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Nostalgic Narratives: Planting Collective Ideals in the Urban Garden Education Movement

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Nostalgic Narratives: Planting Collective Ideals in the Urban Garden Education Movement

Abstract
This study explores the role of nostalgia in farm and garden educators’ collective narrative in the urban Portland garden education movement. It explores the use of nostalgia and historical narratives as opposition to a collective insecurity around food systems and environmental protection. Using ten face-to-face, open-ended interviews, the views of participants were found to be common in their idealized notions of the past, aversion for current American food culture and apprehension for the future of the American diet and environmental protection. The benefits and downfalls of this collective narrative of the past will be explored further to understand the underlying messages regarding diet and environmentalism communicated to youth through the hidden curriculum in farm and garden education.

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Nostalgic Narratives:
Planting Collective Ideals in the Urban Garden Education Movement

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A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Sociology

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INTRODUCTION

Last spring, First Lady Michelle Obama was televised planting an organic garden with the help of local inner-city youth. This collaborative act projected national media attention to an already thriving trend in localized agriculture and food education for youth (Burros, 2009). According to the National Gardening Survey, seven million more people will join the ranks of hobbyist organic gardeners in 2009. This thriving local agriculture movement is seen in the steady increase of organic farming and farmers markets since the early 1990’s (Ozer 2006). Urban agriculture has been the subject of popular sustainability dialogue (Newsweek 2009), with emphasis on returning to a simpler, local method of food production. The modern industrialized food system has recently butted against a rising culture of small farm advocates and food production has become a suddenly popular topic of media and casual dialog. The idyllic images of an old-world food system have lured city-dwellers from the urban fast food mecca to rural farms for gastronomic eco-tourism. With this growing consumer arena for localized (largely urban) agriculture, school gardens have also been in resurgence and garnering media attention beyond the White House yard (Blair 2009).

American school gardens have waxed and waned throughout the last 200 years during eras of food insecurity and environmental activism. The Victory Gardens during World War I and II gave relief to the agriculture industry during times of war, encouraging youth and families that self-sufficiency was patriotic (Mack, Eliason and Scranton 1944). In the 1970’s, the first “Earth Day” marked the American environmental movement, which stimulated a small trend in school garden education as a method of
nurturing environmental stewardship (LifeLab 2006). Despite the short-lived increase during the 1970’s, the overall number of school gardens nationally, sharply decreased in the 1950’s when the agricultural industry focused on technological advances, which increased food production and changed the industry during the green revolution (Blair 2009). More recently, school gardens became popular dialogue in 1994 when Delaine Eastin, California’s then superintendent for public instruction, signed state legislation demanding a “Garden in Every School”, setting aside funding for startup and staffing of over 2000 school gardens in California (Graham 2002; Skelly 2007). According to Blair (2009: 15) “[o]ver the last 20 years, school gardening has become a national movement”. The key feature of social movements is the advocates propelling and spreading the message or the narrative of the movement (Polletta 1996). In the case of the school garden movement, garden educators serve as dedicated advocates for the cause. These educators are largely college educated and work labor positions that were at one time seen as atypical of the lower-class (Marx 1904) in order to nurture the education of food cultivation and preparation. These educators are often unpaid or underpaid for their work and yet are vocal advocates for school gardens. This piece of research explores what motivates these educators to dedicate themselves to promoting school garden education.

Notably, in 2007, Michael Pollan called for a reevaluation of the American food system with a repetitive call to “simply eat the way your parents, grandparents and great-grandparents taught you to eat” (2007). The American notion of “the way our grandparents lived” has become a point of nostalgic memory for many in the localized garden movement (Bushnell 1999; Horton 2008). The duality of rural and urban life have become simplified into a duality between the past and the present, where old-time rural
life is a moral arena for families to raise children and the antithesis of the impure and complex contemporary urban setting (Cronon 1991). The dialogue of those in the food movement centers on the idea of the past and a chorus of “The Good Old Days”, creating context for new meanings and values to surface.

The narrative context of nostalgia for a simpler agrarian past and a declining future, offers fertile ground for skills and connection to food to become more highly valued. The social value placed on garden education can be seen as a form of cultural capital, or a non-economic good exchangeable in markets of society for power (Bourdieu 1986). In times of scarcity, like economic capital, cultural capital becomes more highly valued and those who hold high levels of these valued forms of cultural capital become more powerful. This research explores the function of this nostalgic narrative in the urban garden education movement and asks: Is this draw towards simpler food systems and localized agriculture an attempt to distance ourselves and (more importantly) our nation’s children from the looming threat of food insecurity? Further, do our narratives surrounding food insecurity create an opportunity for social justice education by creating space for new origins of cultural capital?
LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea of children getting dirty and digging in the dirt is rarely a point of excitement for most parents, but trends are showing growing support for having youth involved in gardening and small scale agricultural projects, especially in school learning settings (Blair 2009). Recently, school gardens have become a popular feature of the twenty first century sustainability movement and there has been an influx of research working to show the efficacy and benefits of these programs in arenas such as environmental stewardship, reading comprehension and physical activity (Ozer 2008). There has been little research however, regarding the school garden movement and the genesis of the rapidly growing, collective promotion of garden education. In an effort to explore the collective identities and motivations of school garden advocates, I studied those who invest the most time and effort, and tell the most compelling narratives in defense of garden-based education, the garden educators themselves.

All educators pass along sets of teachings, social roles and values through education (Jackson 1968) and have, at one point, surely learned lessons from educators in their own past. This memory lessons learned and events experienced are often shared by groups of people who have experienced a similar past. This shared memory is explored by theorists Maurice Halbwachs (1992) who developed the theory of collective memory, that emphasizes: memory is not only passed along from elder to child, but also constructed to fit within the framework of modern ideologies.
There are no empty spots in the lives of groups and societies; an apparent vacuum between creative periods is filled by collective memory in symbolic display or simply kept alive through transmission by parents and other elders to children…[A]t the moment of reproducing the past [however] our imagination remains under the influence of the present social milieu (1992:49).

The transmission and simultaneous construction of knowledge allows for historical recollections to be repurposed and socially appropriated. This appropriation is necessary for the perpetuation of social groups like those promoting school gardens as a distinction from the modern industrialized food system. Historical accounts, contemporary influences and personal ideals become intertwined in the discourse of school gardens to create collective and motivating images of the family agrarian farm life, a picture largely lacking the fear, insecurity and industrialization of modern food.

The school garden is for many of these garden volunteers, symbolically connected to the image of the past, especially an agrarian past (Girouard 1978). Drawing on the work of Stephanie Coontz (1992), there is room to explore a sense of nostalgia for rural living as a simpler past. Early century marketing to keep youth in rural areas made appeals based on the sentiment of the pure life, near-nature, on the farm and the antithesis of a sinful city (Cronon 1991). Enduring beliefs in the moral superiority of the countryside permeate into ideology of the garden as a symbol of the good-life and simple living (Girouard 1978).

Pickering and Keightley (2006) note the importance of acknowledging the origin of our idyllic notions:
We need to recognize the various ways in which people are involved in putting the situated past into some form of narrative order for themselves, or in critically negotiating mediated representations of the past for their relations to collective identities and experiences… Uncertainty and insecurity in present circumstances create fertile ground for a sentimental longing for the past, or for a past fondly reconstructed out of selectively idealized features (2006:74).

This personal idealization of the past when widely accepted or subscribed to, also produces social bonds and community. This phenomenon of widely accepted memories or a singular collective memory acts as a unifying agent for communities under the theory of collective memory.

In correlation with the nostalgic narratives, Zerubavel theorizes narratives of the decline (2003), which involves both the presence of nostalgia and the discomfort with the present situation as well as a fear or dread for the future. He claims the narrative of the decline is “often coupled with a deep sentimental attachment to the good old days” (2003:16). It is also key to mention that these are not necessarily reflective of historical trends, but rather with “mental historical outlooks” and memories are constructed quite differently depending on if the individual remembering is using the frame of a progress or decline narrative to recount it (2003:18).
Adults may mitigate the fear for the future of food by promoting and developing frames for education, which position the farm and garden as a valued opposition to processed and industrialized food. Adult volunteers in the gardens (often parents or teachers) are the actors in the garden who create or communicate social meanings to youth through implied messages prescribing social norms and expectations by acting as stewards or teachers to the youth in the garden environment. This concept of implied messages through teaching was initially coined the Hidden Curriculum by Phillip Jackson (1968). He developed the initial theory, defining how values and ideologies can be communicated indirectly (Langhout and Mitchell 2008) through socialization and teaching in schools. The concept of social learning through traditional education can also be seen through an alternative lens in education sociology as Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital (1977).

According to Bourdieu’s research in education youth who attained higher levels academic achievement, were regarded as having a higher level of cultural capital. Youth reared in the dominant class are more advantageously positioned to attain academic achievement (education credentials) because of their familial possession of cultural capital. According to Hollins (1996) traditional American education may serve to perpetuate the social hegemony, often of the white, upper class by creating curriculum based on the needs of the dominant community. The power held by educational institutions perpetuates more than just the knowledge of skills, but a source for socialization into the larger American culture. “It claims a monopoly on truth that excludes other ways of thinking about world. In its hegemonic phase, the ‘truth’… becomes self confirming” (Rosaldo 1993: 220).
Cultural capital is valuable in that it can be exchanged for economic capital and “may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications” (Bourdieu 1986: 243). Thus, cultural capital requires input of different forms of capital (social or economic) to grow and can exchanged or invested later for social mobility outside economic means. While Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital exists in the dominant cultural of academic structure, the subculture of alternative educational formats, specifically those focused on eco-literacy and an integration of ‘natural’ environments like farms or gardens create a unique situation in which new value can be placed on alternative cultural capital.

As a departure from the educational hegemony, alternative school programs like school garden integration are a method of escaping the current social and educational prescriptions. “One can escape from a society only by opposing it to another” (Halbwachs 1992: 49). With this departure and opposition to the conventional there emerges the community of the oppositional force. In the context of the school garden, where is the intersection of a collective memory and narrative and the defining or evaluating of forms of cultural capital? Our education system is a vehicle to deliver messages of social norms through the hidden curriculum as well as cater to the dominant established value systems of cultural capital. These value systems are developed within societies that all contain a framework of collective memory (Halbwachs 1992) and according to subculture theory, can develop a unique valuation and expression of cultural capital relevant to that social milieu (Thornton 1996). This avenue of research connects the role of nostalgic narrative with the construction of cultural capital in school garden education.
METHODS

The research centers on qualitative data in order to illuminate the subjective nature of collective memory. Collective memory is a collaboration of information passed down from generations appropriated to the contemporary social milieu and is the shared memory of many. Nostalgia, which I examine more closely, is a state of individual idealized memory or fondness for the past. Nostalgia can be shared collectively through common individual memories and exists in the context of a discomforting present social landscape. Utilizing semi-structured, face-to-face interviews for the qualitative data collection provided data on the assumptions regarding the importance of school gardens and their personal perceptions of the past food industries and systems. These techniques are effective for drawing out the stories and emotions felt by the individual participant. By combining unique stories, ideological patterns emerge and give a foundation for analysis.

Data collection was conducted through 12 in-depth, open-ended interviews approximately an hour in length. Utilizing open-ended interviews allowed for thematic stories to develop that are individual to the participant and giving opportunity for unique themes to emerge (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Although the personal stories are unique, analysis focused on the similarities in conceptualization and memory of historical food cultivation, current perspective on the larger American food systems and the importance of teaching children within the context of school gardens.

The participants interviewed were largely garden coordinators, farm educators and parent garden volunteers. These are people who often engage in a dialogue on the importance of localized and community supplied agriculture, so the subject was casual
and common discussion. Of the twelve participants, all were white, affiliated with non-Christian religions (largely atheistic and agnostic) and held some form of higher education (8 or 12 held a Bachelor’s degree). Most participants ranged in age from 20-29, and politically, claimed to be “very liberal” or in the case of four respondents “on the radical left”, “100% autonomous” or “extremely liberal”. Despite the high levels of attained education, most of the respondents (8 of 12) claimed to make less than $20,000 annually as garden educators (See Appendix D). The respondents came from diverse backgrounds; some interviewees grew up in urban areas and others on large established farms, however they were all interviewed while working in the urban environment of Portland, Oregon teaching farm or garden education to urban youth.

To achieve an appropriate sample for this study, initial contacts were made through a local garden educator organization, which has a large number of active garden and farm educators associated with schools in the Portland area. Recruitment emails were delivered through the organization (see Appendix A) requesting participation. Once the initial round of interviews was completed, these participants were given a copy of the recruitment letter to pass along to other potential interview participants. Recruitment emails were also sent to well-established garden and farm programs in the Portland Metro area, with contact information gleaned from websites and online blogs. There were a total of 12 interviews with garden educators from 10 different programs.

This method of sampling resulted in a sample that is passionate about growing the garden education programs in the Portland area and represented educators from a diverse schools across the city. Although this sample is only generalizable to the Portland school gardening culture, Portland stands as one of the leaders in the local, school and
community garden movement (SustainLane.com, The Daily Green) and many of these ideologies associated with school gardens are likely gained or supported by nationally utilized media publications like books and Internet resources on the benefits of garden education. Portland is a city with a large portion of school garden programs however, the ideologies of those involved with urban school gardens outside Portland are likely very similar to those in the sample.

The data collected from the one-hour interviews address the past notions of gardening, the current ideologies of school gardens and the perceived importance of teaching youth this skill. The interview schedule (See Appendix B) is semi-structured, as questions are not rigid and might change in wording or follow this particular sequence. The use of semi-structured interviews gave a similar basis of prompts, while also allowing the freedom for the interviewer to explore stories and ideologies in more detail. The questions in the interview schedule began with a few introduction pieces (like the person’s role in their garden) and lead through to the past, present and future ideologies of gardening. The early questions referred to the adults’ past experiences with gardening and how they became a garden educator. These questions offer opportunities for any idealizations of rural or urban gardens to surface through narratives, while simultaneously having the participant define the type and size of the food cultivation practice they currently are involved with. Other questions in the interview schedule address the current state of food and the ideal garden situation for youth education. These questions capture the importance of gardening to the individual and also refer the potential fear for the future state of food. The final questions offer an oppositional perspective, requesting the educator to respond to assumptions of school gardens as a fleeting fad. This line of
questions will be completed with an off the record question regarding the next project for
the individual’s garden to allow for a comfortable emotional close to the interview.

This study involves minimal ethical issues as the participants are consenting
adults and the topic is likely familiar to the individual. Garden volunteers often discuss
and reflect on their own hobbies, and should largely be accustomed to discussing or
thinking about these topics. The interview schedule (See Appendix B) is designed with an
easing lead in and out to minimize discomfort between transitions in and out of the
interview. Great care was taken in the handling of audio or written recordings containing
identifying information, in order to mitigate the risk of a breach in confidentiality.
Identifying materials were securely transported and once the interviews were transcribed
(and de-identified through transcription) the recorded material were erased. The
participants prior to the interview, completed an informed consent form (See Appendix
C) which gives the participant this assured information, levels of consent regarding audio
recording or field notes, and the option to end the interview at any time. Upon completion
of the study, all identifying items (such as consent forms) will be shredded to ensure
privacy.

Using grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) I coded the interviews in
multiple rounds including the foundation of narratives in the context of time (See
Appendix D for Coding Scheme). The first round of coding involved this exploration of
narratives throughout time and included noting discussions within the framework of past,
present and future ideological notions surrounding garden, farm and food cultivation
systems. Futuristic allusions were often found using both direct questioning about their
ideal future and by using the image of the children as a proxy for the future society. The
second round of coding found themes in the contextualization of garden education as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1996). This form of cultural capital was unlike the elite or bourgeois capitals used to exchange economic gain, but was seen in two parts: objectified cultural capital and embodied cultural capital. Objectified Cultural Capital included acquired qualities or skills such as proper use of tools or plant identification. Embodied cultural capital was more illusive and took the form of the deeper understanding of the meaning of the garden and the meaning of the practice of food harvesting, what I will refer to as understanding the “connection”. These example forms of capital were coded to understand the importance of garden education in the eyes of the educators. Using the inductive approach of grounded theory allowed for an approach of building theory through coding, rather than testing strict theory.
DATA AND ANALYSIS

The Golden Years and the Decline

Collective memory is communicated through language of commonly understood symbols, settings and emotions similar to a film (Halbwachs 1992). Collective memories are idealized and reconstructed pieces of the past use to paint a picture or transport those involved in receiving the collective to that time and place. By using idyllic images and symbols the picture of the rural and simple farmstead can be painted. Laura, a self-proclaimed Portland ‘foodie’ who works mainly on developing school gardens to provide local produce, advocates for farm-to-school programs in all Portland Public Schools. Her expression of farm memories utilized symbolic cues in creating her nostalgic narrative:

My mother grew up on a beautiful old farmstead and she would tell these wonderful stories of chickens, cows and pigs… I didn’t grow up on a farm, but I’m so grateful my kids have the traditional rolling hills, ‘Grandma’s Farm’ to visit (Laura).

Laura describes her mother’s farm through the use of iconic American farm livestock and also taps into the assumption of common understanding of a traditional farm. She also associates traditional farm with the countryside and grandparents, alluding to the familial legacy associated with farming life. Mariah, a very romantic gardener, has worked in the field for five years and sees life in a string of gardening metaphors and philosophies. She explains her first experience on her grandmother’s farm:
[My grandmother's farm] was amazing, it totally blew my mind.

And it wasn't even active, but they still had the big barn and the tractors and things (Mariah).

Mariah expresses her amazement for her grandmother’s farm and described the setting using iconic farm images like tractors and a “big barn”. Mariah not only had a great fondness for the actual farm, but she also felt a very loving connection with her grandparents and valued the relationship she had with her grandparents. Relationships are another avenue, which the educators tapped into a common understanding of farm-life memories and “first experiences” in the farm or garden setting. The educators utilize archetypical images of relationships to communicate the emotions and multi-dimensional scene of the past. Sasha, a farm educator in Portland has a romanticized memory of her history on her grandmother’s farm:

[My grandma and I] would run through the grass, pick berries and have picnics and make pies [from those berries] and I just realized… that you can cultivate plants to make food. It was a beautiful (Sasha).

The romanticized and nearly intimate scene and journey to realization that Sasha describes seemingly communicates a guided self-discovery where by she comes to a pinnacle understanding through the help of her relationship with her grandmother. This understanding of food cultivation and preparation will be examined further as understanding “The Connection” and the cycles of food systems as an important feature of the collective narrative.
The influence of guiding adult figures was common in the interviews. These mentoring relationships were not unique to gender roles. Guss, one of two male educators in the sample describes how he got started gardening:

I grew up in the bay area…the cement jungle… watching all the discovery channel stuff when reality shows were about nature. And then, I had [someone in my life] that really got me excited about the natural world. I learned gardening from a dear friend, a sergeant grandfather figure really, and he gardened. He learned to grow food in the generation where 40-60% of the population were still farmers. Now it's less than 2%, maybe even less (Guss).

Guss further went on to reflect on his upbringing as an outcast and his afternoons spent at his older friend’s home. The archetype of a wise and mentoring, older figure was present in many of the interviews while discussing the educators’ initial introduction to gardening or farming.

Another component to the story is the setting. Although setting and symbols often can go hand in hand, the setting tended to be less generalized. Rather than keying in on idyllic symbols, many educators went into more detail about the garden, farm or environmental experiences they had as youth.

I definitely grew up on a small farm. I'm from New England and we had a 14-acre farm… We had fruit trees – apples, pears, plugs, and I
planted corn as a kid and sold it at a little stand by the road. You know there was the dirt road and the little kid in a box selling corn with the hand painted sign – that was me (Olivia).

The details Olivia volunteers on her early experiences with garden, create an image and a scene of her upbringing. Further, Ray, a well educated garden coordinator at a low-income school, spoke of her childhood memories of ‘actual woods’ and compared them to the ‘false woods’ that was accessible to the youth at her sight.

"My parents took me hiking in the Berkshires [and] we had a patch of actual woods in our neighborhood that I could explore and there was even a small one at the end of my cull de sac… And those were trees that seemed really big for a kid, but for a lot of the kids here this [patch of 10 saplings] is the woods" (Ray)

Ray uses the symbolic scenery of ‘the woods’ to differentiate her upbringing from that of the other youth.

The use of narrative archetypes and symbolic details allow for the educators to create a visual image and emotional understanding of a memory. Although there were no two memories that were the exact same, the memories all included a contextualized longing or love for a garden farm space, and many included the presence of an elder (parent, grandparent or other mentoring adult) and the mention of a ‘realization’ or moment of ‘connection’ which was illustrated as pivotal in their relationship with
gardening or farming. These moments and relationships, which feel to the participants the most natural and precious of experiences, are not independent from the paths delineated by social milieu today. These memories, re-appropriated to fit the needs of the garden educators and fill details in the narratives that script their lives, “follow paths laid out in advance and completely independent of us, which society has been careful to point in the right direction” (Halbwachs 1992: 52).

Narrative of the Decline

According to Zerbubavel an additional component to this time-mapped narrative is the narrative of the decline. The educators, when asked about the future of food systems, ranged in emotions from cynical, fearful, disempowered, to sprightly hopeful and excited for upcoming changes. The narrative of decline, or an unstable or worsening future comprised the majority of the opinions of those interviewed. Roslin, a local garden educator and an entrepreneur in the urban gardening scene expresses her view on the present and future state of food:

I feel like it’s just critical right now. It’s not an option to not know how food grows or where food comes from and unfortunately right now we’re at a time in history where people are struggling to understand where their food comes from and getting more disconnected from what it really is (Roslin).
When asked about their point of view on environmentalism and food security, Sasha and Laura both held cynical outlooks for the future:

“Things aren’t getting any better… And I feel like the only way to get away is like moving to a commune in the woods” (Sasha).

"To be honest, I think I'm ready for the post apocalyptic world… that's just how terrible things are getting” (Laura).

Along with the narrative of past and future, is the narrative of the present, which is a source of discomfort in the participants. Some educators discussed the local state of their schools’ budget cuts, or high poverty levels, while others described the more national and global status of society. The more international or national perspectives focus on the poor state of the food industry and the neglected environment. These statements are supported with commentary from popular media figures like Michael Pollan, Eric Schlosser and Alice Waters. A topic that came up in every interview and was met with nearly identical level of disgust was the state of food in schools. Ashley, Nancy and Mariah are all garden educators at public schools, they said:

"Obviously the food situation in the schools is abhorrent.” (Ashley)
"[The school lunches are] disgusting and the kids don't know any better." (Nancy)

"Our food system is a wreck, particularly at schools." (Mariah)

Many established a discomfort with the state of food security nationally as well as in the schools. The interviewees largely hold a common discomfort for present food issues and also hold a collective memory of their personal as well as cultural agrarian roots.

The projected decline of the future completes the collective narrative of the decline: nostalgia for the ‘Good Old Days’ such as the ideological agrarian barns or tractors, discomfort or dissatisfaction with the present as in the failing school food system, and the projected worsening future. This common narrative is powerful in creating not only the story of the past through the mediated state of the present, but also tells the story of the abstract future in a way that aligns their own actions with events that they fear (but assume) will occur. In a picture where healthy and safe food may become a luxury for the elite, garden educators are aiming to teach students how to cultivate and cook their own food, without necessarily the access economic means.

**Garden Education as Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital is a medium of exchange where by skills, expertise and educational ‘products’ can be exchanged for economic capital or social mobility (Bourdieu 1986). The immediate role of educators in an educational setting is to deliver
institutionalized forms of cultural capital to youth. College degrees are an example of institutionalized cultural capital that can be used to gain higher wage jobs and thus greater status in society according to Bourdieu. Education also provides more than just the institutionalized form of cultural capital; it acculturates youth to enter the larger society and gives them the ability to achieve social status through internalized lessons and knowledge. These types of cultural capital is seen as embodied cultural capital, and becomes a part of the individuals habitus, or character, inextricable from an one’s sense of self. Education also provides students with objectified cultural capital, which is a set of skills associated with the material or tangible world such as the use of a computer or the ability to maneuver a car. In the garden education setting, the garden educators interviewed view this educational arena as transferring forms of cultural capital to the youth.

Bourdieu’s research in education examined the role of cultural capital in educational attainment and this interplay with politics. He recognized the importance of family status in the student’s school success and theorized that students that enter school with preexisting cultural capital can utilize those assets to better succeed in a classroom setting. Families with a stay at home parent for example, can better provide educational support for youth or may even be able to provide economic capital to fund a better education. The more education, cultural capital or social mobility one can achieve the more present that individual can be in political decisions and social change. The struggle for many educators is to create a neutral ground where by cultural capital can be acquired by students without preexisting familial connections to cultural or economic capital (Grenfell and James 1998). In the case of inner city garden education, the intersection
between education and politics happens in the realm of cultural capital. If educators can provide not only knowledge and perspective, but also education that is a valuable form of cultural capital, they can achieve a role in politics no longer reserved for the economically privileged (Freire 1985).

*Objectified Cultural Capital*

Objectified cultural capital requires not only the ability to access or own material goods, but also to have the knowledge and skill to properly use and manipulate those items (Bourdieu 1986). Using this framework the hard skills of gardening, food production and food cultivation can be seen in as forms of Objectified Cultural Capital.

Some of the immigrant parents have valuable skills that are amazing resources if they can find the time to [come and teach them to these kids]… there are a lot of farmers and mothers who are great cooks

(Mariah)

The value placed on the skills of parents by Mariah illustrates the importance for teaching hard skills in the garden. The advertised goal for many of the garden programs is to pass along skills related to food cultivation and preparation. Whether this is using tools like power drills (Ashley) and or learning to cook different vegetables and use a knife (Ray), these hard skills exemplify the theory of objectified cultural capital.
On another level, cultural capital is also relative to the garden space itself. Many educators would discuss their numerous structures on their garden property, which had often been purchased through the exchange of economic capital.

There's outdoor classes and some structures like a shed we built, which was funded by another grant… And students built a compost bin. There's [also] a community garden recently established which has about 35 plots and already has a waiting list and it officially opens soon (Guss).

These structures offer extended opportunities for students to interact and gain new knowledge and indirectly relate themselves to those forms of objectified capital.

*Embodied Cultural Capital*

The second form of cultural capital delivered by the garden educators is a more internalized version of cultural capital, embodied cultural capital. In this form, the transmission of capital cannot happen over the short term and is usually connected with capital forms that are inherited or have become a part of the person through a lifetime. These forms of capital however, were the forms most desired in student retention by the educators. Laura states in our interview, "Kids are learning not only things like food preparation, but also community and cycles and connectedness and that is essential.” The presence of the word “connection” or the indirect phrases of “cycle” and “natural phases”
appeared in nearly all of the interviews, especially when educators were discussing what they hope to teach and accomplish in the garden setting.

“Kids are learning gardening skills, yeah, but they are really learning to care for something and making connections with good food” (Corey).

“I really wish we had the funding for kids to come out [to the farm] multiple times a year and experience that cycle and that connection between the seasons” (Sasha).

This “connectedness” spans different topics between the educators including connection with nature and soil (Mariah, Laura) as well as a connection with food (Corey) and a connection to community (Ray). Despite the unique variables of the connectedness allusion, all the educators spoke of the connection as being directly influenced and taught through the farm or garden education setting.

The theory of embodied cultural capital involves another Bourdieu theory referred to as Habitus. Habitus is the organically developing inner characteristic of a person, affected by one’s social surroundings, privileges, experiences and education and mediating those structures and inputs of the world through a lens unique to that individuals habitus (Bourdieu 1993). Embodied cultural capital is thus not only expressed as a physical embodiment of capital, but also as an internalized understanding and conceptual framework for contextualizing the concepts like ‘connectedness’. This
embodiment or understanding of cycles and connections may be related to the realizations achieved in youth by many of the garden educators.

Embodied cultural capital is a main tenant in democratic education. In order for youth to participate in social change movements or progressive politics, they must have the knowledge and socially prescribed credentials needed to have social power. Cultural capital in its embodied form is a set of socially valued characteristics that allow for exchanges in social and political discourse. This might be an embodied appreciation for local or unprocessed food in the case of garden education that will not only give them the knowledge and skills of cultivation, but the embodied passion to further a local food movement and the social mobility to make those changes happen. According to educational sociologists Grenfell and James, “generating cultural capital is no straightforward, seamless process. It involves a complex amalgam of time, effort and both material and psychological resources (Grenfell and James 1998: 70). In the situation of inner city youth that enter educational systems with less cultural capital than the dominate class, alternative education systems endowed with the resources needed can provide a platform for transferring the cultural capital needed for political participation. Urban garden educators utilize their role as educators to act as a conduit between themselves and their students, aiming to transfer their own knowledge of, and passion for localized food onto their students in an effort to build cultural capital and offer them the social opportunity for a role in civic engagement.
Value of Garden Education through Narrative

By establishing an understanding of the collective memory as well as a collective prediction of the future, educators take the initiative to create areas of social change and collaboration to combat the declining narrative they predict. The potential collapse or failure of the industrialized food system, along with a clear image of a better way of food cultivation and preparation, provides guidelines along which the educators can establish the grounds for the social movement. Within this cultural group or movement there lies the common narrative of a nostalgic past, the narrative of a declining future and the dialogue of the common state of society. This dialogue in the interviews both directly and indirectly established a state of isolation and disconnection, disconnection that exists between individuals and food, nature and other people. There is also a discourse surrounding of our alienation from food skills including preparation and cultivation.

Within this collective narrative exists a vacuum for valuable resources and forms of capital to emerge (See Figure 1). Whereby alienation from agricultural capabilities and a generalized environment of isolation are becoming a more popular feature the collective dialogue of garden educators, the qualities of being ‘connected’ or agriculturally enabled emerges as a valuable form of cultural capital.
This established desire for ecological competence and the understanding of connectedness fluctuates in value throughout the narrative conditions of the era. During an interview with Corey, she explains her perception of the cultural value of farming: “I grew up on a beautiful hazelnut farm in a rural area, but that’s back when farming wasn’t exactly ‘cool’”. This recognition of the changing value of agricultural proficiency illustrates the organic nature of narratives within social movements and their ability to assign value to capitals within those narrative contexts. Within the current narrative of nostalgia and decline, one can see the predicted cultural capital of garden education increasing through the process of the declining American food industry (See Figure 2).
Through the development of narratives of collective memory and predictive narratives of the future, values of cultural capital fluctuate within the structure of these social circumstances. When Corey grew up on her family farm, the cultural capital of farm skills and farm living were low, likely because of the mediated narrative of urbanization, industrialization and food security. Alternatively, during times of food insecurity government sponsored propaganda outlined a narrative again framing home and community gardening as higher in cultural capital (Mack, Eliason, and Scranton 1944). These changes in social environment and social narratives, like the economic market, determine the value of the capital at hand. In the case of garden education,
historic changes in cultural narratives determine the patterns of garden education promotion throughout these eras (See Figure 3).

![Time Line](image)

Figure 3 – Historic narrative valuation of garden education

Throughout the course of these interviews there was an established collective nostalgic memory and narrative of decline delineating the arena where the value of cultural capital is socially developed. Teaching garden education and transmitting forms of cultural capitals to students, during a time when there is a predicted increasing need or value of these capitals, is a form of student empowerment. Cultural capital is an exchangeable good, usually in the context of economic exchange; however cultural capital can also serve as empowerment through social mobility and control. “Once cultural capital becomes embodied, those who embody the capital serve to define what constitutes cultural capital in its objectified state” (Bieber 1985: 367). Guss, a garden educator who works in a public school with the second highest rate of students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch¹ in the city emphasized the role of garden education in political action:

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¹ Families with students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) must meet the annual income guideline of $40,793 for a family of four. (http://www.nutrition.pps.k12.or.us/)
If we develop the environment to help young people and the next generation who will be in charge of the urban planning and community associations and various other things that have a put in as to how neighborhoods are going to be…Then you can see where food security and the knowledge of how to grow food is incorporated into the whole system. (Guss)

By creating or supporting a narrative which positions garden education and food security as a highly valued form of cultural capital and giving students those exchangeable forms of capital, not only are they empowered to create exchanges of cultural capital, but they also may serve to redefine the narrative of the social structure through time.
CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This research connects two theoretical frameworks in order to illuminate areas in education where alternative avenues of youth empowerment can occur. Establishing the connection between collective memory and nostalgic narratives (Halbwachs 1992) with the valuation of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1992) offers new insight into sociological literature. Examining this phenomenon in the context of American pedagogy, these narratives create a subversive educational arena for alternative forms of cultural capital to be valued and transferred to youth. These alternatives to traditional forms of bourgeois cultural capital enable students to attain high levels of cultural capital in varying subcultures as opposed to (or in opposition to) the dominant American culture.

If all we're training them for is to be doctors and lawyers, sustainable education reform doesn't matter because the system is built to perpetuate itself and the only way to change it is to kind of work within those parameters and change what we're training our kids for and what we're guiding them towards (Mariah).

This internal approach to creating a new cultural narrative and thus redefining the values and approaches to education underlies the importance of garden understanding and capital attainment to these educators.
By teaching youth alternative skills and delivering curriculums through different vehicles of education, perhaps an educational system serving to nurture a diverse community of cultures can be sustained. Subculture educational alternatives like garden education may give youth the cultural capital or the tools to put themselves at the table when social change occurs. During a time of transition like the current changes in the American food industry, youth must be empowered despite economic position to not only negotiate these changes, but also perhaps use their cultural capital to progress and push those changes and social movements. Understanding these alternative areas of youth empowerment can create equalizing opportunities for social power for youth regardless of economic culture and investment. This insight into alternative education subcultures may be an avenue for a socially just conception of American education.

So why are garden educators motivated to progress the urban garden education movement? These educators are not simply engaged in the gardening movement to teach children the proper soil composition and the benefits of homegrown tomatoes. These Portland garden educators are involved in nurturing this movement in order to transmit socially empowering qualities to youth through developing connections and teaching skills for cultural capital. Michelle Obama may only be planting a garden with youth to symbolically place herself in the enterprise of revamping school lunch programs, but perhaps giving attention to this movement will lead to others acknowledging the importance of understanding beyond what is traditionally taught in classrooms. Perhaps this could lead to an examination of the myth that all youth thrive in the hegemonic American educational system and develop systems for an alternative forms of educational
attainment in order to harvest self-efficacy and extend education beyond economic barriers.

Focusing on the motivations of garden educators within the Portland area, this research has not involved the opinions or observations of youth involved in these programs. The motivation of most educators, not just garden educators, to transmit cultural capitals and empower youth was not tested against the actual social mobility of youth down the road. Future research is needed in longitudinal studies on the cultural capital attainment and changes to habitus in youth through these alternative arenas of education in order to strengthen the stated theories in subversive and alternative forms of education.

This research explores the motivations of Portland garden educators in their involvement with the school garden movement as it relates to their collective memories of our agrarian past. This collective nostalgia for the past is paired with a narrative of decline creating a storyline through which value systems emerge. In moments of insecurity and instability, cultural capital of objectified gardening skills, as well as embodied connectedness with nature, food and communities become scarce and highly valued. This achievement of cultural capital empowers youth to perpetuate or re-delineate the narratives where by new forms of cultural capital can grow. Despite economic capitals, these youth can become socially empowered and mobile in a progressive shift towards a more egalitarian structure of alternative education models.
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Recruitment Material: Email

To be delivered to members of a local Portland garden educator organization

Greetings,

I am an undergraduate student from Pacific University and I am currently studying school gardens in Portland, Oregon. I am seeking out adults involved with local school garden programs, whether as a parent volunteer, community volunteer or an administrator. If you are interested, I would like to invite you to participate in an interview, approximately one hour in length at the location and time most convenient for you. While there is no monetary compensation, I hope we can both enjoy shedding new light and bringing new knowledge about our local school gardens.

Agreeing to participate will not require you to expose any identifying or intrusive information. Any identifying information or statements made will be confidential in this study. If you’d like more information before agreeing, please send me an email or call my number below, but this in no way obligates you to participate. You may decline or withdraw at any time.

Thank you so very much,

Terra Neilson
Sociology & Social Work
Pacific University
Email: Terra.Lee@pacificu.edu
TEL: 509.216.0889

Faculty Advisor
Jaye Cee Whitehead, PhD
Pacific University
Email: whitehej@pacificu.edu
TEL: 503.352.2886
Appendix B: Interview Schedule

*To be delivered to members of a Portland garden educator organization during one-on-one interviews*

1. How did you get started gardening?
   - Did your family history involve farming or gardening?
   - Can you recall lessons you have learned in your past from the garden or farm?
     - *(If the person does not have gardening in their past)*  How do you imagine the ideal garden for children to grow up in?

2. What do feel is the difference, if any, between gardening and farming?
   - Many say the farm is a great place to raise children. What do you think children gain from living and experiencing the farm life that they cannot get in the city?

3. Ideally, what would the school garden teaches students?

4. Why are school gardens important to you?
   - Some have said school gardens are just a symptom of a liberal environmentalist agenda. What do you say to this?
   - Do school gardens have staying power?

6. What is your next major project in the garden this year?
Appendix C: Consent Form

1. Study Title:

Volunteer Involvement in School Gardens

2. Study Personnel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Principal Investigator</th>
<th>Faculty Advisor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Terra Neilson</td>
<td>Jaye Cee Whitehead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Pacific University</td>
<td>Pacific University</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>509.216.0889</td>
<td>503.352.2886</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Study Location and Dates

This study is proposed to begin in November 2009 and be completed May 2010.

4. Study Invitation and Purpose

You are invited to participate in a study by Terra Neilson on parental involvement in school gardens. The results of this study will be used to inform on school garden culture in Portland, Oregon.

5. Study Materials and Procedures

To participate in this study, I will request to meet for an interview lasting approximately one hour long. There will be a request to digitally audio record the interview, but no repercussions will result to objecting to audio recording. Following the interview, you may choose to be informed of the study results, and if so will be requested to fill out a short informational sheet.

6. Participant Characteristics and Exclusionary Criteria

No participants under the age of 18.
7. Anticipated Risks and Steps Taken to Avoid Them

There is very little risk associated with this study. If however, at any time you feel uncomfortable the interview can be ended with no negative consequences.

8. Anticipated Direct Benefits to Participants

This study is non-beneficial and there are no direct benefits from participating.

9. Clinical Alternatives (i.e., alternative to the proposed procedure) that may be advantageous to participants

There are no clinical procedures.

10. Participant Payment

No payments are awarded for this study

11. Medical Care and Compensation In the Event of Accidental Injury

There are no medical procedures.

12. Adverse Event Reporting Plan

In case of a medical emergency I will call 911 and then contact my faculty advisor to receive further instruction.

13. Promise of Privacy

The information gathered in this interview will remain confidential. Names will not appear anywhere in the data collected or in the report. The audio and written recordings will not refer to an identifying detail from the interview and will stored in a locked, private location. Each participant in this study will be referred to by a pseudonym (alternate name) to ensure confidentiality. This Informed Consent form will remain locked away and secure until the finality of the interview when it will be shredded. The participants will be given a pseudonym along with any family members discussed in the interview. Any publication or presentation of the material will not identify you or your family members mentioned in anyway.

14. Voluntary Nature of the Study
Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Pacific University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences.

### 15. Contacts and Questions

The researcher(s) will be happy to answer any questions you may have at any time during the course of the study. Complete contact information for the researchers is noted on the first page of this form. If the study in question is a student project, please contact the faculty advisor. If you are not satisfied with the answers you receive, please call Pacific University’s Institutional Review Board, at (503) 352 – 1478 to discuss your questions or concerns further. All concerns and questions will be kept in confidence.
16. Statement of Consent to Record Interviews

I have read and understand all of the above and agree to the following methods of recording:

☐ I give permission for the following interview to be digitally audio recorded.
☐ I give permission for the following interview to be recorded in writing.

17. Statement of Consent

I have read and understand the above. All my questions have been answered. I am 18 years of age or over and agree to participate in the study. I have been offered a copy of this form to keep for my records.

Participant’s Signature
Date

Investigator’s Signature
Date

17. Participant contact information

This contact information is required in case any issues arise with the study and participants need to be notified and/or to provide participants with the results of the study if they wish.

Would you like to have a summary of the results after the study is completed?

___Yes  ____No

Participant’s name: (Please Print) __________________________________________

Street address: __________________________________________________________

Telephone: ______________________________________________________________

Email: _________________________________________________________________
### Appendix D: Sample Demographic Information

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<th>Education</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Where live</th>
<th>Where work</th>
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Appendix E: Coding Scheme

The following outline was developed to organize the data collected from interviews.

Each interview was dissected using the following categories.

Collective Memory

Nostalgic Icons: Tractors, Red Barns, Animals, etc.

Nostalgic Relationships: Grandparents, relationships with others as a child, etc.

Nostalgic Settings: Farm, garden, et.

Discomfort with the present

Related specifically to food and garden cultivation

Narrative of the Decline

Perspective of a declining future

Presence or Absence of hope for change was also noted

Cultural Capital

Embodied: Cultural Capital affecting habitus and acquired over the long term

Ex: the idea of ‘Connectedness’

Objectified: Cultural Capital acquired as related to manipulating tangible objects

Ex: the use of garden tools or plant identification

Institutional: Cultural Capital legitimized through degree offering institutions