DECOLONIZING RESEARCH AND URBAN YOUTH WORK THROUGH COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

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Abstract

"Grounding Roots" is a community-based collaborative educational program that aims to build food, environmental, and cognitive justice through sustainable urban agriculture and horticulture via intergenerational communities of practice. Drawing upon Linda Tuhiwai Smith's framework of *decolonizing methodologies*, this qualitative case study examined the ways in which a Community-University partnership engaged in decolonizing work through research and practice, as well as the ways in which the partnership served to preserve colonizing practices. Data analyses was guided by deductive coding strategies grounded in theory on decolonizing practices. Identified decolonizing practices included implementing a program of worth to the community and youth; building from community-led agendas; and prioritizing community healing and transformation over academic research agendas. Identified colonizing practices included inequitable power hierarchies in the leadership team and in garden groups, deficit-oriented talk about minoritized youth, and the devalorization of youth voice. Implications from this work call for researchers to do their own research about the white supremacist roots embedded in their practices, and to embrace decolonizing and humanizing practices to guide their work. This ongoing work highlights the need for researchers doing community-based work to engage in community-driven agendas that prioritize processes over products; to facilitate distributed leadership in collaboration with community members; and to produce worthwhile work and products with the community.

Keywords: Community-University Partnership; Decolonizing Methodologies; Partnership Studies; Urban Agriculture; Workforce Development; Youth

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This work is rooted and layered in colonialism and neocolonialism in U.S. agricultural production and food systems (Holt-Giménez, 2018) and in academic research and knowledge production (Mignolo, 2009; Paraskeva, 2016). Colonization and slavery have led to racist and classist agriculture and food systems, with White landowners benefitting from the knowledge and labor of African American, Latinx, and Native American communities (Holt-Giménez, 2018). Still today, the majority of agricultural land and food systems are owned by White people, while non-dominant folks predominately hold unskilled labor positions (Holt-Giménez, 2018). Meanwhile, Western academic research has primarily served to oppress nondominant communities' experiences and knowledge systems (Mignolo, 2009; Paraskeva, 2016). Research subjects are often positioned as objects of intellectual property, and discoveries become Western knowledge, privileged over community-based knowledge and epistemologies (Smith, 2013).

Acknowledgement of these problems led us to investigate practices of a community-university partnership doing programmatic work and research within an urban community that has a historically tense relationship with the local university. The community has faced a history of discriminatory housing, employment, and policing practices, while currently experiencing disproportionate rates of poverty, crime, food insecurity, homelessness, and violence. The program was envisioned by community leaders who approached the local university, as a land grant institution, requesting its involvement in supporting the local community, creating accessibility to the University, and providing work for community members, particularly youth.

"Grounding Roots" was formed as an urban education and workforce development program for youth that aims to build food, social, and cognitive justice through sustainable urban agriculture. Urban youth work together with community mentors and interns from a local university to form intergenerational garden groups. Together, garden groups plant and care for gardens located in once vacant plots throughout the community. Greater program goals include connecting the community to healthy food production and consumption through youth leadership, as well as creating pathways to post-secondary education and the workforce.

Using a design-based research (DBR) approach (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012) this research examined the design and implementation processes of Grounding Roots in its first year, using triangulated data from program participant interviews, meetings, and field notes. The analysis processes were guided by *decolonizing methodologies*, as outlined by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2013). The central goals of this research were to examine the ways in which the Grounding Roots program, in its first year, enacted decolonizing practices and preserved colonizing practices through community-engaged partnerships, research, and programming. As DBR is iterative, the research findings were utilized to redesign planning and programming for Grounding Roots year 2. The following research questions provided guidance for the research:

(1) In what ways does a Community-University partnership, engaging in community-based urban youth work, engage in decolonizing practices?
(2) In what ways does the partnership and program perpetuate colonizing practices?

A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Colonization of Agriculture and Food Systems
Colonization, slavery, and white supremacy are inescapably the foundations of United States agriculture and food systems (Holt-Giménez, 2018). African American, Latinx, and Native American people have been the backbone of the U.S. food economy, with

little recognition (Holt-Giménez, 2018; National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition [NSAC], 2017). Millions of African Americans were enslaved to plantations and responsible for the production of the United States' most valuable crops, like cotton, sugar, and tobacco, and thus became experts in growing and production (NSAC, 2017). The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (2017) traces the white-supremacist and classist history of United States agriculture. With the 1862 Homestead Act, lands were made "eligible" for public agricultural settlement. Homesteaders were granted 160 acres to farm for 5 years or more, for a minimal filing fee. The majority of this "public land" was actually former tribal lands in the Great Lakes, Great Plains, the Dakotas, and former Mexican territory. The land had been pilfered through deception, broken treaties, and military conquest. As land was taken, local food systems were often destroyed. The majority of the Homestead Act acres were given to White Americans or European Americans. It was nearly impossible for marginalized individuals to obtain land, even though they had more growing expertise and experience than their White American and European counterparts. In more recent times, white supremacy power hierarchies in agriculture and food systems have been perpetuated by the denial of non-white folks to United States Department of Agriculture Farm loan programs (NSAC, 2017).

Non-dominant groups have consistently served as underpaid and undervalued laborers, even though they have built our food system and economy. Consequently, non-dominant groups experience disproportionately higher rates of food insecurity, environmental health issues, hunger, malnutrition, diabetes, and other diet-related illnesses (Holt-Giménez, 2018). A racial caste system still exists in our food system, with most land and farms owned by White people and most managerial positions held by White people (Holt-Giménez, 2018). The majority of food system workers and farm workers are still people of color paid poverty wages or below (Holt-Giménez, 2018).

We recognize food apartheid and racism as a foundation of today's food system. Historical and present day institutionalized racism are inescapable, but it is necessary

to recognize this racism in equity-oriented food systems work. With an acknowledgement of institutional inequities that perpetuate oppression in U.S. food systems, Grounding Roots is driven by a commitment to social, racial, and food justice. Larger programmatic goals include igniting the dismantling of social and white-supremacy inequities through the foundation of a just and sustainable local food system built by youth and community leadership across the nation. Mobilization of community food revolutions can lead to healthy food access and food sovereignty, as well as increased representation of racially and ethnically diverse individuals leading food systems transformations. We conceptualize food sovereignty as production, distribution, and consumption all under control by the people, rather than control by market-driven corporations. Food sovereignty includes people's rights to define their own agricultural and food systems, in ways that are socially and culturally relevant and environmentally healthy. A food systems transformation is not only about food, but also about social, racial, and ethnic equity.

Colonization of Knowledge, Research, and Epistemology

"As we know: the first world has knowledge, the third world has culture; Native Americans have wisdom, Anglo Americans have science" (Mignolo, 2009. p.2). Western academic knowledge has long been claimed, produced, reproduced, and legitimized through the politics of what constitutes legitimate methodology and record, as determined by dominant Western/European values and archeological positivism, while marginalizing other forms of scientific knowledge acquisition and preservation (Mignolo, 2009; Paraskeva, 2016). We recognize that education is not neutral. Rather, it is a political act of ideological control through curricula, pedagogy, research methodology, and historical records. Present day values regarding ways of knowing and being are built on the colonization and invisibilization of non-dominant people and knowledges (Grosfoguel, 2007; Paraskeva, 2016). The United States knowledge base has been firmly lodged in Western values and culture (Merriam 2007).

Curriculum, pedagogy, and history are cultural production and reproduction that produce eurocentrism that educators take part in and are often blind to (Paraskeva, 2016). With all of this in mind, given that Grounding Roots is a community-based program working with minoritized youth, we turn to Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2013) *decolonizing methodologies*. We use her framework to analyze our research and programmatic practices in an effort to help us improve our practice towards dismantling white-supremacy-propagating research and community programming practices.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGIES

> "The word itself, 'research' is probably one of the dirtiest words...It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters of us. It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the very people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be the creators of their own culture and own nations " (Smith, 2013, p. 1.).

Although Grounding Roots is not set in an indigenous community, the community is composed primarily of groups that have also been historically colonized and marginalized: African American, Africans, and Latinx. These groups have also experienced systematic oppression and discrimination in housing and employment, as well as anti-Blackness, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim sentiments. Thus, emancipatory, humanizing, decolonizing frameworks are an appropriate and responsive choice for work and research in the Grounding Roots community given the white supremacy and discriminatory legacies that have contributed to present day conditions of disproportionate poverty, joblessness, food insecurity, and crime.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2013) reminds us that academic research is an avenue through which colonialism is perpetuated and regulated. Although research brings with it tensions, Smith (2013) states that, "Research for social justice expands and improves the conditions for justice; it is an intellectual, cognitive, and moral project, often fraught, never complete, but worthwhile" (p.215). Smith (2013) provides a framework, *decolonizing methodologies,* as guidance. While we did not utilize decolonizing methodologies to guide research processes or program implementation initially, decolonizing methodologies were applied retroactively as an analytical framework to evaluate our work.

Three elements of this framework were applied to analyze the program: *researcher critical consciousness*, *an indigenous research agenda*, and *emancipatory community research*.

Critical Consciousness

For researchers to develop *critical consciousness,* they need to examine power, position, and representation in research, history-making, and knowledge formation processes (Smith, 2013). Western academic research and theory generation has consistently oppressed marginalized communities' experiences and multiple ways of knowing (Mignolo, 2009; Paraskeva, 2016; Smith, 2013). Research, through "imperial eyes," values positivist and objectively measurable ways of gathering and validating knowledge which exclude other cultural epistemological orientations and values (Mignolo, 2009; Paraskeva, 2016; Smith, 2013). Too often research subjects, particularly marginalized people, are positioned as objects of intellectual property in the research process. Smith (2013) advocates for researchers to do their own research into the colonial roots of history, writing, and research in order to understand the ways in which non-Western histories have been erased in a Western system that values particular methods of knowledge production and history making.

Community-based Research Agenda

Smith (2013) puts forth an "Indigenous Research Agenda," (p.121) which we believe can apply to other communities who have been systematically marginalized and who want justice and sovereignty for their people. In an "*indigenous research agenda*" (Figure 1), self-determination is at the core, with guiding goals of healing, transformation, decolonization, and mobilization. Through research done by and with communities, a new and self-determined research agenda can be empowering rather than colonizing (Smith, 2013).
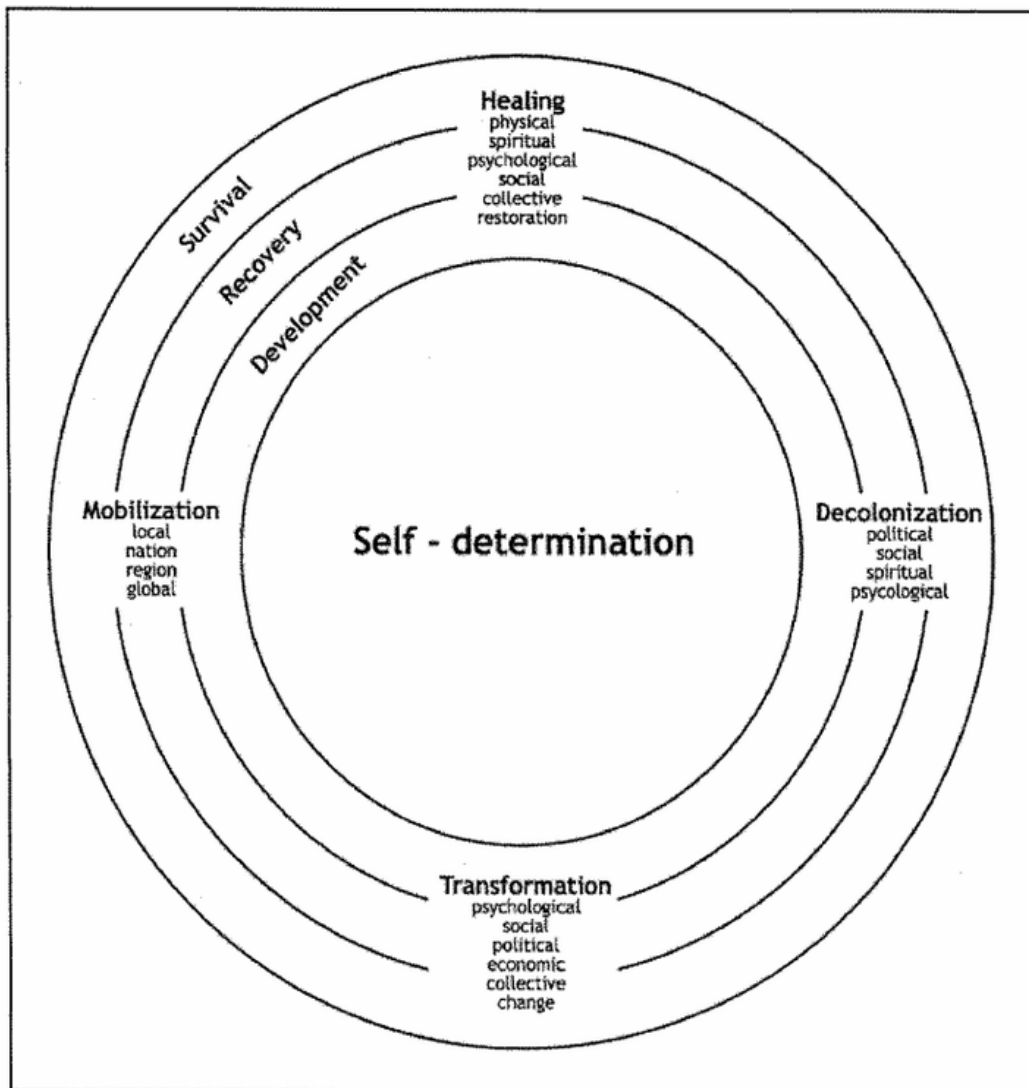

Figure 1. The Indigenous Research Agenda, as conceptualized by Smith (2013, p.121)

Emancipatory Community Research

"Respectful, reciprocal, genuine relationships lie at the heart of community life and community development" (Smith, 2013, p.125). To do *emancipatory community research,* (1) the research must be worthwhile for the community, (2) the community must have opportunity for extensive input and involvement, and (3) researchers must honor the valuable knowledge community members bring (Smith, 2013).

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

Case Context

This research took place within the context of a program called Grounding Roots, a Community-University collaborative educational program that aims to build food, environmental, and cognitive justice through sustainable urban growing and greening. Learning and career development are experiential and contextualized in real-world experiences related to food justice, food accessibility, food production systems, horticulture science, composting, cooking, and food distribution. Urban youth are hired through a local workforce development program, and work together with university undergraduates and community members in garden groups. Together, they form intergenerational communities of practice, in a tiered system of mentoring and learning. During an 11-week summer program, participants create and care for community gardens, cook, and participate in youth development and learning activities.

The program is situated in a predominately African American, African and Latinx community in a large midwestern city. Within the community, high poverty and low home ownership lead to vacant and derelict housing, which gets torn down and leaves vacant lots. Community members and organizations have seen these vacant lots as an opportunity for community garden growing and gathering. Important to consider in the context of this study is the tense relationship between the community and the

University. Community members have expressed feelings of resentment, disappointment, and distrust towards the University. A community member and community outreach coordinator for the University, helped us better understand the history of the tense relationship. Years ago the University included a general college in which community members could get complete general education credits at an affordable price. In 2006, the University closed the general college and, instead, offered similar affordable options onsite at the University. However, the redesigned opportunities weren't made known to the community most affected by the closure; community members felt let down and devoid of affordable educational options. "People took it as the University didn't care about poor people," she explained. The community has also felt hurt by research done on their community. She explained, "People want to do research on the community, about the community, but don't really want to return it back to the community." Research done on the community has selectively highlighted negative narratives. She stated, "Research tells the doom and gloom of what's happening...while these things are happening, it doesn't talk about why these things are happening, and is there a way out."

The Grounding Roots program was conceptualized by a social and food justice activist and community member who approached university professors wanting the University to fulfill its duties as a land grant university. He and other community members wanted pathways to the University and the workforce for the community's youth. They also wanted to build environmental sustainability, food security, and health within the community. His vision was to create urban farming-based learning and working communities with community members, youth, and undergraduate students from the University. This vision, in collaboration with university professors, developed into the Grounding Roots program.

Participants
In the summer of 2017, 37 youth participants were hired through a local workforce development program that seeks to provide job experiences and training for youth who

face barriers to entering the workforce. The majority (>95%) of youth participants represented communities of color. Eight university undergraduate agricultural education and food systems students were recruited as interns. Community mentors were identified by local community networks. Four garden groups were created, each with 8-10 youth interns from the local workforce development program; 2 university interns; and 1-2 community mentor(s). The university interns and community mentors worked together to lead the youth in gardening, learning activities related to environmental and food systems, and workforce development activities. Although data about the youth interns and university interns were collected, the data analyzed for this study came mostly from program design team members and community members and mentors. The primary adult participants are listed and described in Figure 2).

Name	Sex	Ethnic/Racial Identity	Role
Laura	Female	African American	Community mentor and grower. Born, raised, and lives in the community.
Natasha	Female	African American	Community mentor and grower. Born, raised, and lives in the community.
Justine	Female	White	Community mentor and grower. Lives in the city, outside of the community.
Patrick	Male	African American	Community member and partner. Born and raised in Community. Community grower and design team member.
Anthony	Male	African American	Community member and partner. Community grower and design team member.
Yvonne	Female	African American	Born, raised, and lives in community. Community outreach for the University. Daughter of a community elder and leader in the community gardening movement.
Janelle	Female	Latina	Community partner. Grower and youth worker.
James	Male	White	Community partner. Works for a local non-profit. In connection with many community growers.

Figure 2. Adult Participants Interviewed Post Grounding Roots Year 1. **All names are pseudonyms*

Research Design and Rationale

This work employed an exploratory case study, bounded by the Grounding Roots program (Yin, 2017), and guided by design-based research (DBR) methodology. Pragmatically oriented, DBR balances research and practice (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012). Defining elements of DBR methodology include:

- being situated in a real educational context
- focusing on the design and testing of a program or intervention that aims to improve experiences for humans
- programs designed by a team of collaborators including researchers, practitioners, and community members, all who bring diverse experiences and expertise
- research that pulls from mixed methodologies and frameworks,
- a cyclic research process involving multiple iterations of design, implementation, and refinement
- a research process that leads to practical design principles and grounded theorizing representing the contextualized research

Anderson & Shattuck, 2013

DBR was an appropriate methodology to examine Grounding Roots, as the program is iterative, involving cycles of design, implementation, evaluation and reflection, and redesign (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012). The program has a specific localized sociocultural context that influences how the program is designed (Crippen & Brown, 2016). The DBR design cycle benefitted from many voices, including researchers, community members, local partners, undergraduate interns, program coordinators, and youth (Crippen & Brown, 2016).

Data Sources and Analysis

In alignment with case study design (Yin, 2017), multiple data sources were collected and triangulated in the analysis for increased reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Primary data sources included transcribed post-program semi-structured interviews with community mentors and partners, and program design team members. The adult participants are listed and described in Figure 1. Additionally, the first author took field notes during post-program meetings and during conversations with community and university team members. Field notes and *reflexive memoeing* were triangulated to support findings from interviews. Reflexive memoeing is a qualitative research method in which the researcher, acknowledging positionality, reflects upon the recorded field notes and relates these notes to established theories and/or themes emerging from the research experiences. Youth focus groups and university intern interviews were also used as supporting data sources. Data analyses of interviews and field notes were guided by deductive coding strategies (Saldaña, 2015). Deductive codes grounded in theory and literature on decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 2013) were used to develop an initial codebook to guide analysis (Saldaña, 2015). Data analysis was completed using Dedoose qualitative coding software.

FINDINGS AND SUBSTANTIATED CONCLUSIONS

This section is organized into three subsections representing the categories of analyses from Smith's (2013) decolonizing methodologies: (1) researcher critical consciousness, (2) an indigenous research agenda, (3) emancipatory community research. Each section begins with a conclusive statement, substantiated by selected results from analyses. As the findings are organized in this way, implications are woven within.

Researcher Critical Consciousness

Researchers and team members working with marginalized communities need to explicitly engage in learning experiences to increase critical sociocultural, political, and historical consciousness in order to engage in decolonizing work.

Data analyses revealed that a collective challenge Grounding Roots experienced was working across diverse cultures and backgrounds. While diversity (in experiences, knowledge, background, ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status) is one of the program's greatest strengths, it also poses challenges and creates tensions. Community-based research requires outsiders to have deep contextual sociocultural awareness and critical consciousness (Smith, 2013; Johnson, 2016). Data analysis of community partner and mentor interviews indicated that some university team members lacked *critical consciousness* in sociocultural, racial, and historical factors important to community and youth work in the Grounding Roots context. For example, community partner Anthony spoke about a university project coordinator, saying, "He had these middle/upper class biases, prejudices, assumptions, assertions, which were mostly flawed. He insulted all the community members...he was arrogant and self-serving and dismissive. He served his tour and now he's moved on."

Additional tensions related to the university interns, most of whom came from white middle class rural backgrounds, without extensive experience working with diverse communities and youth. When asked about challenges, community mentor Laura responded, "culture stuff...the UM students talked about things...uncomfortable things...that came up and didn't feel right to our community." Laura's response is supported by the university intern data in which interns overwhelmingly expressed experiencing discomfort and challenge in working across differences. One university intern expressed,

> Being in an unfamiliar environment was a challenge, and like working with kids who don't necessarily have the same background as me. That was definitely a challenge along the way - to learn like how to respond in certain situations when the kids tell you something totally crazy.

Another community mentor, Natasha, expressed concern about university intern attitudes: "You could see the attitude when the U students came...and it was going to

be a disaster...the attitude was that 'we're helping you all'"...they used the wrong language, like "'to manage'" and "'get over here right now'".

This perception by a community mentor and member was supported by the university intern data, where some deficit-oriented views towards youth came through. Some spoke about the youth as being difficult to work with. For example, one university intern said,

> I realized I'm never going to have a harder class than I had to deal with this summer. I've dealt with kids who have gone to jail, I've dealt with kids who can't stop their mouth from running, I've dealt with kids who are just unmotivated, lazy you-know-what's but I love them all though...

Although she expressed great love for the youth, she focused on the ways in which the youth were struggling and difficult, rather than their strengths. About the youth, another university intern stated, "Even though it was obvious that some of them didn't care, at least they weren't being obnoxious or ruining it for other people." This perception of youth not caring is also deficit-oriented, and glosses over the many underlying systemic issues that could contribute to a minoritized youth appearing like they don't care.

Both university interns and community members observed a problematic disconnect between the university interns and the youth and community. A community partner, James, who worked closely with some of the community gardeners, reflected,

> Based on some other feedback that I received from community members, there needs to be some sort of youth development training for the university students. They do not understand the community, and it sounds like they imposed a lot of their privileges and ideas of 'proper behavior' on the youth in very unfair and

unjust ways – enforcing a structure of segregation and more distrust of the University.

This quote speaks to some of the tensions that arose from working with the workforce development program expectations. The university interns were the designated 'supervisors', and were supposed to set and enforce behavioral expectations. They were doing their best to prepare the youth professionally, working from their own understandings and backgrounds. However, some community members perceived these efforts as white folks controlling minoritized youth. More communication, sociocultural awareness, and sensitivity was needed in approaching the situation. These findings are not intended to place blame on the university. Humans are products of their contexts and life experiences. Different working environments have different professional and cultural expectations. In the academic world, there is limited support and funding related to community-based programming and research.

Given these findings, program partners have modified the ways in which researchers and university interns are prepared. As researchers, we've taken time to reflect on and discuss our own positionalities, experiences, and the biases we bring to the work. We've read and watched and listened to material about whiteness, privilege, colonialism and neocolonialism, decolonizing practices, and culturally responsive practices. We've learned more about the community, in terms of history, policy, schooling, race and class conflicts, and the relationship between the community and the University. We've explicitly examined our first year's work through the lens of decolonizing methodologies to improve our practices. A seven-week preparation course was developed for university interns on critical and culturally responsive youth work. Course sessions took place in the community so that interns could form a better understanding of community context, including strengths and cultural wealth of the community, as well as systemically oriented challenges. The course guided interns to unpack and critically examine colonialism, structural racism, privilege, whiteness, deficit thinking, and saviorism in youth work. They studied material on culturally responsive mentoring, funds of

knowledge, and community cultural wealth (e.g. Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Yosso, 2005).

An Indigenous Research Agenda

Community-based research requires a community-driven agenda in which self-determination, healing, mobilization, transformation, and decolonization are prioritized. Academic research agendas are sidelined.

In alignment with Smith's (2013) *indigenous research agenda*, research agendas were sidelined in favor of community and youth-centered priorities. Grounding Roots was driven by goals for social, racial, ethnic, youth, cognitive, and food justice; healing; and transformation. Community member and project lead Anthony stated, "I'm really trying to marry the local food movement with the civil rights movement and the environmental movement." For project participants, aligned with the indigenous research agenda, multiple justices were intertwined.

Additional voices presented by community members spoke to agendas that held self-determination, healing, and transformation at the center of the work being done. Community members discussed growing food as a shared commonality between people, and a way to heal community physically, socially, and psychologically. Community partner James expressed belief in the power of food to heal, and even to do decolonizing work. When talking about the positive parts of the program, he said, "Space to reflect, to commune around lunch, to learn what are our leadership and communication styles are...a workplace can be a place where you can grow as a human and dismantle aspects of having a white supremacist system." Natasha voiced the importance of togetherness and healing: "Friendships were formed with the kids, not from the same schools – it was unity – we need more of it in the community." Community mentor Justine spoke to the importance of social and psychological healing and transformation:

It was fun. Gardening, soil, dirt, and eating good food help to make your heart sing. It was great to talk to the students and listen to their stories. Helped everyone to grow. We built a community, A Family of Trees Growing Peace. Great motto that the students in our group developed…Food is medicine, food is healing. One of the things about food…it's a time for people to gather together and do their together thing. If we want to save our planet, this is the work we need to do.

Community partner James further spoke to healing and mobilization, "We're building a local economy supporting youth in work and doing capacity building. Those sort of things...those steps are where inequitable systems are being dismantled." In this way, Grounding Roots became a means of local mobilization, as referenced in the *indigenous research agenda*, as well as a catalyst for social, political, and collective transformation.

Emancipatory Community Research

Community-based programming and research must be worthwhile for the community. Research can only be empowering when it is led by community agendas, with horizontal leadership structures and extensive involvement from community members who bring valuable knowledge and experience.

Findings revealed the program as overall worthwhile, with the terms of success defined by the community, a core tenet of *emancipatory community research*. Community members spoke about learning, mentorship, job readiness skills, and career exposure. Community mentor Justine emphasized the learning component, "Young people are learning things, the interns are learning things, the garden stewards are learning things, it's all about learning…learning how to grow stuff, how to eat...doing the whole cycle of composting, growing, and eating." Community mentor Laura was happy about the youth in her community building career skills and food knowledge, "Not every kid is going to a corporate job, they need to learn vocational skills. The program made kids come out knowing where their food comes from. Little sparks. Hope we started a fire

in them, my spark is community building." Another community member, Patrick, spoke about the worth of the programming in terms of youth engagement, ownership, and connectedness:

> Youth urban farmers in our program have an opportunity for ownership...Youth learn about agriculture, food sciences and natural resources, and working together as one. They are invested, they are planting the seed they are harvesting. The urban farms are real life – not a school assignment that they will forget next year.

Natasha also spoke to the value of ownership in the experience. When talking about what she liked the most, she said, "What I liked most...was when the kids were allowed to plant what they wanted...and ended up with "my" tomatoes, "my" beans...gave them ownership and pride." Perceptions of worth by community members were supported by youth focus group data. Youth reported increased communication and collaboration skills, work ethic, perseverance, knowledge about college options, and interest in careers in food systems and the environment.

The program was also clearly led by community-envisioned agendas, as required in an indigenous research agenda. Food systems movements were underway in the community before the University joined. The University joined the community collaborative in hopes of supporting a vision and building capacity. In conversations leading up to the project, community member and partner Patrick stated, "We need to increase representation of urban youth in solutions to help with problems facing our community." Community members had long voiced that they wanted increased representation of non-dominant folks at the University and in agriculture, food, and natural resource science (AFNR) studies and careers. They wanted educational and career programming that would create pathways to the University and the workforce. Community partner Janelle explained the importance of the University connection in a conversation,

> Our youth need to be able to see themselves at the University - the University is a land grant...it's supposedly for all of us...but youth of color here, they know where they belong and don't belong. We want them to claim the University as theirs, as it rightfully is. They need to walk on those grounds and see themselves there.

By connecting the youth with near-peer university intern mentors and taking field trips to the University campus, the Grounding Roots team hoped to open up spaces for conversations about college life and possible paths. Although the project emerged from community visions, much of the program planning happened within the University, leaving out community voices. This was due to limited time and organization rather than intentional exclusion. However, the lack of voice was felt by community members. Community partner Yvonne explained, "It feels like power hoarding... the University still holds a lot of what's going on, people are given glimpses into things, it's hard to know how decisions are all being made within this structure." A university professor, Catherine, described the year one process as "the perfect storm" to illustrate the complexity of all the moving parts, miscommunications, and rushed planning processes.

Additionally, while the program model aimed to validate community and university knowledge, youth knowledge and experience were largely left out. Community mentor Justine also expressed upset at the lack of communication and inclusion: "There were no clear expectations at the beginning, even though folks tried to set them. It was hard to communicate. I wasn't included on any of the emails with the University, so I got all my information second-hand." Further, some community members felt that the University didn't value the community-based knowledge and skills. Community mentor Natasha said, "You know, the university people were in charge, because they were the ones with the degrees and all, and years of growing experience and experience in my community doesn't qualify me, I guess." Community and university members agree that year 1 of Grounding Roots leadership was somewhat hierarchical, with university

leaders positioned at the top of leadership, planning, implementing, and pay. This style reflects hierarchical structures that are generally observed in university research projects. Through the first year of community-engaged work and research, university team members have expressed experiencing a steep learning curve relating to community-engaged work.

Multiple team members also expressed a want for more clarity in a uniting vision for the program. James's reflections illustrated a common sentiment, "There isn't a shared vision...well maybe there is, but it's not really known throughout. I think everyone understands what the project is, but we need to together build a better understanding about where do we want to go with this." With many people coming from different paths to the shared work, there are many visions expressed in the project - all valuable. People have different goals that are front and center for them. Examples include community building and unity, social justice, environmental justice, food security and healthy eating, creating a pipeline to the University, AFNR skills, building sociopolitical consciousness, building leadership skills, and increasing diverse representation in AFNR and STEM post-secondary studies and careers. While the project advances towards each of these goals, and all goals are interconnected, project members have expressed a desire for a more cohesive vision for the Grounding Roots program.

In response, the redesign included distributed leadership in the design team and in the garden groups. The design team organized much earlier, meeting bi-weekly six months before the summer program, and included increased community representation. During the process different members - both community and university - have consistently reached out to one another in an effort to increase representation of ideas and perspectives. Community mentors and partners have played a key role in the evaluation of year 1 and in the design and preparation of year 2. Garden groups embraced distributed leadership and collaborative decision-making among community mentors and university interns, and a youth-centric model. Adopting a more community-centric and youth-centric model requires researchers and practitioners to explicitly

acknowledge, honor, and build from community and youth knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992; Rodriguez, 2013; Yosso, 2005). Students, teachers, family, and community are all positioned as valued co-constructors of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; Rodriguez, 2013), in alignment with emancipatory community research (Smith, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE

Through the horizontalization of voice, power, and knowledge, our organization has evolved democratically. Implications from this work call for researchers to examine the colonial roots embedded in their practices. Western academic research and knowledge production are firmly rooted in colonial practices which effectively disempower often-researched marginalized youth and communities (Paraskeva, 2016; Smith, 2013). Recognizing research as a reproduction of colonial power and White supremacist ideology can begin a deepening of critical reflection and consciousness in a journey towards decolonizing research for social justice (Paraskeva, 2016; Smith, 2013). For community research to be decolonizing, it needs to be worthwhile to a community (Smith, 2013). The agenda needs to come from within the community, and be supported by the researcher, rather than directed (Johnson, 2016; Smith, 2013). The processes must include community members as partners, with horizontal and distributed leadership and decision-making. Community-based knowledge and skills need to be recognized as valuable to the research processes and products (Smith, 2013). Research products must be useful and accessible to diverse audiences (Johnson, 2016). This work can be situated within the greater field of work on "dominator" versus "partnership" cultures (e.g. Eisler & Loye, 1990). Eisler (n.d.) explains,

> The partnership system supports mutually respectful and caring relations. Because there is no need to maintain rigid rankings of control, there is also no built-in need for abuse and violence. Partnership relations free our innate capacity to feel joy, to play. They enable us to grow mentally, emotionally and spiritually. This is true for individuals, families, and whole societies. Conflict is

an opportunity to learn and to be creative, and power is exercised in ways that empower rather than disempower others.

Like Eisler suggests, our organization used conflict as an opportunity for growth and creativity. We have used Linda Tuhiwai Smith's framework of decolonizing methodologies to analyze and reflect upon our own practices, in order to take steps towards organizing partnerships that build culturally, racially, socially, and economically healthy communities, states, and nations.

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