Memes and Social Messages:
Teaching a Critical Literacies Curriculum
on the Dakota Access Pipeline

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ABSTRACT: This article documents the design and implementation of a culturally responsive critical media literacies curriculum centered around media representations of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). Students (grades 6-8) were invited to discuss media imagery relating to DAPL and to create memes reflecting their understandings. To situate this work, we articulate a framework that blends critical media literacies and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. We analyze students' spoken and multimodal responses to a curriculum that purposefully foregrounded Native perspectives and digital media. Ultimately, we argue that students must be invited to leverage their epistemic privilege in responding to contemporary social issues.

KEYWORDS: Native American, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Critical Media Literacy, Middle School, Digital Composing

We live in unjust times. It is incumbent upon educators to design instruction that leverages students' knowledge of injustice to support their authentic learning and critical engagement. Young people are no strangers to injustice, nor are they unversed in modes and languages of social critique (Johnston-Goodstar & Sethi, 2013; LeBlanc, 2017).

Youth need not be taught *about* injustice so much as be provided opportunities to enact their knowledge in powerful and relevant ways. We ask: how might educators build curricula around contemporary issues that center both students' knowledge of the power asymmetries structuring our world and the digital media youth use to transact with the world? What might this work look like?

Here, we share lessons from our work with students at Mní School (all names are pseudonyms), who, as part of a language arts unit (grades 6-8), responded to environmental and human rights injustices using social media tools. In particular, we highlight the images students analyzed and remixed during a four-day curricular unit entitled "Extending Argument Learning and Critical Media Literacy on DAPL Coverage" (CML_DAPL, henceforth). The unit foregrounded social media coverage of the Water Protectors, a group of Native people[1] and allies protesting the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) across the Standing Rock Sioux people's land in North Dakota. During this time, members of local tribal communities affiliated with Mní School in northern California had been organizing, holding rallies, and recruiting protestors to travel to Standing Rock.

The affordances of social media present educators with a tremendous opportunity to support youth activism within and outside of classroom contexts (Lee & Soep, 2016). While at times dismissed as a domain rife with clickbait and narcissism, many young people use social media as a vehicle for performing identity/ies and voicing critique (Gerbaudo, 2018; Jenkins, 2016). A critical media literacy curriculum invites students to participate meaningfully in the larger discourses of social movements and recognizes the multivoicedness of such movements (Garcia, Luke, & Seglem, 2018). Through our analysis of student talk and student-made memes, we argue that digital composing activities should be central to a culturally responsive curriculum.

Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Pedagogy, Critical Media Literacies, and Epistemic Privilege

Geneva Gay (2002) describes culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). Building on this and other work, Paris (2012) contends that cultural responsiveness falls short of addressing the "systemic inequalities" experienced in marginalized communities, arguing for teaching that is culturally and linguistically sustaining. By bridging culturally responsiveness and sustenance, schools may resist conforming to white[2] middle-class values and Western colonial influences (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008), and position diverse students as "co-constructors of knowledge in school settings" (Belgarde, Mitchell, & Arquero, 2002, p. 43).

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[1] Various terms are used to refer to the Native peoples of North America and which Native people use to refer to themselves. These terms include Native American, American Indian, Indigenous, and First Nations, as well as specific tribal nation enrollments and affiliations. These terms are regionally and historically situated. Following Reese (2018, p. 389), we use "Native people" throughout this paper.

[2] While APA formatting capitalizes racial identifiers, we intentionally use lower case "w" when naming whiteness as an act of solidarity with others invested in decentering and depriviliging whiteness (e.g., Perlman, 2015).

The curricular activities that laid the foundational background knowledge for the CML_DAPL unit privileged Native students' cultural knowledge. For example, Native guest speakers from the local community spoke with the class about the cultural and historical significance of the Water Protection movement. Including local tribally enrolled members in both the design and teaching of the curriculum mirrors Reese's (2018) assertion that teachers can better serve Native students by locating Native people in the present rather than in the past, empowering "tribal nationhood within the states of origin" (p. 391). During the CML_DAPL unit, students analyzed digital imagery that included culturally recognizable symbols, which they readily identified during class discussions.

Students' approaches to viewing and composing images were guided by a curricular emphasis on critical media literacy. Critical literacy positions reading and writing "as part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations" (Anderson & Irvine, 1993, p. 82). Reading texts critically offers students opportunities to examine their biases and ideologies, to surface other (often hidden) perspectives, to challenge power dynamics, and to deconstruct status quos through the production of counternarratives (Low, 2017). Critical literacy engenders social and political transformation through the deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of the discourses and imagery shaping our world (Janks, 2010).

Critical media literacy involves reading across a wide range of modalities, formats, and platforms, and is concerned with "cultivating [students'] skills in analyzing media codes and conventions, [their] abilities to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies, and [their] competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 372). Ultimately, as Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (2018) argue, critical media literacy is "about creating communities of active readers and writers who can be expected to exercise some degree of agency in deciding what textual positions they will assume or resist as they interact in complex social and cultural contexts" (pp. 1-2). Critical media literacy challenges the power of dominant, often dehumanizing discourses, supporting youth to identify and critique power dynamics that contribute to injustice.

The various ways critical literacies are enacted are inseparable from students' identities. As Campano, Ghiso, and Sánchez (2013) argue, critical literacy is "most productively understood through an ideological lens that is attentive to local contexts and issues of history, power, and identity" (p. 101). Rather than being explicitly *taught* to critique (con)texts, Campano et al. (2013) take an organic view of critical literacy, explaining that critical consciousness is activated when students "are afforded the curricular space to mobilize cultural and epistemic resources in their transactions with texts and with their worlds" (p. 119). Such a view of critical literacy privileges students' cultural and personal knowledge in deconstructing systems of oppression (Freire, 1970).

What connects critical literacy and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy is the indelible link between cultural identity and the vantage points from which students critically engage the world. Educators must recognize Black, Indigenous and People of

Color (BIPOC) students' social positions[3] as a form of epistemic privilege for interpreting social phenomena (Moya, 2002). While it may seem self-evident, it bears repeating that people whose identities and experiences are marginalized in society are in an advantageous position to recognize, analyze, and respond to societal injustices (e.g., San Pedro, 2018; Shear, 2018). Further, developing critical consciousness is a process best facilitated through social interaction (Diemer, Kauffman, Koenig, Trahan, & Hsieh, 2006).

Teachers creating space for students' critical engagement with textual materials should honor the funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez,1992) students employ when making sense of those texts. Similar to Reese's (2018) Critical Indigenous Literacies framework, CML_DAPL engaged students in a critical line of questioning about how Native people are positioned in media imagery; however, the ways in which students engaged with text materials varied in their criticality. Consequently, while CML_DAPL was meant to disrupt "the historically marginalized treatment of Native stories—and by extension, Native people" (p. 390), students' collaborative processes illustrated the complex dance that arises when a group of critical thinkers deconstructs and reconstructs digital imagery depicting a culturally divisive topic.

Contexts of the Inquiry

Mní School (a pseudonym chosen to honor Mní Wičhóni Nakíčižiŋ Owáyawa, the Defenders of the Water School located at the Standing Rock camp) is a small public charter school (K-12) in northern California, serving 64 students. During our data collection, 22 (35%) of Mní School's students identified as Native American, 27 (42%) as white, 11 (17%) as Latinx, and 4 (6%) as Black or of African descent. Originally situated on tribal land, Mní School was established to teach Native students underserved by local public schools. The school's mission reflects the cultural values and histories of students affiliated with five tribal bands. However, in 2013, Mní School underwent a relocation off tribal land, resulting in its demographic shift. At the time of our data collection, Mní School's faculty, staff, and administration were involved in conversations about how to update the school's curriculum and mission to be inclusive of its expanded student population, while still honoring the school's original mission to privilege local Indigenous knowledge and practices.

The research team consisted of three white literacy researchers (one male and two females, all cisgender). Throughout the study, we strived to remain attuned to our outsider status in relation to co-designing and analyzing a culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum for minoritized youth. Souto-Manning (2014) offers that critical scholars must "look closely and listen carefully in order to understand the perspectives and experiences of participants in their own terms rather than superimposing our own

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[3] It is important to note that while we frame this research through theoretical lenses that draw on theories of race, ethnicity, and minoritization, Native identities do not necessarily comport to these lenses. As Cook-Lynn (2007) argues, "Native populations in America are not 'ethnic' populations; they are not 'minority' populations...nor 'people of color.' They are the Indigenous peoples of this continent...with very special political and cultural status in the realm of American identity and citizenship" (p. 86). We make every effort in this work not to universalize the experiences of participants, nor do we believe all experiences of identity marginalization within a BIPOC umbrella share common features.

perspectives of what is problematic and needs to be transformed" (p. 201). As white researchers, we cannot separate our status as 'educational experts' from the unequal distribution of resources gained over centuries of violent, dehumanizing practices which led (and lead) to the erasure of Indigenous knowledge and practices (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Indeed, we find it imperative to "develop an antagonism in [ourselves], to step back and examine [our] interpretive frames and presentations" at all times (Hesford, 1999, p. xxxiii).

Members of the research team assisted Mní faculty in planning and implementing the unit. We began our work with the school community (and with one focal teacher, Frank, a cisgender white male) by acknowledging our lack of epistemic privilege in terms of the knowledge, histories, cultural practices, and desires of Mní students and community members (Jones & Jenkins, 2008). We felt strongly that members of the Mní community needed to set the goals of the curriculum as well as determine what constituted its successful realization (e.g., Tuck, 2009). A primary aspect of this process, which we detail in a book chapter (Beucher & Smith, 2019), involved working with a team of tribally enrolled community members who informed the curriculum design, who taught students the cultural and historical significance of water, and who shared their experiences within the Water Protection Movement.

On standardized measures of decontextualized literacy skills, Native students are "four times more likely [than their white peers] to score below proficient in reading" (Brayboy & Maaka, 2015, p. 68). The state literacy assessments of Mní students mirrored these numbers. However, when non-dominant, cultural and multimodal literacy practices are seen and valued, the narrative around so-called "at-risk" students' literacies shifts to one of affirmation (Johnston-Goodstar & Sethi, 2013; Siegel, 2012). This is something known and practiced by Mní faculty, as evidenced by their curricular emphasis on culturally sustaining critical media literacies. Adcock (2014) argues that "it is essential [for Native students] to be both consumers and producers of digital content if they are to realize the potential of the new educational technologies and situate them within an Indigenous consciousness" (p. 109). Our curriculum design process began with Mní teachers looking to leaders of the Water Protection Movement to learn about the values driving people's participation. The CML_DAPL unit's emphasis on social media and memes grew directly from observing the movement itself. We were all interested in seeing how students at Mní School would employ memes to construct "knowledge about how fundamental aspects of our society operate to sustain matrices of power" (Moya, 2002, p. 479), specifically regarding the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Varying in tone and range, memes are multimodal representations of images with overlaid text, meant to be distributed on a large scale. The representational power of memes comes from the imperfect interplay of image and text. When words and images provide contrapuntal meanings, the resulting message becomes complicatedly ambiguous—something meme makers operationalize for varying purposes (e.g., irony, absurdism, satire). Such polyphonous image-text interplay allows a multiplication of perspectives and interpretations (Low & Pandya, 2019). Via social media, memes are viewed, circulated, and transformed by large networks of individuals (Shifman, 2014). Remixing typically involves imbuing an existing, sometimes iconic, image with new text to alter or amplify its meaning. Memes shape (and give shape to) political and social

discourses (Beach & Dredger, 2017) and are often used to express solidarity or derision (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). Memes are neither inherently politically oriented nor socially just. They can be used for any purpose, including to undermine the causes others are spreading memes to promote. Thus, teachers must carefully consider the frameworks used to engage youth in meme production and consumption.

Social Media Activism and DAPL

In 2014, Energy Transfer Partners announced plans to build an oil pipeline from North Dakota to Illinois. The pipeline is now known as the Dakota Access Pipeline, or DAPL. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe opposed the building of DAPL, expressing concerns about water contamination and the destruction of sacred burial sites. This opposition formed into the Water Protection Movement. As the movement grew, Energy Transfer Partners recruited local police and private security to protect their investment. In this paper, we refer to this second group as Pipeline Protectors.

Youth played a pivotal role in building momentum for the Standing Rock Water Protection movement. In early 2016, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe sent a call for help in response to the building of DAPL. Young people from the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, called The One Mind Youth Movement (OMYM), used Facebook to keep the public informed about the construction of the pipeline and to livestream their peaceful protest actions. Although peacefully gathering, Water Protector encampments were monitored by 24-hour drone surveillance. Between 2016 and 2017, 761 Water Protectors were arrested (Associated Press, 2018). When venturing to different sites around the camp on foot or on horses, Water Protectors encountered armored Pipeline Protectors who dowsed them with pepper spray, used dogs to attack them, and shot water at them from powerful hoses, often in sub-freezing temperatures.

Social media visibility raised public awareness about the corporate and state-sanctioned violence brought upon people who were peacefully defending the land and water from irreversible contamination (The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's Litigation on the Dakota Access Pipeline, 2018). Despite facing violence, the Water Protection movement grew in strength and numbers as Native people rallied to protect their cultural values, land, and water. Journalist and activist Simon Moya-Smith (as cited in Steimer, 2017), emphasized, "This is the first time in history that...the authentic, bona fide Native American voice has been ubiquitous.... People [are] utilizing their phones, their Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, whatever they can to get the narrative out" (p. 33). The fight has continued, and as of this publication, a federal court has ruled that oil production must cease until a full environmental review is completed (Li, 2020).

The phenomenon of leveraging social media in tandem with grassroots activism challenges educators to consider the platforms through which youth are invited to engage civic discourse in their classrooms. Haddix, Garcia, and Price-Dennis (2017) argue that "if schools are to meet the challenging demands and needs of today's youth generation, curricula and instructional practices must reflect and represent who young people are today and the tools, skills, and information they will need to be successful in their future" (p. 21). This generation of youth are active social media users (Lenhart, 2015). They are bombarded with information that an uninformed user might interpret as random noise, but due to recently passed legislation (Beller, 2017), much of what they see on the Internet

is targeted directly at them. At the same time, as Haddix, Garcia, and Price-Dennis (2017) argue, "[Youth's] literacy practices are anchored in deeply personal and political causes" (p. 21). Many young people already strategically bend the Internet toward their objectives. Educators are in a unique and urgent position to develop curriculum that facilitates and supports reflective youth participation in online public discourse.

Methods

Participants in our study consisted of 18 Mní students enrolled in grades 6-8, ranging in age from 11 to 14 years (see Appendix 1). Members of the research team assisted a Mní teacher (Frank) in planning and implementing the CML_DAPL unit. Becky collected qualitative data in the form of observational field-notes, audio recordings of classroom lessons, student interviews (n=8), and multimodal artifacts (19 student-generated memes). Understanding the pedagogical affordances of culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum for supporting students in cultivating critical media literacies involved examining the discourses, values, beliefs, and ideologies that emerged in class discussions about media images emerging from DAPL. Students discussed how these images reflected various standpoints on DAPL and reflected on the messages they constructed in their own memes. We sought to understand how students' memes reflected, if at all, the critical and culturally responsive orientations embedded in the CML_DAPL curriculum. We drew on the tools of critical discourse analysis (Rogers, 2011) and critical multimodal analysis (Janks, 2014; Low & Pandya, 2019) to interpret the messages in students' spoken and written discourse engaged through these memes.

We situate our readings of students' memes alongside and in relation to students' spoken discourse (classroom talk and in-person interviews with Becky) as a way to respectfully engage Indigenous methodology (Sheehan, 2011). Kovach (2019/2010) explains this paradigmatic approach as one that aligns research methods with "Indigenous knowledge perspectives" (p. 125). Deconstructing students' sensemaking of school curricula heeds Castagno and Brayboy's (2008) point that "some understanding of epistemological concerns is important for educators hoping to engage [Culturally Responsive Schooling] for Indigenous youth because one's epistemology is fundamental to how he or she sees the world, understands knowledge, and lives and negotiates everyday experience" (p. 952). Here, we must resist assigning students to reductive categories based solely on racial identification while recognizing that some ways of knowing are shared by members of cultural groups (e.g., Moya, 2002, 2009). Given the small size of Mní school (64 students total), it would be difficult to offer proportional representation of student memes and voices in terms of their racio-cultural affiliations. Instead, we have sought to share data reflective of the diversity of perspectives offered in students' dialogues and compositions. Our findings illustrate how Indigenous cultural knowledge, resonant in the Water Protection Movement, permeated the conversational space regardless of students' identifications.

Informed by Kovach's (2019/2010) research with Indigenous research participants, we drew from conversational methods that privilege orality as a means for knowledge transmission (p. 127). While conversational methods in some ways parallel qualitative research methods, Kovach describes the distinctive characteristics of storytelling when used in tandem with an Indigenous framework:

a.) It is linked to a particular tribal epistemology (or knowledge) and situated within an Indigenous paradigm; b.) it is relational; c) it is purposeful (most often involving a decolonising aim); d) it involves particular protocol as determined by the epistemology and/or place; e) it involves an informality and flexibility; f) it is collaborative and dialogic; and g) it is reflexive. (p. 128)

We began our analysis by reading through fieldnotes and student interview transcripts and making note of epistemic discourses emerging across these data.

Employing tools of critical discourse analysis (Rogers, 2011), including multimodal analysis (Janks, 2014; Low & Pandya, 2019), and informed by a "decolonising aim" (Kovach, 2019/2010, p. 128), we developed the following questions to analyze student-generated memes in relation to their spoken discourse:

1. What positions do the texts make available for readers?
2. What cultural representations, social relations, and identities are articulated through spoken and written texts in the classroom?
3. What are the most "normal," or highest frequency, discourses reflected in these spaces?
4. Whose material interests do particular texts and discourses serve?
5. How do youth respond to non-normative identities/subjectivities in texts?
6. How do youth trouble or refuse identities/subjectivities in texts?

Below, we offer a discussion of our data analyses and elaborate our findings. Throughout the discussion, we call attention to how students drew on cultural and experiential knowledge to make sense of the images they examined.

Critically Analyzing Images to Create Memes on DAPL

The curriculum for the CML_DAPL unit began with students interpreting visual media representing various perspectives on DAPL. Students asked four categories of questions following a Critical Analysis Questions (CAQ) handout (Appendix 2). They first identified how images signaled tone and audience, then made inferences and examined power, positioning, and representation. Finally, students drew conclusions about images' messages, audiences, and affects. Following analysis of media imagery, students composed memes using the free program imgflip.com. Appendix 3 provides an overview of the essential questions, lesson objectives, images, and activities students completed each day. For the purposes of this paper, we focus on students' classroom discussions, the memes they made during the first two days of the unit, and their interview reflections. We chose not to include data from the third day due to the fact that Frank and Becky split students into two groups and some students did not complete their memes.

One objective of CML_DAPL was for students to formulate and deliver evidence-based arguments about contested topics. This required that they understand an issue from multiple perspectives for the purpose of addressing counter-arguments. As critical educators, we worked to understand students' viewpoints, not to impose our own views upon them. In our examination of student data, we attempt to avoid propagating "victory

narratives" (Lather, 1997), and endeavor to take a more nuanced view of students' participation in the unit. This allows us to engage both the potentially transformative as well as problematic aspects of co-constructing critical media inquiries with adolescents. Throughout, we interweave student reflections to illustrate how Mní students engaged political, social, cultural, and historical discourses about DAPL.

"A One Woman Army"

Frank and Becky opened the unit with an image from photojournalist Ryan Redhawk (Standing Rock, 2016), which students had discussed previously (Image 1). Using the CAQs (Appendix 2) to guide discussion, students in small groups made initial observations about the photograph and then made inferences about its rhetorical message. Frank called the class together and asked students to share their general observations. Several students reported that the most prominent aspects of the image were a Native person on a horse and the Pipeline Protectors; we coded this as a normal/high-frequency discourse. Given its prominence, Frank asked the class to explain their inference that the person on the horse was Native. Sophia recalled that Sebastian, a guest speaker who had visited the class earlier in the semester (and shared stories and photographs about his experiences at Standing Rock), had told the class Native Americans rode horses. Mary commented that riding a horse is "old school" and that the person is riding the horse because she "cares about the land." Lindsay observed, "The Native Americans' land is being taken over." The multiracial group of students developed their interpretations of the image in relation to information they had received in school, coupled with their own knowledge of the values resonant in the Water Protection movement.

Image 1. Redhawk photograph (Standing Rock, 2016).

Frank called students' attention to the back of the Water Protector's shirt. Evan noted, "It's a bird." Frank responded, "Yeah, but what kind of bird?" Alyssa pointed to a hawk on her own sweatshirt. Several students began talking at once, and Daniel said, "It

looks like a dream catcher." More students looked at their own clothing and conversation erupted in the room as students made connections between the Mní School icon and the image on the back of the pictured Water Protector's shirt. Here, students' knowledge of Native American cultural symbols featured prominently in the discussion.

The conversation turned to the people in the background of the photograph. Carla said, "I think it's the army." Stephanie, jumping ahead to the "Audience and Affect" CAQs, inferred, "Do you see... top half is more defined than the bottom half [which] is lighter. Makes me think that the ones in the dark are the villains. Kind of like the girl is the hero, sort of." The class noted the powerful effect of seeing a single person juxtaposed against a backdrop of dozens of law enforcement officers. Sam commented, "She's a woman, alone, and they can be strong by themselves, because sometimes men aren't that strong." We are intrigued by Sam's gendering of the Water Protector to make a statement about women being stronger than men. Students created memes the next day and many were guided by the previous day's conversation. For example, Daniel's meme included the words, "One woman army? Not fair! #STOP D.A.P.L." (Image 2). Daniel's meme, like many of his peers', captured the sentiment that the pictured Water Protector (who he also gendered as a woman) was outnumbered by Pipeline Protectors, resulting in an unfair situation. Sam, creator of the "Monsters vs. Aliens" meme (Image 3), explained to Becky that she labeled Pipeline Protectors monsters "because they are stopping [the Water Protectors] from protesting and stopping them from trying the Dakota Access Pipeline." She continued: "Native Americans are the aliens because to some people they might seem like [an] alien idea to people who are for the pipeline."

Sam employed critical literacies, both in her meme and her reflection, to articulate how Indigenous people are constructed as displaced, landless foreigners in their own ancestral homeland. Her critique of the violent injustice is clearly captured through her use of the word "monsters" to describe Pipeline Protectors. In her interview with Becky, Sam shared, "Usually I don't get involved in these kind of things, but I am kind of interested in this." She explained that she felt the situation was unfair to the Native Americans who clearly did not want the oil pipeline built on or near their land.

Image 2. Daniel's meme.

Image 3. Sam's meme.

"...There is Really Not a Hero or a Villain"

At the end of Day 1, the teachers asked students to draft meme statements about the Redhawk photograph (Figure 1). Several employed derogatory stereotypes, using "pigs" and "doughnuts" to refer to Pipeline Protectors. Earlier, Frank had expressed the desire not to explicitly demonize Pipeline Protectors. Despite supporting the Water Protectors, he was sensitive to students whose family members served in local law enforcement and in the military, as well as students whose parents worked for the energy company funding for the Dakota Access Pipeline. While we acknowledge that this decision may have undermined the critical nature of the project by not encouraging students to vilify law enforcement, we believe Frank's choice to invite an interrogation of stereotypes better positioned students to counter power exploitation through humanizing discourses.

On Day 2, Frank and Becky began class by discussing the word "stereotype." Frank drew a connection, asking students to talk about their feelings when people make comments that students at their school are "at-risk." Students also discussed stereotypes made about different racial groups. This conversation seemed to open space for students to interrogate the notion of a rivalry between Water Protectors and Pipeline Protectors. When the teachers asked students to consider power and positioning in the Redhawk photograph, several students disputed the assertion that the sides represented in the image should be bifurcated as hero/villain (as the CAQs in Appendix 2 asked them to do). This shifted a dominant discourse from the previous day of solely sympathizing with the Water Protectors to acknowledging that people on both sides of the protest line had jobs to do (which, of course, is a moral dilemma of its own). Marvel offered a structural analysis, arguing that the vitriolic relationship between Pipeline Protectors and Water Protectors was irrelevant because neither side had the power to stop the pipeline. He believed that true power rested in the hands of elected officials and the power company:

> [The image] almost makes it sound like they are rivals. The [Pipeline Protectors] are not there to be [the Water Protector's] enemy. They are there for safety. So, like, there is really not a hero or a villain, because the person on the horse is not stopping them from making the pipeline. The [Pipeline Protectors are] not stopping them from protesting. The only person that could stop it is the government or whoever made the contract to do it.

We could read Marvel's analysis as being ill-informed about the Pipeline Protectors' power as an extension of the state-sanctioned authority levied on behalf of the energy company. Pipeline Protectors did, in reality, have the power to stop protestors and frequently did so in a violent and gruesome manner. Instead, Marvel drew on his own experiences with local law enforcement, whom he viewed as protectors. During an interview, Marvel had shared with Becky that police officers had saved his friend's life when they attempted suicide.

Certainly, Frank or Becky could have argued with Marvel, imposing our collective critical understandings of the violence perpetrated by Pipeline Protectors through offering interpretations of Redhawk's photograph. We felt ethically obliged not to. Students need space to grapple with issues within an environment of care. Nevertheless, Marvel's analysis of Image 1 did include an understanding of injustice and demonstrated his

awareness of a powerful institution (the government) underwriting pipeline construction. While we had hoped for students to deconstruct how Image 1 conveyed the actual power dynamics playing out at DAPL, Marvel's critique illustrates how the classroom dynamic of centering student's voices allowed multiple perspectives to be voiced. This approach enabled students to engage a dialogic and reflexive exploration of their positions in relation to DAPL and its depiction on social media.

The class shifted to a conversation about how Pipeline Protectors and Water Protectors were both doing their jobs. Despite demonstrating empathy, students maintained a focus on the Water Protectors' protest. For example, Sophia created her first meme (Image 4) using Redhawk's photo and included the words "One vs. All. Fighting for what you belive (sic) in" in capitalized white font.

Image 4. Sophia's meme.

In her interview with Becky, Sophia explained that people must voice their political positions to drive change. Becky asked her to explain who in the meme was fighting for their beliefs.

Sophia: I feel like people, they'll think something and they won't share it, and then if it doesn't get done, then they will be like: 'Why didn't this happen?' So, if people fight for what they believe in, then it will happen. You can still fight for it because you believe in it.

Becky: Are the enforcement officers in the back of the image a part of this fight?

Sophia: For this one, it is a little different, because [the Pipeline Protectors] aren't going to hurt people, but they are going to make sure that there is no craziness. They want it to stay calm and make sure that it doesn't get out of

control. The only reason that they would hurt people here is if [the Water Protectors] started going crazy and hurting people.

When Becky asked what might make people change their behaviors, Sophia explained that people might get upset when they realize the pipeline was going to be built despite their protests. While the class had discussed that the pipeline was presently being built, and past guest speakers had shared that Pipeline Protectors had treated Water Protectors violently, Sophia, like several of her peers, including Marvel, upheld the notion that police and military officials were protecting people from themselves and operating with good intentions. Regardless of whether we agree, we believe a critical literacy curriculum must allow for students' own knowledge to inform their interpretations, lest educators recreate pedagogical conditions that devalue minoritized youths' local knowledge.

"When We Come Together We Become Happier."

With the intention of honoring students' multiple (competing) perspectives, Frank and Becky selected two new images for Day 2. Acknowledging many students' positive experiences with local law enforcement, they selected Image 5 because it showcased harmony between the groups. The image originated on the Indigenous Environmental Network's website (Dakota Access, 2016) and depicted Pipeline Protectors shaking hands with Water Protectors. This procession was held following a demonstration by Water Protectors contesting charges that they had stockpiled weapons near the protest site. Their expressed purpose was to reaffirm their commitment to peaceful protest.

Image 5. Indigenous Environmental Network photo (Dakota Access, 2016).

The other new image (Image 6) was shared by a previous guest speaker, Sebastian, from his visit to Standing Rock. The photograph depicts a small child dancing in regalia near a campfire in one of the Water Protection Movement's encampments.

Image 6. Sebastian's original photograph from Standing Rock, 2016.

On Day 2 of the CML_DAPL unit, students examined Images 5 and 6 using the CAQs in Appendix 2, and noted their contrasts with Image 1. Specifically, in Image 5, students mentioned people's brightly colored clothing, their smiling faces, and people reaching over an invisible line shaking hands. The photo served the function of diffusing derogatory language students had earlier used to describe police officers. Daniel shared, "Some people don't like cops a lot, but right here in that picture, they seem to be good guys." Noting the fact that their helmet shields were raised, and the officers wore smiles on their faces, Evan concurred, "The tension seems a lot lighter." Daniel's and Evan's readings served the material interests of Pipeline Protectors. Sam disagreed, commenting that despite being portrayed as "good guys...they're not."

Some students used Image 5 to advocate for peaceful relationships. Using white font and all caps, Sam inscribed, "Don't be like this guy and stand to the side. Be like these guys and reassure." Her message communicates a discourse of care to those in positions of power, asking that they act as caring as their careful portrayal. Sam also conveys an understanding about power. By focusing on the police officers' dispositions, and writing her message through the implied you, Sam recognizes that Pipeline Protectors have a choice in how they interact with Water Protectors, whereas Water Protectors are at their mercy.

Mary and Stephanie typed, "When we come together, we become happier," in white font over Image 5, creating one meme (Image 7). Students had earlier discussed the significance of the color white to signify peace. When Becky asked Stephanie what she hoped people would take from her meme, she shared, "Maybe that people who are for and against can come together to stop the building of the pipeline if it is still being built."

Similar to Marvel, Stephanie questioned the utility of calling police officers "monsters." She explained, "I don't know if the police are the monsters, but maybe the government, because the police are doing their job, and they might not want to lose their job." The words "come together" and "happier" indicate that by working together, peace and happiness can be achieved. Whether aspirational or cynical – we cannot fully say – Stephanie's, Mary's, and, Sam's memes contain an explicit message of fellowship.

Image 7. Mary and Stephanie's meme.

Marvel's and Tanner's memes, however, assume a commanding position on DAPL's projected outcomes. Both expressed a desire for peace and harmony, but they shifted the temporal context of the image from now to later. Tanner wrote the words "This is what could happen if we stop D.A.P.L." In Tanner's view, we may smile and shake hands with our enemies, but only after we have defeated their unjust cause. Marvel, meanwhile, asserted a stance that "It's time to show respect," perhaps to one another, but more likely (based on his other work) to the Water Protectors. Both Tanner's and Marvel's memes highlight the recontextualizing power of memes. By changing an image's temporal context, its message can be changed.

Lupe and Lindsay resisted portraying Pipeline Protectors in a favorable light, and instead focused on establishing solidarity with the Water Protectors in using Image 6, which they recalled from Sebastian's visit. Lupe wrote, "When you start dancing to give hope" (Figure 8), and Lindsay offered a frank "Dont (sic) plant the pipeline" in ominous red and black font (Figure 9). Lupe's words suggest an understanding of how dance is

used in various Native American cultures, while Lindsay's assert the Water Protectors' reasons for residing in the encampment.

Image 8. Lupe's meme.

Image 9. Lindsay's meme.

Rather than a call for facile "let's all get along" sentiments, students creating memes in solidarity with the Water Protectors asserted that harmony was conditional upon justice and respect for the Water Protectors.

Final Reflections

Nearly three decades of research shows that Native students "will learn better and be more engaged in schooling when they can make connections to it" (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 981). Despite being labeled "at risk," Mní students demonstrated nuanced understandings of rhetoric, argumentation, and multimodal redesign through the CML_DAPL unit. Students found an avenue to critically analyze and remix media imagery relating to social contemporary and connected issues. Throughout, the teachers resisted telling students how to think, instead opening classroom space for students to apply their cultural, personal, and experiential knowledge toward multimodal textual analysis. For some, this included taking up critically conscious positions; for others, this meant sympathizing with the so-called villains alongside the heroes. By providing media texts showing multiple perspectives, students were invited to arrive at their own conclusions.

Critical literacies are enacted when students challenge inequity and power. The primary learning objectives of CML_DAPL were directed towards supporting Mní students in considering how digital media-texts are used to convey messages and to position people differently in relation to resources (e.g., Janks, 2014). Overall, students composed humanizing messages around a polarizing topic, a feat many adults, including those in leadership positions, struggle to achieve. As we stated to begin our paper, we live in unjust times. By leveraging their epistemic privilege to comment on contemporary social movements, minoritized young people are able to contribute their voices to the ever-expanding "chorus of justice" (Kirkland, 2013, p. 12). As educators, we take heart in both the harmony and the cacophony of this work.

List of Images

Image 1. Redhawk photograph (Standing Rock, 2016).¶

Image 2. Daniel's meme.

Image 3. Sam's meme.

Image 4. Sophia's meme.

Image 5. Indigenous Environmental Network photo (Dakota Access, 2016).

Image 6. Sebastian's original photograph from Standing Rock, 2016.

Image 7. Mary's and Stephanie's meme.

Image 8. Lupe's meme.

Image 9. Lindsay's meme.

List of Appendices

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Appendix 1. Mní Student Participants and Identifiers.

Student Name	Racial Identifier	Gender Identifier
Alyssa	White	female
Carla	Native American	female
Daniel	White	male
Evan	White	male
Jason	White	male
Justin	Black	male
Lindsay	White	female
Lupe	Native American and Latina	female
Mark	Black and Latino	male
Marvel	Native American	male
Mary	White	female
Sally	White	female
Sam	White	female
Sebi	Latino	male
Sophia	Native American	female
Stephanie	Native American	female
Steven	White	male
Tanner	White	male

Note: All names are pseudonyms. Each participant provided assent and guardian permission/consent.

Appendix 2. Critical Analysis Questions (CAQ) handout in CML_DAPL Curriculum

Taking Stock

1. What do you see in the images/video/article? What stands out to you?
2. What people did you see? animals? vehicles? anything else?
3. How are the objects/people/animals placed in relation to one another?
4. What colors do you see?
5. What is most prominent (large, repeated, visible) in the text?
6. What is least prominent (small, hidden, backdrop) in the text?
7. What is missing from the text that you would expect to be there?
8. What in this text is familiar to you? What personal connections are you making to this text? What emotions are you feeling as you read this text? How are your feelings affecting how you read the text (e.g., what are you noticing and focusing on?)

Drawing Inferences

1. Who do you think the audience is for this text?
2. Is this image playing off a culturally or historically familiar idea (or trope?)
3. Are people/events being represented through stereotypes?
4. Why do you think the author created this image (what do you think their object was?)?

Power & Positioning

1. Whose perspectives are represented?
2. Whose voices are heard?
3. Whose voices are left out?
4. What stereotypes are there in the text?

Audience & Affect

1. What's the story in this text?
2. Who's the hero or heroes of this story?
3. Who are the villains?
4. What is the setting?
5. Who is the audience?
6. How do you think the author wants us to feel about the events/people in the text?

7. Would you use this text to tell a story about DAPL? What might need to be modified to make it more accurate?

Appendix 3. Overview of Essential Questions, Lesson Objectives, Images Used for Analysis, and Daily Activities CML_DAPL Curriculum

Essential Questions.
1. How does critical media literacy allow readers to see how narratives about power, positioning, privilege are being constructed in multimodal texts?
2. How does combining modes (image, words, movement, coloring, framing) inform the story that is being told in a (multimodal) text?

Lesson Objectives.
1. Make general observations about multimodal texts distributed on the Internet and that are related to DAPL.
2. Critically analyze multimodal texts distributed on the Internet and that are related to DAPL.
3. Apply critical thinking when composing and discussing their reasoning when designing multimodal texts (memes).

Evaluation:
Use CAQ to analyze multimodal visual text.
Write captions for static images to create memes about DAPL.
Explain their rationale for their multimodal choices.

Day	Learning Activities	Materials
Day 1	1. CAQ completed through whole class discussion. a. What do you see in the image? b. Who do you think the audience is for this text? c. Whose perspectives are represented? d. What's the story in this text? 2. Prewriting for meme creation independently or with table groups using image 1.	1. CAQ 2. Image 1 (Ryan Redhawk, 2016)

Day 2	1. Class reviewed student Meme Prewriting Examples.
	    a. One against everybody; native americans vs the police
	    b. This is our land.
	    c. I am going to kick your tushie.
	2. Students discussed **stereotype** and talked about how stereotypes are over generalized statements that are sometimes harmful.
	3. Analyze image 2 as a whole class using Critical Analysis Questions.
		1. CAQ
		2. Student Meme Prewriting
		3. Image 2
		
		(Dakota Access, 2016)
		4. Image 3
		
		Sebastian's picture from Standing Rock

Day 3	1. Analyze images 4, & 5. 2. Class discusses "juxtaposition." 3. Class breaks into two groups (two rooms with one teacher each) and uses CAQ for Cemetery and Bulldozer meme (Image 4). 4. Students create memes with two juxtaposed images.	1. CAQ 2. Image 4
Day 4	Individual debrief conversation with Author 1 about their composition choices and reflection on the week's class conversations.	