

Climate Change-
Who's Carrying the Burden?
The Chilly Climates of the Global Environmental Dilemma
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Climate Change — Who's Carrying the Burden?

**The chilly climates of the
global environmental dilemma**

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Dig Where You Stand!

Food research/education rooted in place, politics, passion, and praxis

A popular education program in Sweden, called “Dig Where You Stand” (Lindqvist, 1979), encourages a ‘bare-foot’ research and educational process that begins with ourselves and our immediate environment to uncover the history beneath our feet and critically engage with it. It is also an apt mantra for The FoodShed Project, a new collaborative research project involving over 30 local food initiatives, in collaboration with faculty and students at the University of Toronto and York University.¹ In fact, our focus on the southern Ontario foodshed aims to recover the history and strengthen a burgeoning innovative network of agro-ecological farmers, farm educators, land stewards, urban agriculturalists, environmental and community food security organizations, ethnic culinary initiatives, certifying bodies, producer and consumer coops, public agencies, food educators and researchers.

The framing of the project around the concept of the foodshed counters the geopolitical thinking that has shaped the global food system over the past 60 years. Since the turn of the millennium, there has been ample evidence that this model of corporate industrialized and export-oriented agriculture coupled with neoliberal trade policies has been a major contributor to climate change. Besides its inordinate dependence on vast quantities of

water for monocultural agroindustrial production, it produces greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide) and depends on fossil fuels for long-distance transport. Many aspects of the production, distribution, and consumption practices of the corporate and chemicalized agrifood system threaten biodiversity, human and ecological health (Barndt, 2007; Roberts, 2009).

The FoodShed Project is being shaped by its collaborators who are part of a broader movement for climate justice, guided by principles of equity, sustainability and civic engagement. The research and educational process we are crafting is rooted in place, politics, passion and praxis, integrating processes of decolonization, popular education, community arts and participatory action research. This essay outlines each of these interrelated methodologies and illustrates them with examples from FoodShed Project partners.

Rooted in place: decolonization

To be rooted in place, we need to be conscious of both the historical and the geographic context that shapes who and where we are now. The monument of Christopher Columbus with an Indigenous woman at his feet, erected in Peru in 1876, could be located anywhere in the hemisphere or even in Europe (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Columbus with Indigenous woman at his feet (photo by author).

It immortalizes the white male European ‘discoverers’ who brought ‘civilization’— epitomized by opulent clothing, a cross and an upward gaze — to the ‘savages/heathens,’ here a naked Indian maiden. Even though this artistic representation is more than 150 years old, people today, inevitably still see their own lives within the persistent and intersecting power relations represented here: sexism, heterosexism, classism, militarism, religious evangelization, racism.

How does the Columbus statue reflect your history and cur-



Figure 2: New Canadian farmers at Farmstart’s McVean farm near Brampton (photo by author).

rent relationships? How are similar relations of power operating in the global food system? How can we decolonize the current debate about climate change, in particular, revealing the colonial dimensions of the global food system?

Decolonization can be seen as comprising several different processes: acknowledging the history of colonialism; working to undo the effects of colonialism; striving to unlearn habits, attitudes, and behaviours that continue to perpetuate colonialism; and challenging and transforming institutional manifestations of colonialism. Indigenous and post-colonial theorists have helped us unpack colonial notions of knowledge and knowledge production while also probing the ways that colonized peoples are speaking back from the margins, reclaiming not only their land but also diverse ways of knowing and communicating (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Loomba, 1998; Spivak, 1988). How can we ensure that these voices are heard in the struggle for climate justice and that we all learn from other ways of envisioning the Earth and our relationship to all living things? How can we draw upon the knowledges of diasporic populations to develop food alternatives that are place-based but not place-bound?

York University is located on property that was originally filled with corn that fed 1,000 inhabitants of a Seneca village.

Decolonizing would involve learning about the history and practices of Aboriginals native to this land, as well as drawing upon the rich diversity of practices brought to this land by the diasporic populations who are increasingly a majority (and may have Indigenous roots in another country). Two FoodShed partners have created programs that honour the agricultural knowledges and food traditions of new Canadians, for example. For a nominal cost, FarmStart (www.farmstart.ca) offers plots of land on the outskirts of suburban Brampton to new Canadians so that they can test their own seeds in a new ecological context, and incubate new farms (Figure 2). In the heart of Toronto, the urban agriculture coordinator at The Stop Community Food Centre (www.thestop.org), an African agronomist is experimenting in growing tropical fruit in a spacious greenhouse at the Wychwood Barns.

Rooted in politics: popular education

(The) general liberal consensus that 'true' knowledge is fundamentally non-political (and conversely, that overtly political knowledge is not 'true' knowledge) obscures the highly organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced.

(Said, in Young, 2003: 59)

The implicitly political nature of education, alluded to above by Edward Said, was profoundly articulated by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, whose seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has influenced popular educational projects and social movements all over the world. Freire contended that education is not neutral, that it must start with the experiences and perceptions of the learners, that the content should be drawn from their daily lives, that the teachers are learners and learners teachers. His problem-posing approach to education encouraged learners to name the social contradictions they faced and to consider how they might act collectively to transform them. This process of 'conscientization' integrated the personal and political, the individual and collective, action and reflection.

Freire built on an analysis of power developed by Antonio Gramsci (1971). The Italian Communist journalist introduced the concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony as a way of

understanding power and struggle for change. His notion of hegemony is dynamic, framing power as relational, or persuasion from above as well as consent from below. Gramsci suggested that dominant groups maintain ideological control through intellectual and moral persuasion, winning the hearts and minds of people who might not even share their interests. Struggles for power by marginalized groups represent 'counter-hegemonic' forces that challenge and transform this dominant hegemony. People must consent to dominant ideas and practices in order for hegemony to work. Ideological institutions such as schools, media, and advertising are critical to this process, and so any efforts to challenge current power relations must involve processes of education and communications.

Think about the ways that we are influenced by advertising to buy the 'perfect tomato' (which may be grown with pesticides and transported thousand of miles to our table); or how kids have been seduced into fast food restaurants and childhood obesity by the toys offered along with the fries (Barndt, 2007). This is hegemony at work, reflecting our consent to eat food that may not be good for us. Persuaded by advertising, we are also inadvertently consenting to an unsustainable food system. Except that most people don't make the connection. Nor do they think they have many options, other than the cheap and convenient, given that most of us have been deskilled in growing and cooking our own food.

FoodShare's Recipe for Change program (www.foodshare.net) is tackling that tremendous gap directly by advocating that the provincial Ministry of Education integrate food literacy into the entire primary and secondary school curriculum; this would require that all students learn how to grow and cook food, while also learning the political, economic, ecological, and cultural dynamics of food production and consumption. Headed by a graduate of the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES), the campaign could be supported by the Bondar report promoting the integration of environmental education across all subjects as well as the Equity policy of the Toronto Board of Education.

This suggests a popular education approach that links the daily experiences of the students, their families and communities with the broader history of food and agriculture, the industrialized food system and climate change, the diverse cultural

practices of immigrants, and the community-based initiatives promoting climate justice. Food is a great code for an interdisciplinary education, for experiential learning, and for linking theory with practice — all features of popular education. The FoodShed Project is committed to working with partner organizations to promote nonformal education with communities as well as public school transformation.

Rooted in passion: community arts

Popular education and community arts are counter-hegemonic practices within the cultural sphere. Both practices are about engaging minds, hearts, and bodies in transformative processes, which aim to develop critical social consciousness and move toward more collective actions. While the term 'community arts' is relatively new, the process it refers to — the engagement of people in representing their collective identities, histories, and aspirations in multiple forms of expression — is as old as cave paintings and ritualistic chanting. In Aboriginal contexts, art was/is seen as "an expression of life" practiced by all the people, integrated into ceremony and community (Cajete, 1994: 154).

The separation of 'art' from 'community' perhaps has its roots in both a body/mind and a nature/culture split in Western consciousness emerging from certain streams of the European scientific revolution of the 1700s (Griffin, 1995) and in the commodification of art and knowledge associated with industrial capitalism of the 1800s (Berger, 1972). This has intensified in recent decades with commercialized and individualistic practices of art and media in the context of corporate cultural globalization, often "reducing culture to commerce" (Adams & Goldbard, 2002: 20). In fact, the same forces that have deskilled us in food production have also made people feel that they aren't creative or able to make art that reflects their lives.

We can draw, however, from examples of community-engaged art and media in historical social movements. Community development and community animation in the radical 1960s (*animation socioculturelle* in Quebec) linked the organizing of marginalized communities with the expression of their issues through theatre such as Teatro Campesino (Rose-Avila, 2003), video such as the Canadian National Film Board's Challenge for Change

program (Marchessault, 1995), and music such as Black spirituals in the civil rights movement (Sapp, 1995).

Among activists of the new millennium, there has been a resurgence of participatory production of the arts, often in response to the commodified culture of global capitalism and the promotion of passive consumption rather than active citizenship. It is evident in the proliferation of puppets, masks, and performance artists in street protests (Hutcheson, 2006), as well as in the adoption of culture jamming practices (Liacas, 2005), theatre of the oppressed techniques (Boal, 2001), hip hop music, and reclaim the streets movements (Jordan, 2002). It is perhaps most fertile currently in creative activist art blossoming from multiple sites through new social media and web-based activism (Kidd, 2005).

Cleveland (2002) suggests that community arts can nurture four different kinds of purposes: to educate and inform us about ourselves and the world; to inspire and mobilize individuals and groups; to nurture and heal people and/or communities; and to build and improve community capacity. The social experience of art-making can open up aspects of peoples' beings, their stories, their memories and aspirations, in ways that other methods might miss. When people are given the opportunity to tell their own stories — whether through oral traditions, theatre, visual arts, music, or other media — they bring their bodies, minds, and spirits into a process of communicating and sharing their experiences; they affirm their lives as sources of knowledge, and they stimulate each other in a synergistic process of collective knowledge production.

Community arts are central to the FoodShed Project, as partners are eager to find ways to tell the stories of their innovative practices and to inspire a broader public. We have been experimenting with a new community media process of digital storytelling. In the winter of 2010, York graduate students in a cultural production workshop collaborated with FoodShed partner organizations to critically explore the contradictions around 'local food and food justice.' Adapting the digital storytelling method in various ways, students produced short videos featuring personal narratives by organization members that revealed central principles and challenges of the local food movement (Figure 3). These short videos may be used by the groups themselves, in all-candidates meetings around the municipal elections, in schools with a teacher's guide, and so forth.

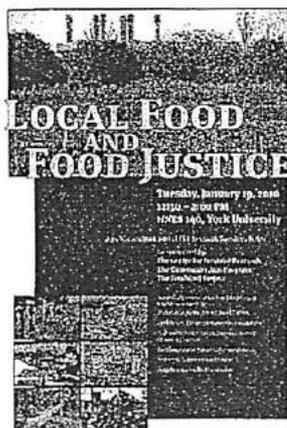


Figure 3: York public seminar linking local food groups with digital storytellers (poster by Todd Barsanti/photo by author).

York students in the Community Arts Practice (CAP) program (www.yorku.ca/cap) also collaborated with local food and art groups in organizing a community event as part of the annual Eco Art and Media Festival. "Growing Art, Rooted in Communities" involved The Stop Community Food Centre, the Association of Native and Performing Arts, the Latin American Canadian Art Projects and the Storytelling Centre at the Artscape Wychwood Barns in a series of activities overlapping with the Saturday Farmers' Market. Native singing and drumming filled the barns while market goers contributed to a

zine of recipes and stories; family-oriented hands-on art-making workshops produced instruments, placemats, cornhusk dolls, and seed plantings while storytellers and dancers entranced audiences; and students served bread and home-made soups to over 150 community members.

Rooted in praxis: participatory action research

Pure action without reflection is uncritical and nonstrategic activism, while pure reflection without action is mere verbalism.

— Paulo Freire,
Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Implicit in popular education is a process of participatory action research (PAR), engaging learners in an investigation of their own lives in order to more deeply understand the power relations that limit them so they can become more conscious and active agents of change. Participatory research in fact originated within popular education networks, and is understood to be integral to the three-pronged process of research, education, and

action associated with Freirean-shaped popular education. Community arts and popular communications are thus tools in this process of people researching their own lives.

According to Carr and Kemmis (1986), PAR is critical social research, different from positivist research (often carried out by a detached scientist) or interpretive research (focusing on subjective meanings). The purpose of liberatory or critical research is the creation of movement for personal and social transformation in order to redress injustices, support peace, and form spaces of democracy. PAR is thus distinguishable from other forms of research by its action component and by being carried out on a group basis (rather than by external researchers independently). It involves *praxis*, or reflecting on what needs to be done, taking action, and reflecting on that action.

PAR has also been a fertile ground for the development of arts-based research methods, a growing field within education, health and social science research. Susan Finley locates 'arts-based research' in the realm of socially transformative approaches: "By its integration of multiple methodologies used in the arts with the postmodern ethics of participative, action-oriented, and politically situated perspectives for human social inquiry, arts-based inquiry has the potential to facilitate critical race, Indigenous, queer, feminist and border theories and research methodologies" (Finley, 2008: 71).

The FoodShed Project has adopted participatory action research as a primary methodology, as it honours the diverse collaborating groups as equal partners in determining the themes, forms, and actions we take. A major goal of the project is to recover the histories of these innovative groups — facilitating collective reflection on their organizational ecology as well as how they engage in both generational and cultural renewal.

Project partners have been experimenting with PAR over the past decade. While working as the Urban Agriculture coordinator for Foodshare in the late 1990s, Lauren Baker facilitated a participatory research process with eight ethnic gardens in Toronto; the Seeds of Our City project (Baker, 2002) involved gardeners in researching the productivity of their diverse community garden practices and exchanging both knowledge and seeds with each other. Baker, FES grad and now executive director of Sustain Ontario, a provincial network for healthy food and farming,

recently published a food policy document commissioned by the Metcalf Foundation. Employing a popular education approach, *Menu 2020: Ten Good Food Ideas for Ontario*, advocated for policy that would support local producers, encourage new and alternative farms, compensate farmers as environmental stewards, provide space for urban growers, create integrated school food policies, fund community food centres, create regionally based food clusters, promote local food procurement, integrate good food into health promotion, and educate planners in agricultural land-use options (Hui, 2010: A3). The link between research and action is not always direct, but rather cumulative; these proposals for policy change have come out of myriad gatherings of a growing food network in the city and province.

Dig where you stand: reimagining university education

If we are to dig where we stand, let's end by considering how university education might be rooted in place, politics, passion and praxis. Can we see a place for processes of decolonization, popular education, community arts, and participatory action research in our classrooms and university community?

At York University, we find ourselves standing on a shifting terrain, amidst several troubling trends:

- The deepening corporatization of the neoliberal university, with eroding public funding and increasingly more dependence on private monies and interests;
- The prioritizing of federal and provincial monies for science and technology, business and law, with diminishing support for the humanities, arts and social sciences;
- The measurement of successful teaching reduced to the number of 'bums in seats' and of successful research reduced to the amount of tricouncil research monies secured;
- An increasingly market-driven curriculum which assumes that obtaining a well-paying job is the ultimate mission of universities in the 21st century.

York was founded over 50 years ago with a commitment to social justice. It proudly touts the most diverse student body in

the country, and promotes itself as the interdisciplinary university. A recent White Paper,⁴ developed through consultation with the York community, proposes the new moniker of 'the engaged university,' highlighting community-university collaboration and experiential learning.

Now here's the Big Chill: inevitably, these goals collide directly with the trends outlined above. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum, in a recent interview in *The Globe and Mail* warns that the "growing obsession with knowledge that you can take to the bank" that eschews the teaching of critical thinking for quick fix technical training is coming back to haunt us. It has in fact led to the Wall Street economic collapse and the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico; it also dominates the thinking around climate change, which too often focuses on technical and market solutions to a much deeper problem. The humanities, arts and social sciences are essential, Nussbaum contends, so students aren't "just accepting what's passed down from some kind of authority, but thinking critically about it, examining yourself and figuring out what you really want to stand for" (Nussbaum in Allemang, 2010: F1). They bring richer meaning to life, nurture an empathetic understanding of differences among people, and train the imagination.

In spite of the chilly climate of the neoliberal university, there are initiatives at York that are very relevant to the FoodShed project goals, and epitomize the mantras of experiential learning, community engagement, and social justice as well as sustainability. In the 1990s, FES students started the Maloca Garden, a community garden at the southwest corner of the campus. While it remains a symbolic gesture toward relocalizing production, the President's Sustainability Council, a Sustainable Purchasing Coalition, and the Institute for Research on Sustainability are all engaged in exploring ways that York can move its food services toward more sustainable and just practices. A new Zero Waste policy is also a step in the direction toward climate justice. Along with promoting a deeper analysis of climate change framed by a climate justice perspective, students can get involved in these and other initiatives, through class assignments, independent studies, and extracurricular activity.

They, too, can dig where they stand...!