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# Eating is an act of learning; Eating is an act of love

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## *Eating is an act of learning; Eating is an act of love*

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### **Abstract**

*Environmental Education should exist to address injustices in our world, be they social or environmental since the two rarely exist isolated from each other. Environmental Education should exist to unite people, transcend social boundaries, and bring about solutions to shared socioecological challenges. One of the most pertinent socioecological challenges we face today revolves around our food system. We now have an opportunity to change our education system to reflect the current reality of our food system and reimagine a future where all communities have control over the cultivation, production, and distribution of the food on their plates all while treading lightly on our planet. By understanding the food sovereignty movement and its effects individual and community identity, we can reimagine our approach towards food systems education that focuses on identity, compassion, democratic education, and empowerment. We can use food sovereignty movements as examples of how positive change happens.*

*Your lunch experience today was meant to mimic the food realities of people living right here in Skagit County and many across the country. While some people have a choice of what goes on their plates and into their bodies, others do not. While some have the purchasing power to eat a well-balanced nutritious meal that will fuel their body and mind through the day, others do not. While some have the resources to pick up the organic apples and broccoli grown in their communities, others do not. Some of you might be feeling a little slighted, maybe even frustrated. Others might be feeling guilty about your privilege of sitting at a certain table. For everyone, I encourage you to embrace the experience, knowing that it won't last forever.*

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**Keywords: food sovereignty, environmental education, food production, food cultivation**

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### **Indigenous Food Sovereignty**

I want to acknowledge the Native territories we are on today. The land beneath our feet has nourished humans for thousands and thousands of years. The Coast Salish people, lived and ate seasonally, in relation with natural systems. The valleys surrounding us in what is now the North Cascades National Park, were important trade routes for tribes like Lummi, Nooksack, Nlaka'pamux, Sauk-Suiattle, Upper Skagit and Okanogan and many more. Indigenous people had their own food systems, that focused

around the food itself as currency. Harvests across the North Cascades would consist of items like salmon berries, mushrooms, wild ginger, and mountain potato (Turner, 2014 p. 299).

Even before the industrialization of agriculture and the corporate food regime came into play in North America, Native peoples had lost control over their land and their food sources. These are the historical roots of food sovereignty loss in North America. Not only was access stripped but it became illegal in many cases to practice traditional fishing and gathering, as it was against local land management laws. Tribes were forced off their land, and forced assimilation ensued creating a dependency on settler food systems. (Alkon & Agyeman, 2012, p. 24).

The history of oppression through powerful assimilation to centralized food systems remains present throughout the history of North America with many, if not all peoples now feeling the devastating effects in one way or another. We now have an opportunity to change our education system to reflect the current reality of our food system and reimagine a future where all communities have control over the cultivation, production, and distribution of the food on their plates all while treading lightly on our planet.

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**My story:**

*Last year, Ginna, Tyler and I were asked and agreed to construct a garden at the North Cascades Institute's Blue House, a graduate student residence in Marblemount. We envisioned creating a space that was both agriculturally productive and invitingly educational. With unclear long term goals, I dove into the project with an obsession I couldn't quite explain. I would wake up early and run outside to water the starts in the greenhouse. I would linger in the garden until the sun went down, transplanting flowers and arbitrarily throwing seeds in the ground. I distinctly remember the way the soil smells at the Blue House. Sweet, almost rotten.*

*Realizing we had grown more food than we could eat, one week I brought some vegetables to the Food Bank in Marblemount, just a few miles down the road. The manager of the Food Bank, Nicole told me that the Food Bank serves over 100 families in Marblemount. The 2010 census reported that the entire population of the town was 203 people. Most of the fruits and vegetables available the day I visited were conventionally grown from far outside Skagit county and on their last leg of life. They were the un-wanted seconds trucked in from the Darrington food bank. Nicole informed me that hardly any of the donated food was locally grown. I was shocked and frustrated. How was it possible people living in the Skagit Valley, the second most agriculturally productive county in Western Washington were not able to eat the food grown in their communities? I saw what was happening in Marblemount as an injustice and was compelled to do something about it.*

I want to address a few of my assumptions that will inform my thought process throughout the rest of this exploration:

I write this essay from a position of privilege that allows me the time and space to even think about food. I am wealthy, white, and I identify as female. I have experienced my entire life from this position. Although I can empathize with others, having a shared experience as a human being, I will never be able to speak for the experience of someone in a different race, ethnicity, gender, economic status, documentation status, religion, etc. Today, I am going to reference the experiences of a few different communities that I am not a part of. This is not my story. My story is one of privilege and power and is likely a narrative you've heard before since it dominates our mainstream culture. My intent is to expose certain injustices within our food system that affect all people, since our freedoms are inextricably linked. I am not standing up here to tell anyone they *should* eat organic and know their farmer. It goes so much deeper than that. Food is a human right. Like clean air and water, everyone deserves access to nutritious food that actually nourishes their bodies and minds and does not contribute to the subjugation of other human beings or degradation of the environment.

What I am doing today is looking at social structures within our food system. By understanding the food sovereignty movement and its implications for individual and community identity, we can reimagine our approach towards food systems education that focuses on identity, compassion, democratic education, and empowerment. We can use food sovereignty movements as examples of how positive change happens.

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### ***Eat Local Elitism***

*Last year, being tasked with Foodshed Assistant, I was expected to develop a curriculum for NCI around "Foodshed". A foodshed is the geographical region in which all food one person consumes comes from. My efforts were focused on educating people about the benefits of choosing to eat locally. I remember standing up in front of the large map of the world waving my arms around muttering about food-miles, organic agriculture, and beef production, while perplexed 5<sup>th</sup> grade eyes stared at me. My compulsory caveat tried to regain inclusion: "We understand that not all families can choose..." My voice trailed off, regretful. Privilege and power oozed off my shoulders, and I could feel myself pushing some students further away from the content and from me.*

The idea that people have purchasing choice is completely false and simply acknowledging that fact with our students, is not enough. We can illuminate certain systemic injustices that occur in global food regime, but what good is the information when the ability and skills to choose a different way of acquiring food are not available?

Many of the popular *Eat Local* campaigns reinforce inequities, leaving poor families excluded from locally grown food (Hinrichs and Kremer, 2008). This further emphasizes marginalized people's dependence on conventionally produced food that is both cheaper, more accessible and subject to exploitative production practices. Here in lies the difference between resilient self-supportive communities and dependent alienated communities. Historically, food access and hunger were addressed through entitlement programs like food stamps and WIC (Women Infants and Children nutrition program) (Hinrichs & Kremer, 2008). A shift in thinking is now focusing on local alternative agriculture markets but those typically serves higher income and predominantly white people. The shortcomings of the *Eat Local* movement allow for an opportunity to shift the ways we approach food education. There is an opportunity to address the underlying social, societal, cultural, racial, and economic reasons why people have lost control of their food choices and to intentionally empower marginalized people to take control over their local food system.

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### **Current Situation**

Martin Luther King Jr. famously said "My freedom ends where your freedom starts." Although King used these words to describe racial injustices, I believe these wise words apply in almost all cases of societal injustices. In food systems, the freedom of financially-constrained consumers to eat healthy local food ends where the freedom of corporate agriculture has usurped an overwhelming amount of the ways food is produced and distributed.

The current food crisis, thought to be a result of the centralized agriculture industry, describes the widespread food shortage and the subsequent inability for communities to be food self-reliant and food secure (Fazzino, Loring, 2009). Centralized food systems are characterized by conventional agriculture practices that value high production and treat food as marketable commodity (McMichael 2014, Gottlieb & Joshi, p.29, McEntee, 2011). The industrialization of agriculture ramped up between 1940 and 1960 and during that time the number of farms in the U.S. fell by half (Gottlieb, Joshi, 2013 p. 27). Food injustice in the United States is a result of the centralization of both farms and retailers, which increases separation between food source and consumer and denies people the ability to have control over what they ate.

The food sovereignty movement grew specifically out of injustices experienced in the southern hemisphere during the 1980s (McMichael, 2014). Via Campesina, the first internationally recognized voice of the movement, was created in response to transnational corporations gaining control over rural peasant farmers livelihoods. Globalization policies made monopolizing control possible through removing restrictions and tariffs on trade and increasing privatization of public services (Alkon & Agyeman, 2012, p. 348). Food sovereignty is defined by Via Campesina as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture

systems” (Via Campesina Website, 2016). We can now see this movement being realized across the globe and in our own communities.

For example, Community to Community Development (C2C) is an organization located in Bellingham, Washington that works to empower immigrant farmworkers in Whatcom and Skagit counties. Rosalinda Guillen is the principal leader of the organization. She states that “No one should have to feed themselves with food that was produced through the exploitation of humans, innocent creature, or through the poisoning and exploitation of Mother Earth” (foodjustice.org). Guillen is the daughter of immigrant farmworkers. She is the mobilizing force behind empowerment movements among immigrant communities around Bellingham. Her words encapsulate the basis of injustices within the current food system and demonstrate the duality of oppression experienced on all sides of the spectrum. Individuals on limited incomes are forced to purchase food produced by denying humans of basic rights.

Another group of people who are intimately tied to food systems are Migrant and undocumented farmworkers who feel the effects of a centralized food system in a distinctly horrific way. Workers are subject to strenuous, long days, and low wages and this system of abuse is amplified because many do not have legal rights to just labor regulations leaving them silenced (Parra-Cardona, 2006). It is worth noting that the influx of migrant workers from Mexico to the U.S. is in part a result of trade agreements that enabled the price of U.S. grown produce to devalue Mexican grown produce putting hundreds of Mexicans farmers out of work, looking north over the border for living wages. The historical roots of the food sovereignty movement in Latin America help contextualize current sovereignty movements of farmworkers in the United States who predominantly come from Latin American countries.

The future of undocumented people in the U.S. is uncertain but will likely get worse. The current administration has implemented executive orders that make it easier for law enforcement to deport undocumented people. The long term effects of these orders are unknown but if we look at the example of what happened in the state of Georgia we might have some insight on nationwide results. In Georgia, Law HB87 allowed state police to ask immigration status of any individual apprehended for any reason. With the consequent loss of farmworkers, Georgia’s agriculture industry suffered a \$140 million loss (Powell, 2012). Fruits and vegetables were rotting in the field, unpicked. State officials were sending prisoners to farms in an effort to salvage the harvest. Some experts suggest that without the undocumented farmworkers, the agriculture industry in the United States would collapse.

All these economic fact and figures do not shed any light on the emotional effects of constantly living in fear of deportation, losing your family, and not being treated with basic human dignity. Despite the uncertainty surrounding immigration, Community to Community continues to fight, as fierce as ever, for the humanity and just treatment of undocumented farmworkers and to gain victories in the struggle. C2C supported the creation of a farmworker’s union called Familias Unidas por la Justicia, the first and only farmworker union in Washington made up of workers from Sakuma Brothers berry farm,

a supplier for Driscoll (Alvarado, 2016). It is from leaders in the food justice movement, like Rosalinda Guillen, that we can find inspiration and guidance.

Sovereignty movements go beyond the notion of “food security” and address the root cause of injustices by re-imagining a local system that is controlled by the people instead of large corporations. This movement for local control has been adopted across the globe and is taking many shapes and forms depending on political, social, and environmental landscapes. Despite the different shapes and sizes of the movement, there is one unifying factor that is present across geographic boundaries, and that is the positive reinforcing sense of identity within communities that is a result of increased local control over cultivation and production. We are going to take a quick trip across North America in order to find examples of food sovereignty in action that are working to strengthen community identity:

- **Bronwood, Georgia:** In the subtropical heat of the Georgia, you can plant and harvest in your garden year-round. In Bronwood, Georgia there is a farm called Muhammad Farms that is operated by the Nation of Islam. This farm grows fruits and vegetables that are shipped to communities to feed African Americans across the country and also strives to educate African Americans on production practices. The story of the black farmer in the United States is one of institutionalized racism that prevented individuals from growing food for their communities. The Nation of Islam, also known as the Black Nationalist organization, roots go back to the great depression when the movement was built with the goal of African American progress in U.S. society and emphasized food sovereignty as an important part of emancipation from racial oppression. Muhammad Farms works to use food education as a means of liberation while celebrating racial identity (McCutcheon 2011 p. 192).
- **Northern Alaska:** Traditionally, Alaska Natives including the Athabascan, Eskimo, Tlingit and Aleut survived on regional bounties of caribou and moose, fish, berries, and root-crop gardens (Fazzino, Loring, 2009). Food, culture and identity are one in the same for these rural communities. With increased environmental and economic pressures, traditional ways of cultivating are no longer achievable. Alaska exports nearly all of what they catch and some grocery stores do not have seafood sections. These discrepancies in food access have revealed social injustices with cultural identity repercussions (Gerlach, 2013). There is a link between this loss of tradition and the myriad health and psychosocial challenges facing rural areas such as colorectal cancer, obesity, diabetes, domestic violence, and depression (Gerlach, 2013). In several areas, there is a push to bring back traditional ways and regain control over food production in order to regain cultural identity and self-reliance. Village gardens are immersing in the villages that line Yukon and Tanana River. Villages are focusing on strengthening education around traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering. Villages are revivifying their food systems through strengthening cultural heritage.
- **Skowhegan, Maine:** In small towns in rural Maine, farmers faced strict regulations that made it impossible for them to provide their local communities with food. Poultry



farmers in Maine were struggling to sell their products because strict regulations forced small scale operations to choose between transporting their chickens 100 miles to a slaughter facility or build costly indoor facilities at their farms. For many, both options were unattainable and farms were forced out of business. Activists fought the political system and were able to pass an ordinance in 11 towns that enabled farmers to sell their products directly to individuals without increased regulations. (Kurtz, 2015). For the farmers, this victory was about strengthening social relationships in the community. They wanted “to just be able to preserve what we were doing and to preserve the kinds of relationships that come out of the way that we exchange food” (Kurtz, 2015).

Whether it is migrant worker rights in Whatcom county, cultural heritage in Alaska, racial identity in the South, or political rights of small scale farmers in Maine, different social challenges necessitate different social approaches. An integral part of the movement is education. Education can be the catalyst. Our educational approach to realizing food sovereignty needs to be based in identity, compassion, and democratic education. I recommend that before we dive into this work; we develop an understanding about how integral food can be to our sense of self as human beings. Once those aspects are understood and realized, then we can move to my favorite part: *action!*

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## ***Identity***

Last Thursday I attended an event at the Northwest Indian College, located on the Lummi Reservation just north of Bellingham. The event was part of the Salish Sea Speaker Series and it was called ‘A lifetime of Fishing in the Salish Sea.’ When we walked into the log building, a warm smell of smoky barbeque made me feel welcomed. The hosts of the event invited us to share a meal they had prepared. Smoked salmon, potato salad, beans, and corn. Eating the food together, I felt a connection to all the people in the room.

Dana Wilson, a Lummi Tribal Member, began to speak. Dana has fished the Salish Sea his entire life and seen many changes. He now holds the position of Lummi Fish Commissioner. He spoke slowly and with purpose and told us that the way of life of the Lummi people “has a lot to do with fish.” He spoke about the way that fishing “reconnects us back to who we are” and that it is “Our way of life. Our core being.” He spoke in terms of the mental health of his people all in relation to the health of the entire watershed and fishing. He wove together stories of his childhood and his hopes for the future, how his grandmother taught him go down to the beach after a wind storm and how he passes on these traditions to his kids. He spoke about fishing as if it were the multi-generational gift that defines his identity. He said that fishing, in general, “reconnects us back with who we are.” The way that he spoke about providing food for his community was inspiring and moving. He was immensely grateful for this gift.



Dana was concerned about the future of the fish, as he has witnessed populations decrease. He said that last year he did not fish for Sockeye at all in the spring. It was the first time in 50 years he hasn't fished for Sockeye in the spring. With Dana's talk I was reminded about the interconnectedness of all things. I thought about the snow in the mountains and how when it melts it travels down the Nooksack and Fraser rivers and it feeds cold water to the Salmon's habitat. I thought about how the mental well-being for Dana and his community depend on that snow melting in mountains. Food sovereignty in itself contributes holistically to the well-being of people and to be food sovereign depends on the entire web of social, political and ecological frameworks. Dana shows us that food sovereignty can be the core of a community's identity.

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### **Compassion**

Joanna Macy describes compassion as "suffering with." She says "It is the distress we feel on behalf of the larger whole of which we are a part. It is the pain of the world itself, experienced in each of us" (Macy, p. 21). Macy's take on compassion translates well into food systems thinking because it encourages us to expand our capacity for caring to really understand those specific challenges and struggles of all members of a community. It reminds us that we are only a small fraction of the larger whole, and that our ability to fully care for all people depends on our ability to feel the suffering of each individual. Upon first exploration of this concept, the notion is overwhelming, if not paralyzing. Denying ourselves the space to "suffer with," which is further perpetuated by a food system that does not allow for community inter-dependability.

Restoring local control has bigger implications for humanity. By connecting ourselves to where our food comes from, we can restore integral parts of what it means to be human. A study recently examined communities around the world where life expectancy is the longest. The study dubbed these areas *Blue Zones* and a group of researchers determined what characteristics each zone shared in order to surmise what were the common longevity boosting lifestyles. Among the top commonalities were that individuals in these communities felt a strong sense of purpose and belonging (Buettner, Skemp, 2016). Other commonalities were that people had strong communal ties and intimate interpersonal relationships.

To be sovereign means to have inter-dependability within your community. In order to fully practice this, we can hold each other accountable and be dependable while also holding deep compassion for different human experiences.

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### **Democratic Education**

Food and farming can be a platform to address several broader community challenges and to connect people across social boundaries. Eating is a unifying act in which we all participate. We all shared a meal together just a few moments ago. We will do the same thing in about four hours from now. Then again another ten hours later. Despite our

varying backgrounds: genders, races, languages, nationalities, and income levels we will all sit down and share a meal together. We can use this inherent unifying quality of eating to frame the way we also teach. We can use food education as way for students to transcend barriers in their lives and in their communities, bringing everyone together over a common goal. The work is then focused around the liberation of the students and the liberation of the entire group. This liberation can be gained by reaffirming control over where your food comes from and who has access to that food.

bell hooks describes Democratic Education as a means to reflect the reality of students' lives. hooks is a feminist, social activist, and author. She describes education as a "practice of freedom," where the goal is for students to transgress barriers like racism and sexism (Spacia, Akello, Osman, 2015). Each student we encounter may have a completely different understanding and the teachers or facilitators should work to create a classroom that is framed around those distinct experiences. The classroom itself needs to transcend the school walls both physically and mentally. As a democratic educator, everything we teach is a reflection of the student's actual lives. hooks describes the act as "Forging a learning community that values wholeness over division, disassociation, splitting, the democratic educator works to create closeness" (hooks, pg. 49). Closeness means celebrating diversity and practicing plurality. In plurality, we recognize everyone's distinct experience as being their truth and we hold those truths delicately and with compassion.

The food sovereignty movement lends itself to democratic education because the movement is not actualized until every person obtains their "right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Via Campesina). In order for this to happen, we need to listen to each person's distinct food access challenges. It can be a space to encourage students to examine the challenges unique to themselves, their families, and their region. Are their parents farmworkers? Or, does their family traditionally subsist on hunting? This can create a starting place for a self-determined education experience. Food and farming education fit into this pedagogical approach because the education can be centered around the act of cultivating food and students can discover first-hand how to address challenges of access and distribution.

Hooks says, in this style of teaching, it is essential that the teacher be committed to continued learning and self-reflection. The typical hierarchal structure of teacher holding power over the students does not serve this model of education. The teacher discovers and learns alongside the students. *The teacher does not know more than the students. They might just know something different.*

bell hooks was influenced by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian activist and author whose best known work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which was built on his practice. Freire was an advocate of critical pedagogy and believed that there was no such thing as "neutral" education. One scholar, Richard Shaull, wrote in reflection of Freire's work that "Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it

becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which (all people) deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world."

We might consider these historical movements or theories, like the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, to be events of the past because they were born out of specific historical moments. I would argue that this work is just as relevant and salient in today's world. The actualization of the movement will look different because it is in response to an ever-changing world, but the internal dynamics between the oppressed and the oppressors are the same as Freire described. If we consider the current global food regime as a system of oppression, where the oppressed are diverse and they are many, we can imagine a pedagogical approach that empowers the marginalized while awakening the privileged to their responsibility.

An example of this could be a classroom that holds space for students to voice their concerns, like a class meeting. In Christine Sleeter's book about just education she tells the story of an elementary school teacher in central California, name Kathy. Kathy developed an entire curriculum around agriculture because the majority of her students were children of farmworkers (Sleeter, C. E. 2013). The curriculum still touched on all subject areas, but was framed around the local agriculture system. Her students would use graphs and tables to determine what percent of students' families work in the fields. She did this because she listened to her students' stories and their concerns. She held a space for them to express their inner thoughts during a class meeting every morning. Instead of enlisting her students in the standardized "one size fits all" curriculum, she recognized that there were distinct challenges within her community that needed to be addressed. Democratic education, or a practice of freedom as bell hooks says, encourages a student driven classroom where all voices are heard. From those conversations we, as educators, can facilitate an experience defined by the student with the goal of individual and community empowerment.

### **Empowerment and Action**

Paulo Freire's work also called for a life-affirming humanization, which does not lie *simply* in having more to eat. In Environmental Education we talk a fair amount about empowerment, a critical piece to the puzzle of change. Empowerment, however buzzworthy, is essential to achieving food sovereignty.

In the Empowerment Education Model, which was informed by Paulo Freire's work, Downey (2009) suggests these steps:

1. Listen: Listen to individual experiences
2. Dialogue: More listening and seeking for understanding between people
3. Deliberation: Time for weighing in on outcomes to action steps and listening further

4. Unity: Together, conclude what is socially and emotionally important to people and what are the positive action steps forward

*The Garden Project is a project of the Bellingham Food Bank that works with people on a limited income to build gardens in their backyards. The Garden Project is run by Julia Raider. It aims to educate people about gardening practices, while giving them the resources to start growing their own food. People self-select to be a part of the project. As an example of a food sovereignty project, this addresses root causes of system injustices and puts control back in the hands of the individual. Another key component of the project is a mentorship program in which more experienced gardeners are matched with less experienced gardeners and encouraged to teach and share cultivation practices. This builds a shared experience around growing food and enforces communal ties across social boundaries. On a cold rainy day in February I stood outside the Food Bank in Bellingham, passing out fliers to clients as they entered and asking folks if they were interested in participating in the Garden Project. My feet were cold and I was beginning to feel sorry for myself. One woman's face lit up when she saw me. She told me she had been part of the Garden Project last year and was excited to volunteer as a mentor this coming summer. The potential power of this project became apparent to me.*

A skills based approach to learning will encourage the next generation of growers to cultivate their own food and have a deeper understanding of where our nourishment comes from. Those individuals involved in The Garden Project are given skills and resources to become active participants in their food choices. Their empowerment aims to transcend economic boundaries, and each person has the potential to become a change maker.

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### **Closing Thoughts**

You might be thinking, OK, food sovereignty sounds great. But, how do we create this utopia where you stroll down the street picking juicy pears while neighbors lovingly exchange baskets of tomatoes, eggs, and freshly churned cheese. The reality is that it doesn't look like that. We can strive for that, sure. The other reality is that the global food system is failing. I am not saying that complete food sovereignty will be a reality in every community. I am saying that an increase in local control would contribute to healthier communities. There is no essential solution to our challenge. But, there are ways in which we can achieve increased local control that do not exclude people.

To tell someone to buy local and eat organic is elitist and furthers the gap between the high and low income families and individuals. This enforces unjust hierarchal structures. I propose a new way to approach food education where the ultimate goal of the activity is to empower people to take control of the how and the where of the food on their plates. With that control, we can hope for and cultivate a sense of identity and compassion.

Environmental Education should exist to address injustices in our world, be they social or environmental since the two rarely exist isolated from each other. Environmental Education should exist to unite people, transcend social boundaries, and bring about solutions to shared socioecological challenges. Shared challenges necessitate grassroots, community driven projects where the focus is on inclusion and individual empowerment. Food and farm education beautifully intersects at social and environmental justice and has potential to create huge positive changes. The connections are inextricable and overt.

*Simply giving produce to a food bank does not address the roots of injustice, but it creates a connection that can be a place to start. It could be a place to start strong communal relationships full of compassion. I walked into the Food Bank in Marblemount last year offering reciprocity to my community with the hopes of forming ties with the people that I share this chunk of earth with in the Skagit valley. I believe that this was so important to me because I want to feel a sense of belonging and human connection. I want to feel what Dana Wilson of the Lummi Tribe described as "wellness" and as he said "to feel good about myself and who I am." I want to participate in the justice that Rosalinda Guillen of C2C advocates for. I want feel a sense of purpose and connection. I want to feel human.*

*My personal position of power is juxtaposed with my sense of being helpless against the systems that have enforced my own privilege while subjugating others. I felt powerless and overwhelmed for a long time. Then, I discovered an entry point. Food is the connector and it is the leverage point. Growing food for my community makes me feel powerful and it makes me feel like change is possible. It is the tangible piece that I can grasp on to when I am feeling helpless. It is the way I can connect with my neighbor and unite with my community. Wendell Berry famously said that "Eating is an agricultural act." I would say that eating is even more than that. Eating is a political act. It is an ecological act. It can be an act of justice or an act of discrimination. It can be an act of respect and kindness. It is an act of community. Eating is an act of learning. Eating is an act of love.*

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