conducted face to face in central Gippsland. The transcripts from the interviews were given to participants to check for accuracy. The research participants who were interviewed for the research included 16 participants we define as circumstantial activists; they are novice campaigners. Five participants are experienced activists, who had been involved in a range of campaigns over their lifetime. They generally identify themselves as being a part of the environment movement. We also interviewed two of the paid FOE activist organisers, who are experienced activists. Those interviewed for the research came from a diverse range of backgrounds. They are a diverse group of people, they were local farmers, tree changers, retired professionals, some identified as environmentalists and were seasoned activists, many had not been involved in activism before but the common issue of fracking had brought them together. Their central motivation to act was concern about the environmental degradation to their land and water supply and the subsequent impact fracking could have on their local community.

Initial analysis of the data commenced through several readings of the data. The data was then coded as themes began to emerge from the data, enabling category construction of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The method of in-depth interviews were used to obtain the data (Marriam, 1998). This aligned with the methodology of case study research which sought to uncover the in-depth experiences of activists. Case study methodology generally provides thick descriptions of the data, it enables an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the research participants (Stake, 2003, 2006)

This research was given ethics approval through an Australian university ethics committee. All research participants either chose their own pseudonym or were allocated one in order to protect their anonymity. The data has been interpreted using Bourdieu's theory of practice a summary of Bourdieus thinking tools are listed below (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990, 1998).

### **Bourdieu and practice.**

As stated, the literature on activism and learning is eclectic and draws on several broad traditions of education and social theory. Pierre Bourdieu's writing on practice is useful to

interpret the practices of activists in the LTGA. In particular, his thinking tools of habitus, field, cultural capital, doxa and *illusio* can contribute a new dimension to how we understand activists' learning (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu's theory is a relational ontology, one which ... 'accords primacy to relations', it is also a theory of action (Bourdieu, 1990, p. vii). His theory of practice was written largely based on his experiences as an anthropologist, observing and interacting with people in Algeria. A committed structuralist at the time, he believed the theory of structuralism could not account for their complex ways of living, organising and behaving (Bourdieu, 1990). It could not explain certain cultural practices that had been passed on from generation to generation. It could not account for the Algerians' ways of working, their communal way of living, gender roles, marriage ceremonies and other aspects of community life that were a unique to Algerian culture (Bourdieu, 1990). Through his theory Bourdieu wanted to resolve some of the tensions in the social sciences between structure and agency, the tensions between objective and subjective epistemologies, in the social sciences (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu (1977, p. 3) claims his theory of practice:

... has no other aim than to make possible a science of *dialectical relations* between the objective structures to which the objectivist mode of knowledge gives access to the structured dispositions within which those structures are actualised and which tend to reproduce them.

In doing this he wanted to integrate an understanding of practical knowledge based on ... '*the continuous decoding of the perceived – but not consciously noticed*' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 8). This relational ontology commenced by beginning to analyse the ways in which people *organised, practiced and interacted* with each other.

### **Habitus**

Bourdieu believed certain habits, practices and dispositions are developed and reproduced largely through socialization (Bourdieu, 1984). Habitus is a collective process, its generative dispositions of family, class, social environment and cultural traditions create a habitus within a social field (Bourdieu, 1977). It is the dispositions, habits and practices within that field which produce the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1998). As Bourdieu (1977, p. 80) claims it is the consistency of the habitus and the practices within it, viewed as natural and normal that make it so powerful.

The homogeneity of habitus is what – within the limits of the group of agents possessing the schemes (of production and interpretation) implied in their production – causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted.

Returning to the LTGA the notion of habitus can also be applied to the way environmental activists in the LTGA organize themselves and practice (Crossley, 2003; Nilan, 2017). Crossley (2003, p. 104) defines habitus in social movements as a process which generates activity, and as Bourdieu claims, habitus is a 'structured and structuring structure' one which maintains the perpetuation of activism as a social practice (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). Crossley (2003, p. 104): claims activists' habitus is structured through their involvement in protest and this habitus is a 'motivating force' for activists to continue to be involved in social movements. According to Nilan (2017) an ecological habitus is developed and formed through being involved in the environmental movement, and embodied dispositions and social practices, which constitute a particular practice in environmental sustainability (Gabler, 2015; Nilan, 2017).

### **Field**

Field is used to describe the space or field of struggle. A field is a system of social positions, it is '*a field of struggle within which agents compete or confront each other*' Bourdieu (1998, p. 32). Field and habitus work together; habitus is the practices and dispositions of agents that are brought to the field. According to Bourdieu (1998), a field can be maintained, conserved or transformed. The field of the CSG campaign includes, different agents such as the LTGA protestors, including experienced and circumstantial activists, the FOE activist organisers, the mining companies, big business, media and government. Those who dominate the field do so based on the 'cultural capital' or resources they bring to the field.

### **Cultural Capital**

Bourdieu uses the term *cultural capital* to define the resources, knowledge, skills, abilities, networks and connections that players bring to the field. Agents are advantaged or disadvantaged based on the cultural capital they have (Bourdieu, 1984). This can include inherited capital, social position and social networks. As Bourdieu (1977, p. 188) notes, ... '*between the qualifications people obtain and the cultural capital they have inherited – in other words through the legitimacy it confers on the transmission of this form of heritage*'. The circumstantial activists are largely reliant on the knowledge that the FOE organisers bring to the field in terms of social movements and successful campaigning. This cultural capital gives legitimacy to their practice, because they have prior experience in successful campaigning. The farmers and tree changers similarly have a version of capital they bring to the field, such as knowledge of local rural community needs and farming.

## **Doxa and Illusio**

Doxa is the concept that long held beliefs, thoughts, ideas and practices that seem to be orthodoxy, correct and natural, have more often than not been imposed by a struggle of competing visions. Doxa is a point of view of the dominant, which generally presents and imposes itself as a universal view (Bourdieu, 1998). The doxa in this case is that green activists, farmers, tree changers, and rural folk, have competing interests or non-aligned views. This discourse will be explored further in this paper in the narratives of the LTGA protesters. Illusio is from the Latin word 'ludas', meaning game, Bourdieu attributes importance to the social game. For example, being in the game, believing the game is worth playing or having a feel for the game (Bourdieu 1998). Being in the game and playing the game is about mastering a practice within it. As Bourdieu (1998, p. 77) points out:

The notion of illusio, that is, the fact of attributing importance to the social game, the fact that what happens matters to those who are engaged in it, who are in the game. Interest is to "be there," to participate, to admit the game is worth playing and that the stakes created in and through the fact of playing are worth pursuing: it is to recognize the game and to recognize its stakes.

The protesters are learning how to *master the practice of the game of activism*, and they recognize the stakes of the game are high. They believe the game is worth playing, because the impact of mining on their land and water supply is great.

## **Adult Education and activism:**

The literature on learning in activism is eclectic and draws on several education traditions such as public pedagogies, critical pedagogy, social movement learning, popular education and adult learning. In reviewing the literature, attention is given to the education traditions of adult learning and activism and social movement learning. Foley (1999) argues there are three dimensions of learning in activism: an analysis of the political economy, the operation of micro-politics, and ideology and knowledge of discourses at play in society. Jesson and Newman (2004, p. 261) outline three key areas of activists' adult learning, '*instrumental learning*—providing skills and information to deal with practical matters, '*interpretive learning*—which has a focus on communication' and '*critical learning*—activists learn problem solving skills, through reflection new meaning is produced'.

Much of the research on learning in social action has focused on cognitivism and the critical



intelligence of activists as they work towards issues of social change (Foley, 1999, 2001; Newman, 1994, 2006), or social learning in the situated site of popular education or social movements (Ollis, 2012b). Learning in the social environment of protest is an emotionally charged practice, where emotions are often the drivers for taking action (Gould, 2004; Jasper, 2009). Protests are sites of education where adults engage in holistic, purposeful and embodied learning (Drew 2015; Ollis 2011, 2012). Some theorists draw attention to activists' development of practical knowledge or wisdom and are concerned about protecting this knowledge and passing it on to other activists (Maddison & Scalmer, 2006). Others argue that learning in social action is largely informal, incidental, tacit and applied and not always recognized as real adult learning (Branagan & Boughton, 2003; Foley, 2001; Ollis, 2012a). Cassie Earl (2005, p. 108) analyzed the popular education movement 'Occupy' in the United Kingdom and found activists with limited formal education were reading philosophy and sociology books associated with historical materialism and change such as Marx. She argues through activists' self-learning they were developing 'an epistemological curiosity' Earl (2005, p. 108).

Much of the literature associated on learning in environmental activism draws on social movement learning (Jasper, 2009; Jasper & Goodwin, 2004; Swain, 2005). Hall (2009, p. 46) argues there are three central propositions to social movement learning:

1. 'informal learning occurring by persons who are part of any social movement;
2. intentional learning that is stimulated by organized educational efforts of the social movements themselves; and
3. formal and informal learning that takes place amongst the broad public, the citizens, as a result of the activities undertaken by the a given social movement'.

Clover (2013) claims adult education in the environmental movement requires bringing people together to discuss new ecological understandings of the world.

Environmental adult education begins from a platform of recognizing people's ecological knowledge (s) and bringing these together through dialogue and debate to create new ecological understandings of our world. This also includes respecting and weaving into the learning process spiritualities and ways of knowing and being that are linked to the land (P, 10).

Chase (2000, p. 17) claims environmental activists acquire skills and knowledge in five areas: 'technical knowledge, political knowledge, life skills, knowledge of organizations, and skills through personal growth'. One of the important roles of environmental movements and NGO's is to 'bring about behavioral and social change for sustainability' (Flowers &

Chodkiewicz 2009:298). Such community education strategies are central to raising environmental awareness. They are fundamental to passing on knowledge about environmental devastation and the consequences of non-action for the planet. Research on environmental activists' training has found learning is based on adult learning principles and is largely informal, as formal education amongst environmental activists is uncommon (Whelan 2002:33). Central to these pedagogies are learning to deconstruct discourses of power; and social and popular education movements harnessing transformative resistance against these discourses (Foley, 2001; Bud Hall, 2009). Kovan & Dirkx (2003, p. 103) interviewed environmental activists in a small organization in the United States about maintaining their long-term commitment to campaigning. These activists noted that the use of critical cognition was important to their practices, but there was also a spiritual dimension associated with their agency. They believe their involvement in the environment movement is a calling and rooted in an identification with a spiritual connection to the environment, 'consistently, these activists mentioned being motivated by head, heart, and spirit'. Ecopedagogy stems from critical theory and its contemporary education tradition of critical pedagogy (Kahn, 2010; Kopnina, 2014). It draws attention to the project of capitalism, unfettered economic growth and its creation of inequality and its subsequent impact on the environment. McLaren (2013, p. 84) claims, *'as the global power complex reduces human life and mother earth to mere production and consumption, critical revolutionary ecopedagogy is developing new, unalienated forms of self-presence'*. Helen Kopina (2014, p. 227) argues for an affirmative action pedagogy for the environment, one which is .. *'integrated into its practice and theory, instructed by critical pedagogy'*. Richard Kahn (2010) claims the project of education to avoid environmental devastation is complex and linked to unsustainable environmental practices. *'Of course more problematic still for educators is the bourgeoisie rise in social and ecological disasters that are resulting from the mixture off unsustainable economic exploitations of nature and environmentally unsound practices'* (Kahn, 2010, p. 7). Kahn advocates for ecoliteracy in schools, the need to bring scholars, the public and activists together across interests and connections by building a deep dialogue and critical reflexivity across progressive education groups to counter the planetary crisis (Kahn, 2010).

### **Coal Seam Gas Protests in Victoria.**

Interest in the environmental issues has gradually increased in Australia in the past two decades (Flowers & Chodkiewicz, 2009). Issues such as climate change and land

conservation are major concerns for environmental activists. Moreover, the mining of large multinational companies by horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing or 'fracking' for gas, has emerged as a major environmental concern (Lloyd, Luke, & Boyd, 2013). As Willow (2014) claims:

In recent years, the merger of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing (often shorthanded as fracking) techniques has made the extraction of fossil fuels from deep shale rock layers feasible and lucrative.

The LTGA through the coal seam gas protests in central Gippsland in Victoria, is a campaign that is creative, artistic, powerful and forceful as well as educational. This is important because the environment movement is so diverse and includes, people from a range of scholarly disciplines in academia, climate change activists, those who greenies, environmental non-government organisations (ENGOS), social movements, environmental government agencies, activists and conservationists, as well as some farmers. The data shown here provides insight into understanding the agency of the activists. It reveals the educational capacity of these activists' work and the individual and collective learning that occurs as the LTGA campaign gained momentum. The embodied, strategic and intelligent practices of the protesters enabled them to win an initial moratorium on fracking, and recently a complete ban on mining for coal seam gas.

### **Central Gippsland and Coal Seam Gas:**

Central Gippsland is farming country well known as the 'food belt' of Victoria, because it produces a large amount of Victoria's fresh produce such as dairy, meat, fruit and vegetables. Here an unlikely coalition of people has joined together to prevent multinational mining companies from 'fracking' for coal seam gas. Seasoned environmental activists involved with the ENGO FOE, farmers, tree changers, concerned community members and 'cockies, blockies, croppers and greenies' (Hutton, 2012, p. 16), have formed an alliance to educate the community about the dangers of fracking for Coal Seam Gas (Ollis & Hamel-Green 2015). This is an unlikely but important alliance of groups opposed to fracking who have collectively built a broad based environmental movement. As Hutton (2012, pp. 16-17)

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Cockies, blockies, croppers and greenies are terms used by Drew Hutton, a key activist in the LTGA. The term 'cockies' refers to small dairy farmers in Australia. known colloquially as 'cow cockies'. The term 'blockies' is used to describe small farming enterprises (Hutton, 2012, p. 16).

notes, bringing together people who are not necessarily aligned with any political ideology is an essential strategy if they are to have an impact on the powerful discourses of mining corporations.

Our opponents – the coal and coal seam gas companies – are among the biggest and most powerful multinational corporations on the planet and they have the ear of both government and opposition. We can only achieve our objectives by forming strategic alliances with those who agree that irresponsible resource extraction represents a very serious threat to our land, our water and our communities. Therefore, the Lock the Gate movement is an alliance between progressives and conservatives, left and right, city and country, farmers and environmentalists.

The diversity of people in the movement is its strength, the involvement in previous campaigns and social movements is varied. Some are experienced and identify themselves as activists, however, the majority of circumstantial activists do not identify as activists at all. In addition, some of the protestors have feelings of antipathy towards 'greenies'<sup>2</sup>, Gail doesn't identify as an activist, she claims she has a duty of care to preserve the environment:

*No, I don't really see myself as an activist. I was in New Zealand and they had a placard and it read 'I am not protesting against, it is my duty to care for', it was something in that wording and I thought - yeah, it's not actually about anything but it is a duty of care.*

John a local farmer and former engineer is adamant that he is not an activist at all but someone who is against fracking for coal seam gas.

*No, I don't – I'm just another anti coal seam gas bloke!*

Tim's argues his involvement in the LTGA is driven by his concern for the impact of fracking on the land and as he is a concerned resident he is motivated him to be involved in the campaign.

*I'm not an activist - I'm a concerned resident. - Tim*

In Australia and elsewhere internationally, as large multinational resource companies search for gas, in a market with increasingly depleted gas resources. Fracking for Coal Seam Gas has become the new norm for accessing further gas resources from the earth. Indeed, it has become a prominent issue of concern for farming communities, where the imposition of

hydraulic fracking has the potential to contaminate important water and land resources (Lloyd et al., 2013). There are four central concerns of the community organizers involved in the campaign. Firstly, the risk to the Australia's best food producing land and natural environment. Secondly, Australia is one of the driest continents on the planet with water resources becoming increasingly scarce; protesters believe the current mining boom will inevitably impact on water purity. A third concern is the impact of pollution through mining on the air as well as water quality, the focus here has also been on how industry is using precious water resources in the fracking process and also the potential for contamination of water supplies (Hamawand, Yusaf, & Hamawand, 2013 cited in Muhhamed, 2015). The fourth and final concern of the LTGA is the impact on community life in rural communities due to fracking.

### **Learning in the 'Lock the Gate Alliance'**

The LTGA campaign has managed to foster education through building a successful ecological habitus, a collective social practice that exudes dispositions that are emulated and embodied (Crossley, 2003). The LTGA encourages informal learning through protesters engagement by providing a space for the protesters to socialise in locally based action groups and larger meetings of the LTGA. It is here largely through socialization that protesters learn the strategies of campaigning. The protesters are learning skills associated with community development and community organizing (Ife, 2002).

Drawing on international research about the impact of fracking for coal seam gas resources and armed with several case studies of farmers' experiences of mining companies using their land to mine, this coalition of activist groups has been able to build campaign to prevent mining for coal seam gas in Victoria. This is not an easy process; the mining companies have the support of government, big business and mainstream media and Australia has a long history of supporting mining. Listed below are the key areas of learning in the LTGA, identified in the data.

### **Group work skills and networking:**

Many of the activists are involved in small local action groups in the LTGA. They are learning the skills associated with being a part of a local environment group. Skills such as written and verbal communication, group work and networking are being developed by being engaged with other groups across the broader LTGA. When they were asked what

skills, they learned throughout the campaign, participants frequently referred to learning how to work with groups and networking. Gail who had no experience in working with groups responded with the following:

Well basically simple things like running community meetings, everything I've done is basically foreign. These are things that I'm not practiced in and I had no comprehension on even who to contact to book a community hall, I had nothing!

On the other hand, Jane claims she learned skills associated with the organisation of meetings.

... I do the organising, setting up meetings, setting up dates, speakers, getting people together, right down to the lady who does the sausage sizzle and that sort of thing.

Skills such as networking, bringing people together, organising meetings, handing out flyers, booking a hall or a meeting room, holding an information stall at local community events in order to educate the local community about the impact of fracking. Most of the circumstantial activists spoke about the importance of learning these key skills.

### **Critical cognition skills**

What was clear from the data is that engaging in the campaign developed the protesters' critical cognition skills. These skills were built through having every day conversations with others in the alliance and primarily through socialisation with other activists. Significantly, most of circumstantial activists gained critical knowledge through self-learning by spending hours researching the internet, reading journals, articles and campaign information and through informal learning conversations between people in the LTGA. This enabled them to build their knowledge about the risks associated with fracking for CSG. The dialogue from the data below from circumstantial activist Tim, reveals his understanding of the power of multinational companies

You can see companies wrecking the place, destroying the habitat I suppose, people's livelihoods with no consideration at all for the future and our politicians are letting that happen. I can see the criminal aspect of that, it mightn't be law type criminal, but it is criminal to society and human behavior.

John shows his agency and motivation to avoid further environmental damage to his land and the cost to the environment in the quote below;

The only thing that motivates me is that we can't afford to destroy this agricultural land, this is the food bowl of Victoria. It's a very, very concentrated area, very rich soil, very rich ground, they just can't afford to destroy it. There's too much underground water here, you only need to see what comes out of our place here, if

you ruin that you've ruined everything. It will take millions of years to get it back but it takes them only five minutes to destroy it.

Similarly, Alana connected the issue of fracking for coal seam gas to the impact the process would have on the environment, and the effect that fracking would have on farming produce and the local community.

Well when you find out things like there are two exploration licences in Poowong that inspires me. Although I'm not just doing it for Poowong, I'm truly not. I had a friend the other day and she said 'wouldn't it be awful if we looked out here and we could see gas wells'? I said 'I don't think I could live here'. But I'm not really doing it for that, because it's not just spoiling my view that motivates me, it's spoiling the whole Gippsland food bowl that upsets me.

The quotes from the protesters reveal their understanding of the implications of fracking, which they link to broader political, economic and environmental issues. This is a major theme in the data and was reaffirmed consistently throughout the interviews.

Gail connects fracking for coal seam gas to local community rights or lack of rights as well as the impact fracking would have on the local environment and farming community. When she was asked why she decided to be involved in the LTGA she said:

Well I think really the coal seam gas was actually the trigger. I keep myself well informed globally, I made that sort of just from an interest and learning point of view but this is like 'the lion stepped too far'! That's the trigger it's the step over the line but then it's multifaceted. It's the environmental side, it's the social side, it's about people's rights or lack of, it's about the interconnectivity between neighbour to neighbour.

Differently, Jane believed gas and oil companies were ignoring the collective intelligence and expertise of the local community, who had a great deal of knowledge and skill.

That's why I feel that these big gas and oil companies and I'm talking the big guys to the little guys and the politicians, are forgetting they're taking the intelligence of the communities for granted. Our communities are full of retired scientists, retired lab workers, retired teachers, retired gas industry people, from farms, you name it they are in communities everywhere.

The quotes outlined above highlight the intelligent, critically cognitive problem-solving capacity of the protestors. They are able to see the broader politics at play in the race to mine their land. What is also interesting to note from the statements above is the emotional agency of those involved in the campaign and how this is linked for some to their initial agency to be involved in the LTGA.

## **Communication skills**

Most of the protesters learned communication skills of some kind ranging from skills associated with interpersonal communication through their local group in the alliance. Written communication skills were built and developed through writing letters to politicians, emails to members of the local community. All of the respondents to the research spoke about honing their communication skills in some way. Some of the protesters like Barry learned to speak publicly at events.

Well yes, in that it's been another thing that has forced me to do some public speaking and to stick my own head up on activities. So yeah, I think that has been an area of personal growth for me over the last few years. – Barry

A small number of protesters needed to learn communication skills associated with using new technologies such as social media, email and the internet.

## **Learning from experienced activists**

Worth noting is the significant role that FOE has played in providing formal and non-formal education to the circumstantial activists. These experienced activists, have been able to play a central organising role in bringing the coalition of smaller groups together for strategic planning. FOE's considerable cultural capital is derived from being an ENGO, which has enabled them to gain high level media attention to the campaign through the use of their campaign website, media releases and other social media platforms. Alongside these events more structured training in non-violent blockades have been delivered by FOE to the alliance. This theme is illustrated in the data below and the comments made by Tina, reveals FOE's involvement was mutually beneficial as FOE had expertise in campaigning and the protestors had local knowledge which was useful for FOE:

At that stage, FOE was coming to every community meeting by industry and Quit Coal. So, it was a huge effort on their behalf and very well appreciated because they had the experience, although there was so much they didn't know about the local community. – Tina

Lisa found FOE share knowledge and information with the protestors which was helpful in terms of resourcing the group:



They don't have an ego, they don't have an ego, they're just people. They share stuff, share information, share their knowledge, anything they can do to help they share. They are sharers, which is wonderful because often groups aren't sharers. -

On the other hand, Anita was amazed by the public speaking skills of one of the FOW organisers, which she said she'd like to emulate:

We had a public meeting here in Gormandale and FOE came and a few other people came, we had a lot of people. The way she spoke, the eloquence in her voice, the passion in her voice, it was just magnificent. That sort of stuff, the way she handled herself and the grace about her as well - it was excellent. I'd love to be able to do that, she was just awesome and the way they dedicate themselves.

As outlined in the quotations from the protesters a significant theme that emerged from the data is the admiration the protestors held for the knowledge, skills and expertise of the FOE activists. The relationship that has been built between these experienced environmentalists and the circumstantial activists involved in the campaign, was essential and important for the overall success of the campaign.

### **Learning informally, incidentally and socially**

Significantly, knowledge, skills and expertise have been passed on to other members of the alliance, through socialization at local groups and larger LTGA meetings. An example of this is that the LTGA used large-scale protests such as building a human sign with 450 people on the oval in the town of Poowong's oval, declaring it 'CSG free'. Public campaign events offered protestors further opportunities for social and informal learning and direct-action tactics. Regular meetings provided opportunities for knowledge and campaign strategy sharing and the exchange of skills knowledge and ideas. The data revealed that locally based campaign meetings were instrumental in term of building the knowledge and skills of the circumstantial activists. This is illustrated in the quote from Tina, who discussed the importance of sharing ideas within the LTGA.

That's it, the sharing of ideas, definitely the sharing of ideas. ... That's where the beauty of the network has been that we spread it out, and we say 'hey this is new, does anybody know about that? You need to be willing to be humble, to take advice and seek it, because you want to benefit, it all gets back to 'how do you effect change'?

### **Discussion.**

As the data in this paper has uncovered, the LTGA, in conjunction with the leadership and support of the experienced activists in FOE, have managed to create an effective ecological habitus. Where a collective understanding of the risks associated with mining for coal seam

gas and 'fracking' has been achieved, through the development of individual activist skills and knowledge and through building the collective practices of the group. Returning to Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72) and habitus being a 'structured, structuring structure' is supported in the data as the protesters learn community development practices such as group work, community education and how to run small and larger scale community meetings. The informal and structured training practices adopted by FOE, have been successful in building relationships with the circumstantial activists and lifelong activists in the alliance. The dispositions, habits and practices of the group around environmental sustainability has created an effective ecological habitus. This affirms Crossley (2002) and Nillan's (2017) proposition of an activist habitus being a social practice one which supports and maintains how people engage, interact and learn from each other. Clover's (2013) claim of environmental adult education's capacity to build new understandings about environmental sustainability, has been affirmed in the data where newcomer activists who through interaction in the movement, self-learning and information sharing were able to build critical knowledge about the impact of fracking on the land, water supply and the environment. According to Bourdieu, the importance of the 'orchestration' of the habitus is the way it produces a 'commonsense world', which gives the players a 'consensus' on the meaning of the practices, this occurs through 'continuous re-enforcement' of the rules of the game (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 80). As Bourdieu states 'in short, the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices' (Bourdieu, 1977)

Key to this campaign's success has been the education of the activists themselves, but on a broader level the environmental education that occurs in local communities, the public and the citizenry by the LTGA. This supports Hall's proposition that formal and informal learning occurs amongst the broad public and citizens (Budd Hall, 2009). It has been achieved through strategic, public actions, through LTGA campaign meetings, through rallies, and embodied direct actions such as human signs.

Of significance are the skills and knowledge development of the protesters themselves. For the circumstantial activists, their skill and knowledge development is significant because as the data has revealed, some of the skills associated with being a part of a group or network are entirely new to them. The experienced activists in the group are not only able to further hone their skills but also pass on knowledge about successful campaigning through the social practices within the habitus. Key skills and knowledge about community development practice, such as group work, highly developed communication skills, networking, public speaking and running public meetings and actions were identified in the data as being

significant. All of the activists revealed they had developed critical cognitive understandings about the politics of the campaign and the broader impact of mining on the environment in central Gippsland. They understood the risks to the community due to CSG mining is significant. They were able to look critically at the players in the field and understand the impact of government policy and the influence of the doxa of big business and mining could have on the outcome of the campaign. These activists were building and or extending their 'epistemological curiosity' through their own self-learning, but also through socialization with other activists in the LTGA. This affirms Cassie Earl's (2005, p. 108), research on activists in the Occupy movement who also developed a desire to learn and read philosophy and theory in order to build their knowledge. Through social practice in the field activists are able to draw on the cultural capital the newcomer and experienced activists bring to the field, this builds and maintains the practices and the habitus. The habitus and the dispositions and practice within in it are transferred unconsciously through pedagogic actions, as Bourdieu (1977, p. 87) argues, ... 'practical mastery is transmitted in practice'.

Further in this campaign, the LTGA has managed to bring a broad alliance of people with different values and political beliefs together to educate the community, even though many of the CSG protesters did not identify themselves as activists and some had reservations about 'greenies'. The long held doxa that environmentalists and farmers did not have common interests appears to have been suspended in the LTGA. This is because the FOE activists, alongside the protesters have built a habitus that has engaged the alliance. The FOE organizers have cultural capital they bring to the field. They know how to successfully campaign. The farmers and community members also have a specific and needed capital they bring to the field such as knowledge about local community needs, sustainable farming practices, and knowledge about local community politics. These forms of capital work together and contribute to the campaign's success. The circumstantial activists have suspended the doxa of antipathy towards the environmentalists. Bourdieu's concept of *illusio* relates to the protestors gaining 'a *feel for the game*' of protest, an understanding of the importance of the game, a belief that the game is worth playing, that their individual differences are not significant in the larger game of protest. As Bourdieu (1998, pp. 76-77) claims, '*Interest is to 'be there' to participate, to admit the game is worth playing, and the stakes created in and through the fact of playing are worth pursuing; it is to recognise the game and recognise its stakes*'. The initial hesitance of the circumstantial activists identifying as an activist has not changed, but the long held doxa of environmentalists and farmers having competing interests has been suspended. They now believe they have a common

purpose and a common problem. They know the stakes of the game are high, and that powerful interests of government and big business want to stop them. In order to be successful, the FOE organizers and the protesters need each other, their interests are now aligned.

Returning to Bourdieu, who argues every social field, tends to require those who participate in the field, to believe that playing the game is worthwhile (Bourdieu, 1998). Whether the *illusio* will continue to be suspended in the LTGA alliance, or whether the campaigners will continue to work with each other on other environmental campaigns is hitherto unknown and requires further research. Nevertheless, the achievements of the alliance is significant as no other state in Australia has been able to achieve a moratorium on coal seam gas exploration, followed by a complete ban. This significant social change is now enshrined in legislation by the Victoria Government, largely because of the efforts of the alliance. In effect the LTGA case study in central Gippsland reveals how deep conversations can occur across various players in the environmental movement. It reveals how activist groups, farmers, business and tree changers are able work together for a common pedagogical goal. This affirms Kahn's (2010) proposition that what is required to arrest environmental devastation is a deep critical dialogue between all of the players in the movement - scholars, the public, activist groups, conservationists, ENGOS, government, business and others who have a common interest in preserving and protecting the environment for future generations to come.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has outlined a case study of the LTGA and the rich learning of activists as they participate in a campaign against mining for Coal Seam Gas, in Central Gippsland, Australia. Those interviewed for this research were predominately newcomers to protest and were resourced by experienced activists in the group and the ENGO Friends of the Earth. It has been argued that the protestors learn largely informally through socialisation with other activists, and are influenced by the *habitus* of the LTGA. In the field of the campaign, these circumstantial activists have developed knowledge, skills and expertise through the practices and dispositions of the movement, by observing the practices of experienced activists. Of significance is the unusual alliance of farmers, tree changes and seasoned activists, who bring various forms of cultural capital to the LTGA alliance. The key to this successful campaign is the ability of the LTGA to suspend the long held *doxa* that these groups who are concerned about the impact fracking for coal seam gas have competing interests. The LTGA

has been able to build an environmental habitus which crosses the divides and boundaries of a disparate and complex environmental movement, where the perception of competing interests have been suspended. Through critical pedagogical actions the LTGA has been able to change government policy. Regardless of their differences this broad alliance takes seriously their custodial role of looking after the planet for future generations to come. They have built an ecological habitus of practice and a successful one too, this group of activists have managed to achieve a complete ban on fracking for coal seam gas.

## References:

- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction : a social critique of the judgement of taste* (R. Nice, Trans.). Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical Reason* (P. Press, Trans.). California: Stanford University Press.
- Branagan, M., & Boughton, B. (2003). How do you learn to change the world? Learning and Teaching in Australian Protest Movements. . *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, Volume 43, Number 3, November 2003, 43(3), 346-360.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006).
- Using thematic analysis in psychology *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Brookfield, S. (2005). *The Power of Critical Theory for Adult Learning and Teaching*. United Kingdom: Open University Press.
- Burdick, J., O'Malley, M. P., & Sandlin, J. A. (2013). *Problematizing Public Pedagogy* (pp. 1 online resource (237 p.)). Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.deakin.edu.au/login?url=http://deakin.ebib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1461145>
- Burgmann, V. (2003). *Power, Profit and Protest, Australian Social Movements and Globalisation.*: Allen & Unwin.
- Chase, S. (2000). *The Education and Training needs of Environmental Activists and Organizers*. Thesis. University of New England,: New York. New York.
- Couch, J. (2004). *This is what democracy looks like : the genesis, culture and possibilities of anti-corporate activism*. (Thesis (Ph D )), Victoria University of Technology, 2004.
- Crossley, N. (2002). *Making sense of social movements*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Crossley, N. (2003). From Reproduction to Transformation: Social Movement Fields and the Radical Habitus. *Theory, Culture & Society* (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), 20(6), 43-68.
- Crossley, N. (2008). Social networks and student activism: on the politicising effect of campus connections. *The Sociological review*, 56(1), 18-38.
- Crowther, J., Martin, I., & Galloway, V. (2005). *Popular education : engaging the academy : international perspectives*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (England and Wales), Niace.
- Earl, C. (2005). *An Exploration of Popular Education from Occupy! London to the University: Making Hope Possible in the Face of Neoliberal Enclosure?* (PhD PhD Thesis), Education and Social Research Institute, Manchester University.
- Flowers, R., & Chodkiewicz, A. (2009). Developing a more research-oriented and participant-directed learning culture in the Australian environmental movement. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 49(2), 294-315.

- Foley, G. (1999). *Learning in Social Action: A Contribution to Understanding Informal Education*. New York: Zed Books.
- Foley, G. (2001). Radical Adult education and Learning. *International Journal of lifelong education*, 20(No 1/2), 71-88.
- Gabler, K. (2015). Green Capitalism, Sustainability and Everyday Practice. In B. Werlen (Ed.), *Global Sustainability: Cultural Perspectives and Challenges for Transdisciplinary Integrated Research* (pp. 63-88). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Gould, D. (2004). Passionate Political Processes: Bringing Emotions Back into the Study of Social Movements. In J. M. Jasper & J. Goodwin (Eds.), *Rethinking social movements : structure, meaning, and emotion*, Lanham, Md. ; Oxford, (pp. 155 - 172). Lanham, Md. ; Oxford: **Rowman & Littlefield Publishers**.
- Hall, B. (2009). A River of Life: Learning and environmental social movements. *Interface: A journal for and about Social MOVements*, 1(1), 46-78.
- Hall, B. (2009). A river of life: Learning and environmental social movements. *Interface: A Journal for and about Soical Movements*, 1(1), 46-78.
- Hamel-Green, M., & Ollis, T. (2015). Adult education and radical habitus in an environmental campaign: Learning in the coal seam gas protests in Australia. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 55(2), 202-219.
- Hutton, D. (2012). Lock the Gate unites cockies, blockies, croppers and greenies *Chain Reaction*, 115, 16-17.
- Ife, J. (2002). *Community Development: Creating Community Alternatives in an Age of Globalisation* (2nd edition ed.). Sydney: Pearson education.
- Jasper, J. (2009). The Emotions of Protest *The Social Movements Reader cases and concepts* (2nd ed.). West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell.
- Jasper, J., & Goodwin, J. (2004). *Rethinking social movements : structure, meaning, and emotion*. Lanham, Md. ; Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Jesson, J., & Newman, M. (2004). Radical Adult Education and Learning. In G. Foley (Ed.), *Dimensions of Adult Learning: Adult education and training in a global era*. NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Kahn, R. (2010). *Critical Pedagogy, Ecoliteracy, and Planetary Crisis: the Ecopedagogy Movement*. (Vol. 359). New York: Peter Lang publishers.
- Kopnina, H. (2014). Future Scenarios and Environmental Education. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 45(4), 217-231.
- Kovan, J., & Dirkx, J. (2003). "Being Called Awake": The Role of Transformative Learning In The ives of Environmental Activists. *Adult Educaiton Quarterly*, Vol. 53(No 2), 99-118.
- Lloyd, D., Luke, H., & Boyd, W. E. (2013). Community perspectives on natural resources extraction: coal seam gas mining and social identity in eastern Australia. *Coolabah*, 144.
- Maddison, S., & Scalmer, S. (2006). *Activist wisdom : practical knowledge and creative tension in social movements*. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Marriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case study Applications in Education*. San Fancisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- McLaren, P. (2013). Seeds of resistance, towards a revolutionary critical ecopedagogy. *Socialist studies*, 9(11), 84-108.
- Newman, M. (1994). *Defining the Enemy: Adult Education and Social Action*. Australia.: Stewart Victor publishing.

- Newman, M. (2006). *Teaching defiance - Stories and Strategies for Activist educators, A book written in wartime*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Nilan, P. (2017). The ecological habitus of Indonesian student environmentalism. *Environmental Sociology, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group*, 1-11.
- Nillan, P. (2017). The ecological habitus of Indonesian student environmentalism. *Environmental society*, 1-11.
- Ollis, T. (2011). Learning in Social Action: The informal and social learning dimensions of circumstantial and lifelong activists. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 51(2), 248-268.
- Ollis, T. (2012a). *A critical pedagogy of embodied education : learning to become an activist* (1st ed.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ollis, T. (2012b). *A critical pedagogy of embodied education : learning to become an activist* (1st ed.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stake, R. (2003). Case Studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (second ed.). California: Sage Publications Inc.
- Stake, R. (2006). *Multiple Case Study Analysis*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Swain, A. (2005). *Education as social action : knowledge, identity, and power*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Walter, P. (2012). Cultural Codes as Catalysts for collective conscientisation in environmental adult education: Mr Floatie, tree squatting and Save-our-Surfers. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 52(Number 1), 114 -133.
- Willow, A. J. (2014). The new politics of environmental degradation: un/expected landscapes of disempowerment and vulnerability. *Journal of Political Economy*, 21, 237-257.
- Yin, R. (2012). *Applications of Case Study Research* (3rd ed.): Sage publications.