

CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF AUTHENTIC CARE IN  
URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION:  
NARRATIVES FROM YOUTH INTERNS AT EAST NEW YORK FARMS!

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## ABSTRACT

Given an increasingly urbanized and ethnically diverse population in the US, many environmental education (EE) practitioners and scholars are reevaluating and seeking to transform practices, philosophy, and frameworks to better serve and support urban youth. Urban EE is an arena that provides an opportunity for creating rigorous, experiential, and culturally responsive place-based educational experiences in urban spaces with diverse young people. I conducted a narrative inquiry with participants in a food justice education organization called East New York Farms! (ENYF) in Brooklyn, NY to gain insight into young people's experiences in the urban agriculture internship program. Emergent from my conversations with youth is a theory of change that emphasizes the importance of authentic care and other politicized notions of caring as a foundation for cultivating positive youth development, critical consciousness of social and ecological issues, and the transformation of self situated within community.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jesse had her early pivotal educational experiences reading, writing, and playing in schools in New York and New Jersey. Always seeking the stories of people and places, she pursued photography, literature, and creative writing from a young age through her undergraduate career at Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

After school, learning continued in a multitude of beautiful, mind and heart-opening places around the Northeast, Northwest, and here and there outside the states. Moved by a love of people and the natural world, Jesse worked at making a life of integrating environmental and social concerns and possibilities out of her commitment to creating a beautiful, just, and equitable world for all people full of deep enjoyment of one another, our land, and our food.

At Cornell, Jesse was fortunate enough to come under the mentorship of Marianne Krasny, a patient and brilliant individual who seems always to push the boundaries and carve out new spaces for intellectual curiosity to grow into innovative ideas and practice. Jesse was moved by community education, development, and organizing; participatory action research and the pursuit of democratizing research; multicultural and politically responsive education; and the expansive project of learning how to craft research methodologies that were a fit for her values.

Having made it through the fire, Jesse looks forward to offering what she has learned to the movement for social and environmental justice and transformation as well as venturing into the creation of new communities of praxis in pursuit of that sweet spot where social and ecological well-being thrive.

To Mom and Dad  
and all the grandparents.

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¡Buen provecho!

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## INTRODUCTION

Given an increasingly urbanized and ethnically diverse population in the US, many environmental education (EE) practitioners and scholars are reexamining EE goals, theoretical frameworks, and practice. Are approaches derived from the Tbilisi Declaration that emphasize changing attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Hungerford and Volk, 1990) still an ideal match for urban, ethnically diverse communities? How useful are more recent approaches that pay attention to issues of action and participation (Jensen & Schnack, 1997; Reid et al., 2008; Læssøe & Pedersen, in press), place (Sobel, 2005), and power and oppression (Cole, 2007; Gruenewald, 2003; Ceaser, 2012; Cermak, 2012)? And what goals, theories, and approaches are emerging in the growing field of urban environmental education (EE)?

A number of empirical studies have focused on the potential for hands-on EE practices to stimulate student interest and achievement in science among low-income and ethnically diverse youth living in cities. For example, Fusco (2001) described how an urban planning and community gardening project created a “practicing culture of science learning,” and the Garden Mosaics program integrated the practical knowledge of community gardeners with scientific knowledge as a means to engage urban youth in science learning (Kennedy & Krasny, 2005). Working in a school setting, Cermak (2012) used hip hop music as a means of instilling “critical ecological literacy,” integrating ecological understanding with an analysis of issues related to power and justice.

Kudryavtsev and Krasny (in review) reviewed the literature on urban EE dating back to the early 1900s, when educators turned to urban nature study as a means for youth to learn about natural history and benefit from being outdoors in cities. Based on their review, the authors outlined five historic and current-day trends in urban EE. One of the trends, Youth and Community Development, draws heavily from the work of Schusler and Krasny (2010) demonstrating the overlapping goals and practice of positive youth development (PYD) (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) and youth environmental action programs. PYD seeks to create and understand settings that lead to the long-term success of young people transitioning into adulthood (Lerner, 2005; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 1998). It also strives to equip youth with social, intellectual, emotional, psychological, and physical assets that increase the likeliness of long-term individual well-being (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), including the skills to “be participants...in their own growth” (Sabo, 2003, p. 22). Urban community-based organizations sometimes engage youth in urban environmental stewardship or “civic ecology practices,” such as constructing bioswale gardens, monitoring water quality, tree planting, and community gardening (Krasny & Tidball, 2012), as a means to foster positive youth development in low-income urban neighborhoods (Kudryavtsev & Krasny, in review). Strife and Downey (2009) have demonstrated how urban-dwelling children’s lack of access and exposure to green spaces paired with disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards may negatively affect youth physical and mental development.

Place-based education situates learning in local places that incorporate social and ecological processes, and seeks to make connections between learning and learners’ lived experiences (Sobel, 2005; Smith, 2002). It provides a second lens through which to view urban EE, given that urban EE programs are re-rooting learning in the issues and geographies of their particular

locales. Kudryavtsev, Stedman, and Krasny (2012) conducted a study of the impact of urban EE programs on youth participants' sense of place, including place attachment and place meaning (Stedman, 2002). As a result of the programs, students expressed increased ecological place meanings for the Bronx, i.e., the importance of ecological attributes such as places to recreate outside or enjoy nature. The EE programs did not result in changes in place attachment however, perhaps because the place meanings that informed attachment were often either strongly positive or negative (Kudryavtsev et al., 2012) and take longer to form.

A critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003) calls on EE practitioners and scholars to incorporate issues of power and justice into their work by drawing from place-based education and critical pedagogy. Gruenewald proposes an integration of Sobel's (2005) work with Freire's (1970) theory of critical pedagogy and *conscientização*, a critical consciousness that allows learners to perceive, understand, and counter oppressive systems and structures. Critical pedagogy of place points to the interdependent relationship of justice and ecological health, offering a conceptual framework for the multi-faceted goals of urban EE. It further suggests how urban EE can be a means to disrupt the impacts of discrimination perpetuated against urban youth and the exploitation of their local environments.

Whereas Gruenewald and others (Ceaser, 2012; Cermak, 2012; Cole, 2007; Kyburz-Graber, 1999) have theorized about the importance of crafting a theory and practice of critical EE, I know of no studies that have used both PYD and critical pedagogy of place to understand the benefits of an urban EE program, as reported by youth participants. Thus, I set out to explore how these frameworks could be applied within the context of a youth program focused on urban farming.

East NY Farms! (ENYF) is a youth leadership development and food justice education organization located in Brooklyn, NY. The urban agriculture youth internship program employs approximately 30 youth every year through the growing season from March until November, teaching technical agricultural skills while facilitating learning through workshops focused on “environment, health, community development, leadership and social justice” (ENYF website). First-year interns participate in all aspects of growing and selling the food at markets as well as all workshops. Returning interns (second, third, and fourth year interns) take on greater responsibility in their roles by leading crews of first-year interns, learning specialized knowledge specific to some aspect of the program, and leading workshops for first-year interns or at conferences.

I posed three research questions, reflecting positive youth development and critical pedagogy of place within the ENYF internship program:

How do returning interns’ narratives illuminate or demonstrate the ways in which participation in an urban, farm-based environmental education program contributes to positive youth development outcomes?

How do returning interns’ narratives demonstrate understanding of ecological and social issues? How is critical consciousness of these issues affected through working at East NY Farms!?

In presenting these results, I draw lessons about urban EE practice and theory from the stories of youth participants in ENYF’s urban agriculture internship program. Emergent in these stories are the ways in which authentic care or *cariño* (Valenzuela, 1999; Bartolomé, 2008) provides an access for understanding *how* ENYF is achieving its goals of ecological health, social justice,

youth development, and the creation of a new generation of young leaders. I hope you will draw insight from these stories into how young people in urban EE programs might be encountering and learning to address environmental and social exploitation-- and transforming themselves in the process.

## RELEVANT LITERATURE

### **Integrating Critical Social and Ecological Concerns in Urban EE**

Critical pedagogy and EE scholars alike are seeking to create pedagogies, practice, and theory that address social and environmental concerns. Scholars in both fields are exploring the impact and benefits of intertwining critical social theory and EE theory and practice (Bowers, 2002; Cole, 2007; Gruenewald, 2004; Kyburz-Graber, 1999; McLaren & Houston, 2004). Responding to internal and external critiques, some critical pedagogy scholars are working to “green” their Marxist, “red” educational theories and practice in order to address social, environmental, and ecojustice (McLaren & Houston, 2004). Alternatively, EE practitioners and scholars-- influenced in part by the environmental justice movement-- are expanding notions of the “environment” and ecological literacy to include a socially critical understanding of environmental issues that were formerly understood as purely social concerns “by addressing the ways power, race, class, gender, and politics shape human interactions with the land” (Cole, 2007, p. 36). These critical EE theories are an ideological match for urban EE practice that by nature of its contexts and the lived experiences of urban youth of color necessitates an integration of social and ecological concerns (Cermak, 2012; Kudryavtsev & Krasny, in review). Critical EE theories have the

possibility of informing a culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) in urban EE programs, responding to the need to make these programs relevant to participants' everyday experiences (Kudryavtsev & Krasny, in review). I draw from environmental and critical social theories, with emphasis on Gruenewald's (2003) critical pedagogy of place, to create a deeper understanding of how urban EE promotes social-ecological health and well-being.

Critical EE theories constitute several distinct frameworks that have common goals-- that is, to create educational theory and practice that promote ecological and social justice by incorporating discourses related to structural oppression and social identity (Cole, 2007). Kyburz-Graber (1999) offers a critical EE framework that moves away from the previous emphasis on individual behavior change and focuses instead on two tasks characterized by uncertainty and openness: constructing contextual value-laden knowledge with students and creating a culture of participatory teaching and learning guided by reflection. Ceaser's (2012) empirical study of an urban farm education program using a critical EE lens highlights the extent to which students' learning and desire to create social and ecological change are cultivated or limited by the relative presence or absence of an egalitarian teaching and learning ethic. Critical ecological literacy does not draw as heavily from a participatory practice but rather inquires into and theorizes how reading and writing can generate opportunities for students to "create messages that question, confront, and reconfigure how environmental problems are constructed by one's own overlapping racial, cultural, and economic power relations" (Cermak, 2012, p. 197). In his study, Cermak (2012) uses "green hip hop" in urban high school classrooms to connect environmental concepts to students' lived experiences, inviting forms of creative expression often devalued in formal educational settings. Though many of these critical environmental theories draw from

Marxist and Freirean traditions, ecojustice education scholars offer round critique of critical pedagogy's anthropocentric lack of attention to the natural world (Bowers, 2002), asserting that the question of what needs to be conserved—rather than transformed—is the fundamental inquiry. Ecojustice education confronts the root metaphors of the current ecological crisis, including narratives of progress and individualism, asserting that social and eco justice hinges on conservation of traditional ecological knowledge and life ways. Though not free from criticism (from Bowers in particular), a critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003) is a framework that integrates the theoretical concerns and goals of critical pedagogy and place-based education.

In “The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place,” Gruenewald (2003) aims to synthesize the “best” elements of critical pedagogy and place-based education into a framework that invites “critical social and ecological concerns into one’s understanding of place, and the role of places in education” (p. 9). Drawing on the rich traditions of critical pedagogy and place-based education, Gruenewald demonstrates how the respective goals of each discipline are not only overlapping but also interdependent. He posits that by combining the strengths of each tradition, their respective weaknesses can be addressed. The oft social and urban contexts of critical pedagogy concerned with “challeng[ing] assumptions, practices, and outcomes taken for granted in dominant culture and in conventional education” can be paired with the ecological and rural contexts of place-based education that are most often focused on crafting educational settings that “might have some direct bearing on the well-being of social and ecological places people actually inhabit” (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 3).

Within the scope of a critical pedagogy of place, the fundamental question of critical pedagogy centers on what needs to be transformed. Critical pedagogy is concerned with the development of critical consciousness through “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 17 as quoted in Gruenewald, 2003). If critical pedagogy is concerned with the transformation of unjust structures and relationships, according to Gruenewald (2003), place-based education is concerned with the question of what needs to be conserved. Gruenewald (2003) characterizes place-based education as a methodology that draws on local knowledge with the specific objectives of empathy, exploration, and social action (Sobel, 2005). These two traditions intersect in their “recognition that experience has a geographical dimension” and in the pursuit of “localized social action” (Gruenewald, 2003). By synthesizing the strengths of each tradition, Gruenewald (2003) defines a critical pedagogy of place as a framework for critical educational theory to be used to teach learners about pressing social and ecological issues concerning the places they inhabit, such as poverty, environmental racism, food security, or equitable access to green spaces, while developing the skills to understand and take action on these issues.

In practice, a critical pedagogy of place teaches through local socio-ecological issues to cultivate critical consciousness and action. The goals of a critical pedagogy of place are *decolonization* and *reinhabitation* (Gruenewald, 2003). Gruenewald defines decolonization as the more culturally-focused pursuit of “undo[ing] the damage done by multiple forms of oppression” (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 149) by being able to recognize inequitable systems, develop the tools to address them, and acting to disrupt the perpetuation of injustice. Alternatively, the more environmentally focused aim of reinhabitation is concerned with “learn[ing] how to live well

together in a place without doing damage to others, human and nonhuman” (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 149). Building on David Orr’s discussion of the art of living well in a place, Gruenewald builds on this ecological, geographically situated understanding of place to include the restoration, preservation, and transformation of both human and nonhuman relationships (Orr, 1992, p. 130; Gruenewald, 2003). Ultimately, the pursuit of these goals matters insofar as we are committed to creating educational opportunities that draw on past non-exploitative traditions and current practices and beliefs in order to create just, resilient relationships to each other and our places as we go forward.

Within the diverse and growing body of critical EE theory, critical pedagogy of place is being used to imagine how EE can be more effectively integrated into classrooms, honoring students’ funds of knowledge that they bring with them (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005) and focusing student learning on collaborative problem-solving of local issues that have direct bearing on students’ lives (Buxton, 2010; Cole, 2007; Smith, 2007). Azano (2011) points to the ways in which the limitations of place-based education in a rural classroom could be overcome by using the critical lens of critical pedagogy of place to open opportunities for students to more effectively “read” the world and feel empowered to take actions to create systemic change. Smith’s (2007) study of three classrooms involved in community-based collaborative projects demonstrated how these ventures were successful in connecting students to their local people and places—supporting a process of reinhabitation—but took only small steps in instigating a process of decolonization. Smith asserts that educators’ fear of administrator or community backlash contributes to the limited number of teachers engaging students in learning about and

for controversial topics. As with any liberatory practice, Smith calls on educators to teach with courage, to push themselves and their students beyond what might otherwise be possible.

Though many critical pedagogy and EE scholars build off of Gruenewald's theoretical writing, his and other critical EE scholars' ideas are not free from criticism. Some EE scholars contest the usefulness of socially critical theory to advance EE in schools when oftentimes teachers' theories of practice are ignored (Walker, 1997) while others take particular issue with Gruenewald's critical pedagogy of place because it perpetuates several cultural assumptions that are counterproductive to ecojustice (Bowers, 2008). Bowers (2008) asserts that a critical pedagogy of place is an oxymoron, based on fraught assumptions that include "thinking of change as an inherently progressive force...; a deep seated ethnocentrism that is now masked by abstract references to valuing cultural differences; a view of language as a conduit; ...and that critical thinking always leads to overcoming oppression and environmentally destructive practices" (p.p. 325-326). Stevenson (2008) also offers the criticism that critical pedagogy of place does not appropriately move beyond the theoretical realm in its guidance to educators; and though Bowers does an effective job of pointing to critical pedagogy's weakness in engaging ecological issues, his thinking is ultimately more closely aligned with the values of a critical pedagogy of place than he might like to acknowledge (Greenwood, 2008; Smith, 2008). The formulation of a critical EE is ongoing and each of these scholars contributes to "the larger, necessarily collective effort to describe culturally grounded ecological educational theory and practice" (Greenwood, 2008, p. 337).

## **Environmental Education for/as Positive Youth Development (PYD)**

PYD constitutes a diverse and dynamic field. Though PYD is evolving and sometimes hard to define (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003), most scholars, practitioners, and policy makers agree that it is an asset-based approach that assumes that all youth have the capacity to become successful adults, given appropriate support (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner, 2005). A relatively recent shift toward developmental systems models emphasizes the “plasticity” of human development (Lerner, 2005, p. 20) and the importance of understanding young people’s development in the context of their various relationships. Accompanying this shift has been a change in vocabulary, practices, and theory building that no longer pursues goals of creating problem-free individuals. The absence of problem behaviors is of course still desirable (Lerner, 2005) but PYD aims to promote the development of assets and skills rather than the elimination of negative behaviors.

Consistent with the goal of preparing youth for successful adulthood, PYD scholars and practitioners offer an array of assets, indicators, and measures that constitute the elements of PYD. Many PYD scholars recognize the five C’s as the fundamental assets of a prepared young person (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner, 2005 cites Little, 1993 as the first to propose these indicators; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003), sometimes citing a sixth, namely:

Caring and compassion;

Character;

Competence in academic, social, and vocational arenas;

Confidence;

Connection (Eccles & Gootman, 2002); and

Contribution (Lerner, 2005).

Eccles & Gootman (2002) propose a distinct though overlapping set of developmental assets based on their extensive review of youth development literature including assets related to: physical development, intellectual development, psychological and emotional development, and social development (p. 74). These assets are considered important and can be indicators of future success as an adult—not all assets need be present but the more that are developed, the better a young person is poised to thrive.

Features of PYD settings (supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, support for efficacy and mattering, opportunities for skill building, integration of family, school, and community efforts, and structure and safety) promote these developmental assets in youth (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Critics assert that while PYD focuses on the positive aspects and strengths of youth, the conceptualization of young people as resources, the indicators of success, and the motivations behind the growth of PYD are problematic or even troubling (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011). Sukarieh & Tannock (2011) explain that

Proponents tend to write, for example, as if the concepts of ‘competence,’ ‘character,’ ‘caring,’ ‘prepared’ and ‘productive’ adulthood and so on, were self-evident, unproblematic and easily measurable terms, rather than being controversial and politicized social and cultural constructs (p. 679).

Further, these and other authors claim that despite the focus on an ecological model that attempts to understand youth development in context, PYD literature pays too little attention to structural inequities and barriers to development such as the influences of poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of injustice (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 85; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011). Though the deficit model of youth development characterized youth as

irrational and immature, there was more emphasis on structural obstacles to development whereas the focus on individual strengths and assets runs the risk of forwarding a neoliberal agenda that refocuses the onus of responsibility for youth development on individuals and families (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011).

EE programs provide an opportunity to promote PYD assets alongside ecological learning and actions (Schusler & Krasny, 2010). Similarly, environmental action programs promote increased individual competencies and capacity in addition to community and ecosystem services benefits (Jensen & Schnack, 1997). Currently there is growing research on the varied benefits for urban youth of exposure and engagement with nature and green spaces including increased sense of place and ecological identity (Kudryavtsev, Stedman, & Krasny, 2012). Though youth and community development work has been occurring in urban green spaces in the U.S. for many decades (Kudryavtsev & Krasny, 2012), there are increasing numbers of explicit, educational interventions and programs being created. Of particular interest is the growing movement of agriculture and garden-based education in urban green spaces (Gaylie, 2011). Stewardship-based programs in urban garden spaces can create opportunities for social learning, knowledge sharing and the development of communities of practice (Krasny & Tidball, 2009; Ceaser, 2012) as well as contribute to PYD assets and identity formation in participants (Schusler & Krasny, 2010). Given the importance of learning in green spaces to youth development, paired with the ways in which young people experience race and class-based inequalities that limit access to nature and overburden youth with exposure to environmental hazards (Strife & Downey, 2009), I draw on a PYD framework paired with a critical pedagogy of place to inform a theory of critical urban EE in this study.

## **Understanding Authentic Care as a context for fulfilling PYD and critical pedagogy of place outcomes in urban EE**

In many ways, understanding the importance of care and caring is highly intuitive but there is a significant body of literature that provides insight into the importance of caring in both educational theory and practice (Noddings, 1984; Noddings, 2005). Discussions of care and caring in EE literature tend to focus on teaching students to care for or about the environment (Martin, 1999; Russell & Bell, 1996) by cultivating attachment to a place or natural object, or alternatively, on a deep caring that starts with the individual and extends out in relationship to all nonhuman nature (Russell & Bell, 1996). These understandings of care are an important element of connecting young people to the environment but need to be grounded in a critical approach to education that accounts for learners' lived experiences and teachers' expectations and assumptions about both care (Bartolomé, 2008) and the environment. Given the distinct needs and resources of EE programs in urban settings, utilizing a politicized theory of care that deeply respects youth while meeting them where they are in terms of their social positionality creates new possibilities for urban EE practice and scholarship.

Care can be oppressive and undermining (Darmanin, 2003) just as readily as it can be liberating (hooks, 1994). Noddings' foundational educational literature on care and caring in schools points to the ways in which being cared-for and caring can humanize both students and educators (Noddings, 1984; Noddings, 2005). Noddings' focus is on schools and is in part a response to the increased emphasis on standards and accountability, but she writes about a concern shared with

other educators, namely the lack of connectedness in a “placeless” curriculum (1992; Gruenewald, 2003). Building on Noddings’ expansive work on care, Noblit (1993) begins to explore questions of power and caring, coming to see that the power of a caring authority figure can support students’ growth and development.

Noddings’ work provides a foundation for examining and theorizing a politicized conception of caring that explicitly confronts how power and privilege are experienced and mediated by learners. Valenzuela’s (1999) in-depth study of Mexican-American youth and immigrant Mexican youth’s schooling experiences sheds light on the ways in which youth exercise resistance to assimilation. Youth express the need to be cared for (by teachers) before being asked to care about (school and school culture) and point to the necessity for authentically caring relationships which honor students’ experiences of class, race, and culture that they bring with them to school. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) posits a form of womanist or black feminist caring by examining the teaching practices of exemplary black women teachers who demonstrate what she refers to as the embrace of the maternal, political clarity, and an ethic of risk. Bartolomé (2008) forwards the conversation on care, offering *cariño*, which builds on previous definitions of care but includes the “understanding that caring for and loving one’s subordinated students is insufficient unless the love and care are informed by authentic respect and a desire to equalize unequal learning conditions in school” (p. 2). Bartolomé points to the need for educators to critically examine their own expression of caring so that it is free from oppressive and limiting behaviors, however unwitting. By drawing from this rich scholarship on care and caring relationships, I can begin to bring what I will call the authentic care literature into dialogue with the urban EE literature, presenting a useful unifying frame for the goals of a critical pedagogy of

place and PYD in urban EE settings. These multidisciplinary frameworks help us understand urban EE practice and scholarship through a new lens, inviting practitioners to not only care about youth but to teach with the clarity of their position and that of their students as well as the systems that effect, limit, or have the potential to liberate young people. Following Cole's (2007) call to develop a more expansive and inclusive EE field, I draw on these multiple conceptual frames to both reflect the complexity of urban EE and better develop its diverse practical goals of youth and community development and critical socio-ecological knowledge and action.

## METHODOLOGY & METHODS

### **Methodology**

*We can call on stories to make theoretical abstractions, or we can hear stories as a call to be vigilant to the cross-currents of life's contingencies. When we stay with a story, refusing the impulse to abstract, reacting from the source of our own experience and feelings, we respect the story and the human life it represents, and we enter into personal contact with questions of virtue, of what it means to live well and to do the right thing.*

*(Narrative's Virtues, Bochner, 2001)*

Narrative inquiry is a project of understanding rather than explanation. A narrative methodology lends itself to exploring particular phenomena in context over time (Wells, 2011, p. 16; Hart, 2002). Although this approach presents the limitation of being unable to draw conclusive, causal relationships between variables and study factors, there is a different pursuit at play. Namely, "the contribution of narrative inquiry is more often intended to be the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic than it is to yield a set of knowledge

claims that might incrementally add to knowledge in the field” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41). Rather than seeking to discover an absolute truth using positivist approaches and practices, such as “sterile’ research tools” (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, p. 1) are replaced with the strategies and rules of a methodology that facilitates a genuine process of empirical discovery in regard to the subject of study. Narrative situates subject, researcher, and reader in a world of exploring what is newly possible.

Narrative inquiry or analysis assumes multiple definitions dependent on context (see Wells, 2011, p. 7- for several possible “definitions”). For the purposes of this research and in most narrative analysis, narratives or stories are used as the main source of data (Wells, 2011). These stories are co-constructed and created between the speaker and the interviewer (Riessman, 2008) and are the basis for interpreting and understanding a particular “phenomenon in context” (Wells, 2011, p. 16). In this paper, I use the terms “narrative” and “story” interchangeably, referring to the diverse oral, written, and visual ways in which people sequence, make meaning of, and recount events, both immediate and long since past. Stories can be interpreted as complete pieces with attention given to what is presented (content), how the story is told (performance), and in what form (structure) (Wells, 2011, p. 7; Riessman, 2008). Narratives allow researchers and readers to delve into the local context of a story or phenomenon of study as well as the possibility of situating individual stories into larger contexts or meta-narratives. Understanding particular cases can be used to test theory or develop new hypotheses (Flyvberg, 2006). Narrative inquiry is effective for the in-depth study of a case that, though it may not yield highly generalizable results in the traditional sense, can provide new insight and deep meaning

that open new possibilities for practice and scholarship to be imagined by the reader (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42).

Given Paul Hart's (2002) call for EE researchers to discuss the beliefs and assumptions that inform my work, I find it important to also acknowledge my own assumptions about how the world works and how narrative is a fit for my beliefs and values. I draw primarily from a constructivist epistemology, claiming that there are real, physical limits to the world but that our understanding will always be constructed and in many ways, incomplete. Given my acknowledgement of the constructed nature of our experiences, I utilize narrative inquiry and ethnographic data collection techniques—naturalist methodologies that facilitate inquiry into the constructed realities of participants (and the co-construction of interviews with me as the researcher) (Hart, 2002, p. 149).

The use of narrative inquiry is consistent with my own normative views of what counts as knowledge and the purposes of research, i.e., that research “subjects” are authoritative experts of their own lives and lived experiences and that this knowledge goes beyond conceptions of the anecdotal. Participants’ local and situated knowledge is the foundation of this research and youths’ perspectives are honored as such. Ultimately, my commitment to pursuing ethical relationships with research participants and my understanding of research as a point of access to social change informed my decisions to spend multiple seasons on-site with participants as well as to select a method that hinges on establishing relationships and bringing participants voices to the forefront. Building trust with all participants allowed for more open, honest, safe, and familiar spaces and interview dialogues (Seidman, 2006). Although fundamental in any context,

it was very important that trust and rapport be established with youth participants especially given the added consideration of my status as a white, educated class researcher/outsider, ten years their senior. During the second summer, I had the benefit of established relationships with staff and first-year interns (now returning interns) and was familiar with the program structure and culture which provided a kind of “intimacy” with the program and its participants that allowed me to also become more of a member or “insider” of ENYF.

In the case of ENYF, narrative inquiry is an appropriate methodology and method given the initial open-ended nature of my research questions. At the outset, I began with a simple question: what’s going on here? After a first season of pre-research with youth interns at ENYF, it was clear that something both positive and unique was happening in the program but it was not immediately obvious what it was. By undertaking an appreciative inquiry (Grant & Humphries, 2006), I was able to encounter youth stories that demonstrated what worked well at ENYF and begin to imagine what might be newly possible. Pursuing an ever-evolving dialogue between theory and life, or “the stories of life contained in the inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41), the personal narratives of youth allowed me to begin exploring my “hunches” and practical theories regarding PYD, emergent critical consciousness, and later caring. Because narrative yields very contextual, in-depth data, this research provides new understanding of the effectiveness of ENYF and also offers insights that can be reshaped and used in new, context-specific ways by other urban environmental educators and scholars.

To begin this in-depth inquiry, prior and emergent theoretical frameworks informed this study, as can often be the case with narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008). Utilizing extended personal

narratives as the unit of analysis allowed me to explore the breadth of my research questions while honoring the depth and complexity of my research participants through in-depth narrative interviews. I approached both staff and youth participants with a request to hear stories— to be let into their lives such that we might better understand their lived experience in the garden— though I left it largely up to the interviewer as to how to tell a story. I am hopeful that this will illuminate some of what is tangibly vibrant in the program, contributing to the practical and intellectual understanding of urban EE programs-- specifically, what methodologies, beliefs, and practical theories can be used to build community, individual capacity, and environmental health and justice.

## **Methods**

*The narrative researcher's experience is always a dual one, always the inquirer experiencing the experience and also being a part of the experience itself...we are in the parade we presume to study.*

*(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81)*

My relationship with members of ENYF began in April 2010 on the Cornell campus during an urban agriculture conference. After my initial meeting, I interned the following summer of 2010 both at a different farm-based educational youth program in Brooklyn and at ENYF. At ENYF, I spent this preliminary field season working with first-year and returning interns participating in the urban agriculture internship program. Over the season, I worked in the main ENYF garden with youth, observed workshops, and attended farmers markets. Hoping to craft a participatory project, I spoke with staff, primarily the director of ENYF, about the organization's research

needs and facilitated semi-structured discussions with youth about what they were learning. Though the project did not evolve as a participatory action research project (Greenwood, 2007), this pre-research season greatly informed the theories and questions that emerged. I came into the second field season with both my original open-ended question: what's going on here?; the question posed by staff, what are youth learning?; and the more specific research questions developed out of the underlying theories related to PYD and critical pedagogy of place (authentic care was added later on and thus did not inform the questions). Entering the second season with ENYF, all of the youth I interviewed were returning interns who I had worked alongside with in the gardens and gotten to know from the season before. Based on my own assumptions about the role of research as a tool for social change (Greenwood, 2007), as well as a process of self-discovery for myself and for research participants (Hart, 2002), I cannot overstate how highly I valued the process of building relationships with both youth and staff.

### *Sampling*

Utilizing purposeful sampling, I interviewed returning interns who had participated in the urban agriculture internship program for at least one previous season. Returning interns were selected because of their familiarity with the urban agriculture internship program and ability to reflect on their long-term experiences with ENYF. Ten youth were selected because of their leadership roles and experiences as returning interns. Rather than pursuing a large population size, I chose to interview and observe a small group in-depth over time with whom I had already developed and established close relationships.

## *Participants*

During the time of the study, all participants were returning interns working for a second, third, or fourth and final season at ENYF. All participants were high-school aged youth of color and included two young men and eight young women (seven of the ten were interviewed twice).

## *Data Collection: Interviews, Participant Observation & Focus Groups*

I conducted two-part interviews with returning interns consistent with Seidman's (2006) recommended structure for in-depth, phenomenological interviewing. These interviews were treated as "a joint product of exchange between an interviewer and an interviewee" (Wells, 2011, p. 27) and serve as the main unit of analysis (Riessman, 2008) in interpreting the data with a focus on stories related to ENYF. I sought thick description of participants' experiences in the greater context of their long-term experiences at ENYF and of their personal histories. The first interview, conducted to understand youths' stories in context, focused on life-story and personal background, prioritizing questions related to school, family, friends, and role models, activities outside of the program, and future personal and professional aspirations. The second interview focused on participants' experiences at ENYF including how they found out about ENYF, how they became involved, stories about their experiences with other youth, staff, and community members, as well as reflections on what they had learned and how it was or was not useful outside of the program. All interviews were one-on-one with youth with the exception of Kiah and Tamara's joint second interview.

I recorded stories and observations of the intern program during the first summer in field notes collected through participant observations consistent with ethnographic observation techniques. Although these field notes were primarily focused on documenting daily happenings, they also served to better capture a record of my own experiences, observations, and thoughts (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). Additionally, unrecorded ethnographic observations, informal conversations, and simply getting to know youth by working together provided greater background and context for situating youth's narratives.

I conducted informal discussions and focus groups during the first and second seasons at ENYF. In the first season, an informal focus group with current returning interns informed much of the literature that was used to develop the research questions. In the second season, in addition to the initial interviews described above, I met regularly with returning interns to draft an interview instrument for use with alumni from ENYF that was later implemented in collaboration with the Forest Bureau's Urban Field Station in New York City. Though the focus was on this interview design project, I also made participant observations of these meetings. Finally, after data collection was complete and initial analysis had begun, I returned to ENYF in fall of 2011 and conducted a focus group with a subset of the returning interns who had been interviewed during the second summer (and one returning intern who had not been interviewed yet) in order to get their impressions of the first stages of data interpretation.

## **Sense-Making**

*Connecting biography and society becomes possible through the close analysis of stories.*

*(Riessman, 2008, p. 10)*

### *Transcribing Interviews*

Two research assistants and I transcribed all interviews as close to verbatim as possible, including various speech utterances (e.g. um, like, you know) that were later selectively edited for ease of reading. While transcribing, I read all interviews closely for themes related to the a priori frameworks including PYD assets and critical pedagogy of place outcomes. I recorded memos (Saldaña, 2009) noting general themes, patterns, novel or confusing information, or contradictions within and across narratives. A highly interpretive process (Riessman, 2008, p. 29), the transcription of interviews informed the understanding of the relationship between the two theoretical frameworks as well as the emergent focus on care and caring.

### *Interpretation/Analysis*

As much as possible, interviews were read for wholeness, aiming to maintain the coherence and unity (Riessman, 2008) of each participant's narrative. Rather than fragmenting narratives into discrete categories, emphasis in interpretation was on themes that emerged from deep analysis of individual narratives and then were "checked" and explored by looking for them across narratives (Riessman, 2008) as well as from ethnographic notes (which were open coded). These themes were informed by a priori conceptual frameworks and questions but also directed the process of interpretation towards the integration of new, unexpected literature. Consistent with thematic analysis, the focus was primarily on the content of stories rather than the telling, "focus[ing] on the act the narrative reports and the moral of the story" (Riessman, 2008, p. 62).

The unfolding series of stories shared by interview participants, rather than segmented excerpts or themes, was taken as the unit of analysis (Riessman, 2008, p. 12).

Throughout, I engaged in a process similar to what Ginwright and Cammarota (2007) define as “rigorous improvisation,” observing young people at work at ENYF, immersing myself in dialogue with academic colleagues about what was happening in the program, returning to ENYF to delve deeper into understanding youths’ experiences, and all the while weaving in new strands that emerged from the productive tension of interviews, literature, conversation, and ethnographic notes and observations. My initial interpretation was based on open coding of stories that led to substantive categories which are descriptive and function by connecting statements in context into a coherent whole (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Maxwell, 2005).

Throughout the process of interpretation and analysis, I negotiated the tension between analyzing whole narratives while still drawing connections across cases to be able to present general themes and offer “broader commentary” (Riessman, 2008, p. 13). In addition to open coding interview data, I also used Atlas.ti to continue to draw out major and subthemes. Beyond the use of Atlas.ti, interpretation was a highly creative and iterative process, as I went back and forth between observations, reflections, insights, interviews, and familiar and emergent literature. Once it became clear that the results reflected a process and the unifying theme of “somewhere to be” emerged (see “The Findings”), I was able to parse out, shuffle, and reshuffle major and subthemes until I developed “a melody” I could explain (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007, p. 695). In the results, I present stories from youth but there are also extended accounts that incorporate non-storied texts including assertions or opinions, descriptions, reports, and other kinds of evidence that substantiate youths’ claims and complement their stories. On the other

hand, there are no extended excerpts from my ethnographic notes but my long-term engagement with youth at ENYF greatly contributed to my interpretations; my notes and observations of day-to-day interactions and key moments are inextricably woven throughout the findings. Though it is impossible to paint a complete picture of the lived experiences of the youth participants, I attempted to present the complexity and richness of each youth's story, acknowledging and honoring their humanness, agency, and dignity.

## THE FINDINGS

... you not dragging me down now cause I got somewhere to *go*, I got somewhere to *be*, so when you gonna stay in this house, while I *go work* at the *garden*, at the *farm*, you know, making *my money* while you just sit here...

*Nova, 4<sup>th</sup> Year Intern*

Returning interns' stories demonstrate the ways in which they come into their own through their experiences at ENYF. Taken as a shared narrative of personal growth, their individual stories mark the major themes of this process of personal transformation. Using Nova's above quotation as a starting point in which she passionately explains that her brother can't bring her down anymore because ENYF gives her "somewhere to *go*... somewhere to *be*," I explore the ways in which ENYF is not just a job or educational program but also *somewhere to belong*, *somewhere to be pushed*, *somewhere to grapple with complexity*, *somewhere to practice leadership*, and *somewhere to become yourself*. Within each of these themes, I identified several subthemes (Tables 1-5).

<b>Somewhere to Belong</b>
<i>Feeling welcomed</i>
<i>Feeling safe</i>
<i>Feeling cared for and connected</i>

**Table 1.** Somewhere to belong subthemes.

**Somewhere to belong**

So it's like, so we see that person-- all right, they havin' a bad day. And we go cheer 'em up or go talk to them... It's just like a family. East New York Family Farm-- like a family. ...So it's like, I'm wanted here cause like I don't wanna be no place that I'm not wanted.

*Cedrick, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Intern*

Returning interns express feelings of belonging in their stories. Several young people share stories of their initial days as first-year interns at ENYF and how they remember *feeling welcomed* and appreciated by staff and returning interns. Over time, youth begin to *feel safe* and able to open up to adults and their ENYF peers. Many express directly that they *feel cared for and connected* and seen for who they really are. What became clear through returning interns' stories was the importance of close, caring relationships with staff and other youth.

*Feeling welcomed*

By the time I met Tamara, she was already an energetic and supportive crew leader; she shared her warm smile with me every morning that I showed up at ENYF, making me feel like I fit in, like I was welcome. Tamara tells the story of her early days at ENYF and the ways in which other youth persisted in their attempts to welcome her and get to know her, even when she was reluctant to open up.

*Tamara:* My first year, the first time I started working here I was quiet, like I didn't want to talk to nobody. I didn't really know anybody and then I was working in the garden and then I had to work with Kimberlé, Jayden, and Aisha, and then it's like, Jayden kept trying to like get conversations out of me. And I was like answering him with one [word] answer. [...] and then Kimberlé tried talking to me and then she was like, you know, forget it. And then, everybody, but they still trying to talk to me and then finally I loosened up and I started talking.

Kiah—who also tells the story of her shy first days at ENYF and who when I met her was also a confident and competent leader who would later teach me how to run the share table at the farmers market—and Tamara explain how staff members made them feel respected and appreciated when they first started the youth program.

*Tamara:* ...She's [staff person] so happy. And it's like, some of the staff's like make you feel welcome.

*Kiah:* Mhm, yeah, like- exactly what she said, like when I first came to the program and stuff, Teresa made me feel welcome, like, even when I wasn't really um, open- I wasn't really open to like a lot of youth here, she always made me feel comfortable, you know, like I was appreciated or something.

### *Feeling safe*

When I met Kimberlé, she was in her fourth year as an intern at ENYF, well-liked and well-known for her contagious laughter. She told me a story in which she shared personal information with a staff person named Gail. She explains how this staff person would never “throw her under the bus” or break her confidence which was echoed by that staff person one afternoon as she and I were working together. Notably, in this story she uses similar language to that which she uses earlier to describe her relationship with her brother. Kimberlé admires her brother and looks to him as a confidante, saying, “...he didn’t throw me down, or throw me under the bus if I was doing something wrong, if I told him about something...” She makes a more explicit connection to a feeling of safety and familiarity by describing ENYF as a kind of second home.

*Kimberlé:* Like one person I always go to just to talk to, you know, just to talk and get a lot of stuff outta my mind is Gail. Like, she’s a good listener, and she just, I really talk to her about anything and everything, you know? So, like, we was talkin’ on, um, volunteer day, -you know like, it’s really comfortable talking to her, you know? So yeah, she really listens, so like, yeah, this is another good thing about, um, about this job is that, you know, you can come in, and if you have something on your mind, you know, you can talk to them about anything. Like, they wouldn’t you know, throw you under the bus, [...] you know, look at you a different way because, you know, ohh, you talked to them about something, you know, they wouldn’t spread your business also, so yeah, that’s another good thing about this job. It’s very comforting, you know, you feel like it’s a second home.

### *Feeling cared for and connected*

Several of the returning interns echoed Cedrick's opening quotation, describing the ways in which their bonds with other interns and staff knit them into a family complete with inside jokes and stories, nicknames, favorite "siblings," and an experience of intimately knowing and being known. Tamara, in an interview conducted jointly with Kiah, tells the story of how she got her nickname and explicitly articulates the way in which other interns and staff observe and notice things about each other.

*Tamara:* And it's so funny because, people notice stuff, *people in this job notice stuff about you* like, Kiah was like the only one to notice that every time I come to work, I always have me a buttercrunch cookie with me. And she gave me the nickname, Miss Buttercrunch D and everybody wanted to know why she gave me the name [Kiah laughing] it's like, you don't wanna know. [Kiah laughing] It's like, I never heard nobody tell me, you're always eating buttercrunch cookies. It's like, nobody notice it and then Kiah notice it and it was like, dang, Kiah, you \* mess up my flow! [Kiah laughing] And it was like, it's like, it's cool. She's always singing Chris Brown songs. So I had to give her a name. [laughing] (emphasis added)

Although a seemingly simple observation, this kind of attention to detail is no small thing. Kiah noticed and then pointed out one of Tamara's idiosyncrasies, drawing the two young women closer together through a shared joke and nickname. Cedrick explains how paying attention and getting to know the other interns actually allows them to "bring each other up," make each other feel better, and look out for each other at work, pointing to the ways in which supporting peers is a learned skill. Cedrick, a freshman standout athlete at the time, is used to his teammates having high expectations of him and he seems to thrive in team settings. Here he begins by talking about Angela, his fellow returning intern co-crew leader.

*Cedrick:* Angela [is the] person [that brings me up]. Cause there's supervisors but me and Angela knew each other from last year. So it's like, me and Angela got a connection that \*\* expect cause the returning interns all got connections that people might [not?]\* understand. You might look at each other, start laughing. They be like, what is wrong with y'all two? You be like, nothin. It's just something that we remembered. So it's like, we all got the connection that always bring each other up. Like everybody know when I'm mad cause I'm quiet. Everybody know when um Tamara mad cause she get that face. Everybody know when Schuyler mad cause Schuyler goes in the hallway. So it's like we all know each other already, like same thing from next year-- the first year's like, when they become\* second years, they gonna know what's wrong with the next person already. So like the next year, the person [first year?] be like, oh, what's wrong with him? \* She'll\* be like, I know already. Don't worry about that.

Tamara goes on to explain that all the returning interns have different bonds, implying that though not all interns give each other nicknames (though many of them do), that even these different kinds of connections are acceptable, even this does not make them less of a family. In fact, both Kiah and Tamara use the metaphor of a family to describe the respect and love present in the relationships with other youth even if they are not very close.

*Tamara:* So some of us have different bonds from others and some of us we get along but we just like, we're not that close with others, so-

*Kiah:* And it's ok, you know- you know, you don't have to force nothin' on nobody.

*Tamara:* Cause at the endin' of the day- at the endin' of the day, we know we're a family and it's like, you know your sisters, you have- say you have five other sisters, you and one is gonna be like the closest but you and the others, they'll always be your sisters for life.

*Kiah:* You have different relationships.

*Tamara:* And it's like, so I think it's cool.

*Kiah:* You will always have a different relationship with um, people but at the end of the day, it's like, it's all out of love. Just so long as you y'all don't disrespect one another and disrespect yourselves, y'all have a good life to live. [laughs a little]

Tamara tells a brief story, explaining how the youth adopt each other's unique forms of expression (sayings, ways of laughing), creating an intimate environment not unlike a close family in which family members share mannerisms, speech patterns, and gestures. Youth and staff alike share insides jokes and stories, often affectionately poking fun at one another. During lunch, breaks and special events in particular, youth and staff "crack jokes" and retell stories. The repertoire is nearly endless: teasing staff for attempting to use slang, the time Daniel swam to the bottom of the pond to retrieve Aisha's dropped glasses, Teresa's love of banghra, Kimberlé's amazing laugh, the time Christopher ran four city blocks from what turned out to be a very friendly dog, and Schuyler and Daniel trying a ghost pepper.

*Tamara:* I feel we doing good and it's like, I think if we hadn't come into this program, we hadn't- we wouldn't have met some of the people that we, um, we met today. Like some of the stuff that we do like, other people like now coming in this year and noticing stuff that Kimberlé does, oh gosh-- who could not talk about Kimberlé's laugh? It's like, you can't meet somebody with a laugh like Kimberlé's. It's like, Kimberlé laugh is so like, and now it's contagious cause the other day we was working, Saturday I was working, I was painting and Priscilla was doing market, she was doing the stand and she laugh and they said, oh gosh, you can hear Kimberlé all the way in the garden. And I was like, that wasn't Kimberlé! That was Priscilla. And Priscilla's like, in having her laugh\*,

it's like, everybody's getting a part\*- somebody got her "hey," somebody got her laugh and it's like, dang, Kimberlé.

<b>Somewhere to be Pushed</b>
<i>High Expectations</i>
<i>Clear Structure</i>

**Table 2.** Somewhere to be pushed subthemes.

### **Somewhere to be pushed**

...[staff] really push you a lot, you know like, it's not-- it's just so you can have fun and break out your shell, you know? So that's really good about this job...

*Kimberlé, 4<sup>th</sup> Year Intern*

By nature of the structure of ENYF, there are many demands and expectations on first-year and returning interns. Returning interns tell stories and explain how both their peers and staff have *high expectations* for them, especially staff who challenge youth to perform new roles outside of their comfort zones. The returning interns also explain how the *clear structure* of the urban agriculture program pushes all youth to honor the guidelines and agreements that they make at the beginning of the program, pointing to both the frustration and appreciation created by these rules and consequences.

## *High Expectations*

Kimberlé describes being pushed by staff, telling a story of the days where “during the markets, [the staff] would catch amnesia and like they wouldn’t remember, we would have to clean up the market without going to them”-- a simple and funny exercise in pressing the interns to take leadership in completing the weekly market responsibilities and clean-up. Kimberlé explains how the high standards of the staff have forced her and others to grow.

*Kimberlé:* I feel like [the staff] had an effect on me like, *really a lot*. Like, because, [...] they push you, to like, you know, do certain stuff, and it’s not like “Oh I’m pushing you because you know, I want you to.” It’s good for you, like they’re pushing you just to better yourself, you know? [...] Yeah like they really push you, they really, get- crack you out your shell, you know?

...that’s really a good thing that they do, like other jobs, they don’t really do what, you know, this job does. Like this job, you have, you get a learning experience, you go to workshops, you know, they teach you a whole bunch of stuff about leadership, dedication, how to save your money, everything...they don’t only send us out to the garden, you know, we have a farmer’s market, we have tours, we have, just have a whole bunch of stuff.

So you know, I’m really proud that, they really push us, you know, to do all this, it’s, they really push the returning interns a lot, you know? Like, I know some people like, they really try their hardest not to fire anybody either, cause they don’t want to have to fire nobody, so you know, they be *trying*, like and that’s one thing. They really have like, you know, they really care about our feelings, like they really care about us, so you know, it’s like, it’s a good feeling.

Cedrick expresses the importance of having a good peer partner or co-crew leader. He thoughtfully describes how his former and current crew leader partners have skills that he does not possess, explaining, “we cancel each other out,” referring positively to his and his partner’s complementary skill sets and strengths. Cedrick relates his experience at ENYF to his beloved football team, comparing how he is pushed and supported in these groups:

*Cedrick:* ... I’m having good partners. So it’s like, it’s helping me cause I’m out\* by myself, like on the... basketball field, I’m out by myself- like my coach, football field, I got other people around me- coaches, the people, the stands, it’s like I’ve always got somebody that every time I do something wrong, they go push me back in, it’s not like you fallin’, droppin’, like they push you right back in the circle, like “You’re not going nowhere ‘til you’re done with this, ‘til you reached your point.” That’s why it’s like, it’s good to have a partner like that.

Cedrick goes on to explain that Angela (his co-leader at the time of the interview) is the person who has high expectations for him and she plays the role of pushing him “right back in the circle.” They, along with the other returning interns, have what Cedrick referred to earlier as “the connection that always bring each other up,” built over their time together working as first-years and now as returning interns.

In an extended excerpt of dialogue between Tamara, Kiah, and myself, the two returning interns explain that sometimes the high expectations of staff can be overwhelming. In a rare moment for these generally upbeat youth, their frustration is incredibly apparent.

*Tamara:* Yeah, I think that- maybe sometimes it can be a little bit too hard on us sometimes. But I think otherwise that they're, [the staff are] pretty good.

*Jesse:* How are [the staff] too hard sometimes?

*Tamara:* I think sometimes they expect us to like-

*Tamara & Kiah:* *know every-thing.*

*Kiah:* And then it's like, then when you don't know everything, then it's like, oh I shoulda known this, or I shoulda did this.

*Tamara:* And then if you do know everything, they be like, well you should still ask questions, like, we don't-- sometimes we feel like we're stuck in a, between a rock and a hard place and we don't know what to do because like, you go to them, and ask for help--

*Kiah:* You have so many other things on your mind--

*Tamara:* Yeah, and then you be like, sometimes I feel like you go to them and you ask them a question and they're like, well, you should know that and it's like you go and you do it and they be like-

*Kiah:* Why did you do it--

*Tamara:* --that way?

*Kiah:* Why didn't you ask me? Why didn't you come?

*Tamara:* Well, I came and asked and you told me to do it the way I know so I'm, I did it the way I know instead\*.

*Kiah:* I mean, I don't know-- [laughs]

*Tamara:* But I feel it, they could be cool sometimes too and understand where we're coming from and what we don't understand because you can't expect us to know everything and understand everything cause we also, we're younger. Sometimes we forget things like, like I forgot how to-- when I started back as a second-year, I forgot everything about harvest. I was not thinking about harvest when I was--

*Kiah:* Yeah, that's so true.

*Tamara:* I was at wor-- I was at school and I was just trying to get my grades up cause I'mma be a senior next year\*. I was not paying attention to coming back like doing this cause you're out for like-- what? Four months, three months. And it's like, you have all this stuff on your mind and it's like-- \*\* but, I think that, when I had to first lead the harvest by myself it was like, some of the kids would ask me, "How do you do this?" and I was like, I don't know. And then it's like- when I first did my first harvest I think I had Angela with me and I was asking Angela and she was like, "I don't know." We both was sticking there like, [making a sort of "I don't know" sound...] and we was like, okay, go over there and ask Teresa. It was like, she \* ask and then, sometimes she would give them an answer and sometimes she would send us back to them and we were like, dang. She sent\* them back. We hope you gave them the answer they didn't come back. But-- it was cool.

*Jesse:* And how'd it turn out?

*Tamara:* It was cool. Usually, sometime we be having to confess and be like, ok, I just don't know it. That's what\* we did. And sometimes we get away with it because like, if we give them the answer or sometime we remembered and be like, oh, you know what- this is the way. Or if you go over and you look at it and be like, well, there's no other way to do it but like this.

*Kiah: Mhm.*

*Tamara: Cause it's like if you see a Swiss chard, you're not gonna say like, take out the whole thing. Guess you gotta just like break it off and bunch it, I guess? It's pretty good. And then with the 33 in harvest-- I think that was like, at first when we started doing harvest, we were running like over time, like we were doing half an hour extra, we was never finishing on time. Not one harvest was we done on time and then finally like, I think as we got into it, we started breaking the cycle and more by more, they start finishing like a minute maybe late or on time or, and then now these days it's like, we're finishing a little bit ahead of time and able to help and stuff like that but I think it's cool.*

Tamara and Kiah negotiate the tension between the discomfort of being asked to do too much and the benefit they experience from performing outside their comfort zones. Tamara tells the story of a difficult first harvest that becomes an opportunity for collective triumph over a challenging task. Despite the demands of high expectations, Kiah reflects on the importance of confronting these difficult responsibilities, as she explains, "I appreciate every task that I get because I see them helping me...for the real world." Though she loves to tell stories and jokes, Kiah seems to take seriously both at work, in school, and at home the lessons and wisdom she is learning from those who ask her to be at her best.

### *Clear Structure*

The programmatic structure of ENYF's youth program is very transparent. Youth sign contracts agreeing to specific guidelines and to participate in a system of straight talk and violations. All youth choose to follow these agreements and because of the clarity of the expectations, how they are enforced, and ongoing feedback, youth have many opportunities to improve their work and

leadership skills. Youth interns struggle initially but many thrive within this system that holds them accountable for their behavior. Several youth even offered me feedback that in our group meetings, I could more strictly enforce these guidelines to help the sessions go more smoothly.

Kimberlé explains the intent of violations-- there can be severe consequences for more extreme violations but generally it is a system in place to support the youth. Even during a challenging time where she sometimes just felt “down,” she kept a mature perspective about the purpose of violations.

*Kimberlé:* [...] violations are not really, to like, throw you under the bus or throw you down. But it's really to [...] be like, “Hey, you know. You did this, can you improve on it.” [...] unless it's like, to the certain extent where you're like cursing and fighting, you know then, it's like, you need to change your act, like that's when the strictness comes. But like, you know...there'll be some days last year I used to get unmotivated, there'll be some days where I just was like “You know, I'm just down,” you know? And...it's just really to better yourself, and not really to, you know, throw you down.

Cedrick describes how the violations system becomes more rigorous once you become a returning intern because there is no longer the ability to “earn back” a violation. He tells the story of how he adapted in order to meet these expectations and keep his job, working to be better prepared and motivated for work.

*Cedrick:* I miss those days, like first-year, you can't do no wrong. It was like, you got earn-backs so you get a violation, take 5 dollars out of your paycheck, \* 5 dollars. Next paycheck, you got 5 dollars back on your paycheck. It's like, whoa, ok, earn-backs. This year, no earn-backs. You like, “Oh. What happened?” So it's different. I still love it.

Last year it was like, I'm getting violations for coming late. Um, unprepared: coming with no water bottle. So it's like, all right. I know I'll get those earn-backs cause I won't do it 2 weeks. \*\*\* This year, you get a violation. There's no earn-backs. You[re] like-- lemme see my water bottle in there. Let me come and put my shirt down here.\* It's like, being prepared, to do it. So it's like, an extra responsibility. It's like, no more slacking. It's like, you have to stay up, and stay motivated cause \*. If you unmotivated, there's an unmotivated violation. It's no more-- \*[earn backs on] violations...the next 2 weeks, it disappears.

But this year, like, \* it up, it stays there. It's no-- it's like, keep moving forward, keep moving forward, keep moving forward. Til that one day you just fall off. And it's like, it's different. Cause like you so used to going forward, trying [turn?]\* around, and then going that way. You go forward, you try to turn, you can't. Like, Gail, Teresa, Daniel's like pushing you, you like no, keep going forward. So it's like, wow. I didn't think about it. Wow. I gotta keep my head in it.\*

So I get out with my first paycheck and buy everything I need. Bought me a poncho. Bought me, an umbrella to stay here\* just in case I'm here in the rain. I'm like, ok, be prepared, be on time. I started coming in like 30 minutes before I had to be here. Forty minutes before I had to be here. Teresa's like, "Why you here so early?" "So I can be on time." Cause if I time it, I don't wanna time it wrong. Cause I gotta be dressed and ready to work\* at 8:45. So it's no like, coming in at 8:45, dragging my feet, getting dressed, coming up, \* all right, I'm upstairs. There's none of that.

The rigor of the programmatic structure is daunting at first but like most returning interns, Cedrick rises to the occasion and plans his daily routines such that he can be motivated, on time, and prepared each day for work.

<b>Somewhere to Grapple with Complexity</b>
<i>Complex Tasks</i>
<i>Complex Concepts</i>

**Table 3.** Somewhere to grapple with complexity subthemes.

**Somewhere to grapple with complexity**

I like seeing like direct change and immediate change but that’s not always the way things happen, sometimes it’s a long change. Yeah, like we was trying to talk to people and stuff like that but some people weren’t- they didn’t wanna learn about something that was new. . It was still like, there was so much brainwashed throughout their life, that they don’t, they just don’t accept no more information. They’re like, Aw, someone already told me information. My mother told me that this was the correct way and how are you a stranger telling me that that’s the wrong way? So, yeah like telling people, you don’t have to always stay with something. You could always learn new things and if you think it’s correct, you could go with it.

*Angela, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Intern*

Returning interns spend much of the growing season grappling with *complex tasks* including leading crews of first-year interns, giving and receiving straight talk, managing responsibilities at

the farm and farmers market, and speaking publicly at workshops, conferences, and occasionally at public hearings. Returning interns also grapple with highly *complex concepts* related to the environment, ecological systems, and questions of food justice and the food system in both workshops and conference settings. Though returning interns may not report every scientific detail accurately, in their narratives they productively struggle to articulate what is important about the concepts they are learning and why they do the work they do. Most notably, returning interns express pride at learning through challenges and demonstrate an emergent critical consciousness through their critical questioning.

### *Complex Tasks*

Returning interns take on new roles (e.g. crew leader, Urban Agriculture Intern) that involve managing and completing complex tasks. As a crew leader, Tamara explains the myriad day-to-day responsibilities of picking a game and check-in question, keeping track of the time, getting out, and then remembering to put away all of the tools. Crew leaders also manage weekly harvests with the first-year crews.

Angela is a dedicated crew leader and sister—whatever she takes on she seems to always have teaching and learning in mind, especially when it comes to those younger than she. Impressively optimistic, Angela has a way of finding the silver lining in most situations but she has encountered her own fair share of challenges while working at ENYF. When asked about a frustrating time at work, she tells the story of a challenging first harvest as a crew leader. She is a new crew leader managing a group of first-year interns harvesting vegetables for the farmers

market for the first time ever. Involved in a new task, Angela is forced to draw on the skills and knowledge she acquired during her first year. On the spot, she's able to apply what she learned the year before and despite the initial struggle, her crew is able to start completing harvests on time.

*Angela:* A frustrating, difficult [time]? Oh yeah, yeah yeah. The first harvest. It was kind of-- cause it was my first time leading harvest, and I didn't know like how to do stuff. I was being trained but it was like, teaching them at the moment cause nobody knew anything and so like, at that moment I had to gather all the tools, like the rubber bands, the weight, while talking to them, so I had to ring it in. I had to say, all right, you got to do Swiss chard, you have to take it going outside to in, make sure the leaves don't have holes, no yellow, the bunch should be from your middle finger to your thumb but a little bit open, a rubber band, give it to me so I can check it and put it in the water-- and like the roots, I had to tell them-- you have to wash this last. And sometimes it would like go in first, and so the greens, you would have to empty out the thing [wash basin], it'd be a waste of time.

But it was still good, um, that day we went overtime. It was 4:45 and we supposed to go at 4. And so, last- this week, Tuesday, I actually beat the, like the chain, it was at 4 o'clock. We, we came out earlier, we finished harvest at 3:45, for 15 minutes we just weeded but like that day was really hard. Yeah. \* working and everybody was talking to me and everything. It was complicated. "What should I do next?" I'm, ok, ok, some people like took jobs of they own, so I don't know who's at, I'd be like, "Oh, go do bitter melon," they be like, "Oh someone's already doing it."

At the end of her story, Angela shows great self-awareness as she reflects on the ways in which both first-year and returning interns are involved in a process of continued learning.

*Angela:* And yeah, it's easier, it's much easier since they know. I guess that's how it was last year, I didn't know nothing and I was just, it was a learning process. And like next year's gonna be a learning process again.

As an Urban Agriculture intern, Kiah is responsible for managing the share table, which involves collecting and tracking multiple gardeners' produce for sale. The day of the market, all sales and amounts have to be closely recorded based on whose produce is sold, making it a complicated job that can be compounded by late comers who want to drop off their produce the day of the market. My second season with ENYF, Kiah trained me to run the share table so our commiseration about the initial stressfulness of this responsibility is apparent in our conversation. In her story, she masters this task over time and is able to take on new projects, all of which she sees as helping her prepare for the future.

*Kiah:* And then like, as far as my job go, it's mad stressful cause it's like, it's mad stressful cause like you come in, you go to the garden to whoever garden you goin to, you get they stuff, you record it on the list, then after you record it on the list, you come back here, you gotta wash it and weigh it, then after you wash it and weigh it, put it in the fridge. Make sure you put labels for they names, so that way they don't get confused. Then it's like, all right, boom! (claps) You done. Whoo! Now Saturday come, now people wanna come with they stuff, mad late. Like, um, I ain't gonna put no names out, [Jesse laughs] but a few [laughing] [I'm sure I can guess a couple people] yeah, people be coming mad late and stuff and then it gets really confusing when they come at you--

*Jesse:* especially like in the middle of the market.

*Kiah:* Yes, in the middle of the market, when you have like, 20 customers in your face and you like, "Hold on, ma'am, hold on, wait."

*Tamara:* “I’m trying to get my stuff out there to sell too!”

*Kiah:* Then it’s like you got Gail like, “You need to record these. You have to get it out. It can’t be sittin’ out in the sun,” I’m like, hold on. Just like, wait. [laughs] And then it’s like, I be doing it by myself so it’s like, \*\*

When I first started working at the market on Saturdays, it was kind of hectic but it got smooth (snaps) like, I only worked the market for the summer, maybe like 4 or 5 weeks and then, now I’m doing compost, um, every Saturday. And um, now I just started doing the Wednesday market. So, it’s a lot but [laughs] I mean like, it’s preparing me-- you know, like, I don’t take, I don’t hold no regrets so it’s like, I appreciate every task that I get because I see them help me for the real, for the real world. ...it’s gonna help me you know, to prepare myself for what’s up ahead cause you know, this is a dog eat dog world. And um, you know, I just gotta pace myself and have more confidence in myself.

In addition to their daily responsibilities, returning interns give straight talk to first-year and returning interns as well as staff at the end of the season. Though most returning interns are accustomed to receiving feedback through straight talk, giving comments presents the unique challenge of communicating constructive criticism to peers and supervisors, which tended to feel more complicated since many of the youth worried about making others feel badly.

*Kimberlé:* Well, it’s kinda like, intimidating cause you don’t wanna like say something bad and then you know like, they take it the wrong way. But it, it’s for a good cause... I think like last year, I gave Daniel an improve to you know, talk more, you know, be more act-- you know just get to know us more. Like now, he just talk all the time, start convos, laugh at us, joke with us. So you know, it’s good. Yeah. I feel like umm, it’s very difficult to give comments when you’re like, really close to someone. Like, it’s like, for example like, for me and Kiah or me and Tamara, like, I wouldn’t know like, what, what can be like her improvement like, like what can she really improve on like, so it’s really

hard like then like. For Gail like I, I wou...I would like last year I think I could not find like an improve comment you know. Like what can she improve on, cause it's like they're just so nice and you know I was like, you don't see anything bad in them. Like, or you don't see anything like, you know that's, they're just so perfect sometimes. Like you know it's hard.

Notably in this passage, Kimberlé offers feedback to one of the staff and is able to see the improvement of this individual based on her advice. She takes pride not only in what she offers but in seeing that her words and actions have an impact on an adult and on the day-to-day culture of the youth program.

### *Complex Concepts*

In addition to the myriad hard skills returning interns learn through their job responsibilities, they both participate in and teach workshops that provide opportunities to grapple with complex material related to the environment, food systems, and social and food justice. Returning interns struggle to articulate the multifaceted nature of these issues; at times, the factual accuracy of their explanations is incomplete but what is of greater significance is that the interns demonstrate critical questioning as well as an emergent critical social and ecological consciousness.

Angela describes a workshop in which she has to practice talking to others about the importance of ecological behaviors such as composting. In addition to beginning to understand ecological processes, she is also thinking about why teaching others about ecological behaviors is important.

*Angela:* Like how to talk to someone like, when you cross the street, get your point across and they would know like what you was talkin' about. So that helped me, you could start off the conversation like, "Oh, do you know that um mostly all of our leaves go to the landfill in New York, um New Jersey and all of that could be composted and put into nutritious dirt, for the soil and it's going right back into the earth. It's like a cycle process." And they're like, "Oh, that's true, I..." and then they're like, "I just threw a bag of leaves in the garbage." I was like, "See, that could have been right here, you could even put it like in a jar or something and bring it to us," and they be like, "Okay, so next time I'll rake my leaves and bring it." I was like, "Yes, that's a good idea." Yeah, and when you like, if you, some stuff you would know a homeowner would do, like "Oh, you know when you cut your grass? That grass could go in compost too. You don't have to mow it on the streets and then it goes into uh, ocean and then it just sits, stays there just like seaweed.

Angela's favorite workshop ties together many complex environmental, social, and economic pieces of the food system. Her discussion of food miles is an example of where all the factual pieces may not be completely "correct" but she is grappling with what it takes to begin to understand a large-scale, often unjust system. Even in the interview, she seems to be working through these complex issues again and reinforcing her own learning by telling the story of the workshop.

*Angela:* Favorite workshop is, hm... I don't know. Cause they're all good but... The one, was like a cucumber from California and a cucumber from East New York, like our cucumber and comparing like that one, the one from California was wax\* and the one here wasn't, it was just shiny naturally and like um how theirs was extremely big which you know there were inputted with steroids and stuff like that. Ours was a good size but it wasn't like you know that it was like, you know that there was some fertilizer that wasn't organic and like um we learned like the farmer gets like, for tomato they get like one cent

per tomato and we pay like 50 cents a pound for a tomato and how does it, how does the farmer get one cent? Yeah, and so it taught me like you should really think about who to buy from, a lot like the gardeners cause the gardeners, you're paying exactly what they're selling. They're givin it to you and you're givin the money back to them so and you know it's like healthily grown instead of all the way from half around the world and all the pollution that has to come over here, and all the workers that it's/is payin' minimum wage or even lower or the immigrants that had to like, was forced, "if you don't do this, I'm gonna take you to the immigration center," and like that you would think about.

Yeah, yeah [food miles], tied into, yeah, like um the steps for like from California, everybody wants a piece of the money so we had a big dollar and as the money went down you had to take a piece but you're supposed to leave at least somewhat for the next person so and the farmer was left like with this little, little piece. It was still some but it was like a little, little piece of the dollar, like the first one just took a big chunk, like the big corporation took a big chunk and then it went down for the distributor, the trucking, the waxing, then the refrigeration, it just kept going down and down and down. Yeah, sad, it was a nice workshop.

Schuyler moved around to different states when she was younger and it made her want to see more of the world. She's inquisitive and eager to travel and learn, to understand herself and others better. In a longer excerpt, Schuyler struggles to articulate her understanding of the current food system and also the more immediate, personal impact it has on people in her community.

*Schuyler:* It's changed a lot like-- being, that's one thing that I can say that this job has really helped me with, it's very beneficial at telling you about the things that we like deal with every day that like you can actually be blindsided by because you, there's nobody being open-minded enough to take the opportunity to listen to what people have to say and it's like, a lot of people are blindsided by what they're dealing with, they're living with in their everyday life. I mean like a lot of people in this community, if you even try

to talk to them about health, they won't want to hear it cause they think that they're eating healthy. Cutting back is not- cutting back is not helping you eat healthy, it's just right now you're not eating as much as you was before but you still unhealthy. And it's like, I don't (sighs) ...it's a really big issue that, it's like, it'll take years and years and years to fix because it took years and years to build. So, it's like, something that, only thing I can say is something that our future kids and grandchildren are gonna have to work on changing because it's something that we, well I don't know if it'll change, I doubt if it'll change by the end of my lifetime, so, it'll be something that they either have to adapt to or go out and change, cause I mean, it's like, everywhere. I don't know how to say it but trying to summarize it as best I can but it's like everywhere.

When I asked Schuyler if she could give me an example of what she meant by being “blindsided,” she told a story about a workshop in which she learned how much sugar is in an Arizona iced tea, a cheap and popular drink favored by youth.

*Schuyler:* The workshop with the- the workshop with the um, with the Arizona. Like I used to always buy Arizona's, and I'm like, I'm looking at the Arizona when they show me how much sugar is in Arizona. I was like, that is ridiculous. There is no reason why there should be that, the whole bottle should contain so much sugar. And the fact that they're actually tricking people in the bottle, saying, oh it's such and such grams for 8 fluid ounce bottle but the bottle itself is like 20-something ounces, 20-something fluid ounces. And I was like, that is ridiculous. And the vitamin water, vitamin water's supposed to be healthy-- the whole, almost like three-fourths of the bottle is filled up with sugar too. So it's like, basically everywhere you turn there's either too much sodium is in stuff or it's too much sugar is in stuff and it's like, it's nothing like you can do.

Burgers-- like people who eat burgers. They say that one burger takes like 3 years just to digest all the contents of the chemicals and stuff that's inside. I don't know how much fact that is or how much true, true that is, but they say that because of all the chemicals

and preservatives that they put in the meat, that makes it, it takes a while for your body to digest and some of the things that we eat takes a lifetime to digest.

So it seems like it's no way of being healthy no matter-- I mean, we're taking, the garden is helping us take steps towards being healthy. But you're gonna have a lot of people who refuse to eat, stop eating meat to be healthy. And I know it like, meat is really good for you, but a lot of things that they put in meat is not good for you. I've even heard that they're putting steroids in the chickens to make the chicken big. And like to, to add more like, they puttin' steroids in the chickens to make the chicken big so that when they kill it, the meat is bigger and it'll give you more quality...like a bigger quality. So, where can you turn?

I still, I used to always like, I, ever since I was younger, I used to always be a person to love food but like, I'm trying to hard to like, to start eating more healthier, I guess you could say. But then again like, if I get hungry, and I like don't feel like cooking or something, I'll be like the first one to run to the corner store and, and like get a bag of chips or something like that. And it's like, it's something I'm accustomed to that, and, to be accustomed to something, it's really hard to not, like to get away from it. So, I don't, the decisions that have, the, the things that, the knowledge that I have now is helping me a lot to be able to understand what's going around, around, what is actually happen[ing]\* in the community. But, like, habits and being accustomed to different things is making it harder for me to actually adapt to the knowledge that I just learned about the community. So, even though-- all the knowledge I have about this stuff, I don't even know if I'll be able to use it, cause it's like really hard to adapt to something that you're not accustomed to. So, I don't know.

Schuyler's descriptions are rich, complicated, and personal. She sees that change will take a long time and that adapting to new knowledge can be difficult-- she humbly admits that it has been for her! Though she might not offer an answer to solving large-scale food system problems, she is clearly asking critical, systems-level questions as she works to make changes in her personal life.

<b>Somewhere to Practice Leadership</b>
<i>Responsibility &amp; Accountability</i>
<i>Being the Experts at ENYF</i>
<i>Developing Praxis</i>
<i>Teaching Others Outside of the Program</i>
<i>Youth as Leaders</i>

**Table 4.** Somewhere to practice leadership subthemes.

**Somewhere to practice leadership**

I feel like this program really shook the shy outta me...

*Kimberlé, 4<sup>th</sup> Year Intern*

Returning interns reported the ways in which they learned about *responsibility and accountability*. Returning interns “perform into” new positions and leadership roles within the program, *being the experts at ENYF* by leading workshops, attending conferences, and leading volunteers. Returning interns also share stories about acting out these roles by *teaching others outside of the program*. Many of the youth share their practical theories of leadership and

demonstrate their *developing praxis* while pointing to their actions and their work as defying stereotypes, stressing the importance of *youth as leaders* in the food justice movement.

### *Responsibility and Accountability*

Many of the returning interns echo the sentiment that when they were first-years, they learned from the returning interns and in turn they have the responsibility of teaching the new first-years how to be part of ENYF, laying the groundwork for those first-years to become successful returning interns. Nova explains the “intergenerational” learning that happens since “basically like here, you have one set of interns and \* returning interns and it’s like, these returning interns are being taught what to do, what to say, for the first-years that’s gonna become returning interns next year.”

Cedrick elaborates on the importance of modeling appropriate behavior and says that he is learning responsibility and leadership at ENYF. Similar to his experiences on the sports field, he is required to give directions to youth that are sometimes older than he is--youth whom he looks up to. Though being in a position of leadership can be challenging, he tells a story about rising to the occasion in the very first days of the season.

*Cedrick:* [I’m learning] responsibility and leadership. So like the crew leader, I got the responsibility to set an example of, to what to do and how to do it cause if I do it wrong, the first-years are gonna do it wrong, so everything we have to\* start over or we can’t do it again\*. So I gotta breathe, know that I’m responsible for my actions and do it, so there’s like a leadership role aka crew leader. So it’s different.

Oh yeah. My first day. Wait. Was it my first day? Yeah, my first day meeting everybody. Cause it was like, I didn't know people's names. I was like, yo. Miss. Like, lady. Girl. Boy. [J laughing] I'm like, breathe... Lemme get to know their names. What's your name? What's your name? First I was working\* with the people in my group. I'm like, all right, I get their names first, \* get close with y'all. Cause, I know I'm gonna work with other people but y'all are the main people that I work with. Y'all my main goal. So I'm like, all right, we gonna help you. First it's \*\*, before Derrick came cause Derrick was just coming. So we had Teresa, so it was like, more\*\*- she would push you. She be like, what's their name? What's their name? So it was like, I learned names. Me and Schuyler.

In this story, Cedrick deals with the pressure gracefully and points out that he had staff to push him to learn as well as a crew leader working alongside him.

Schuyler explains that she more readily takes responsibility for her actions than when she started the intern program. She explains how she learned this by being accountable not only for her own actions but for those of her entire crew, demonstrating her point with a story about a time that she took responsibility for a miscommunication between staff and interns—an interaction that I witnessed in the office, once everyone had come inside.

*Schuyler:* I have like, if I work on a project, like before, I'd probably be like, "Oh, she made that mistake, she made that mistake. But now I'd probably be like "Oh, it was a team effort that we both, we both take responsibility for the mistakes that we made, on a project." And like, \*, I will be able to be more accountable for others because like, I guess I can say I struggled with that before. Like if I messed, if I was working with a team and I messed up, I be the first one to point "Um, I did not do that! That was her!" So I guess now I'll able to account, to have accountability for others.

*Jesse:* Hm. How do you think you learned that?

*Schuyler*: Cause we're responsible for the first-years. So we learn that by, we learn that by, because we have a lot of practice here, being responsible for them. So we learn, that's how we learned that.

*Jesse*: Do you have like any specific stories of a time like that?

*Schuyler*: Where I had to um, work with a um, every-- everyday! [*Jesse*: Everything. Anyone that stands out in particular or...] Umm. Hmm... Mm. Yes. It was one day when the groups, all the groups were outside packing up um, we, two of them stayed to harvest and we went to another garden. We came back and got our tools and packed up. Derrick was taking B, I mean taking Group B and C downstairs, and he was like "Come on y'all, let's go." So I thought he was, the, I thought, well I thought that since he was going downstairs, that it would be okay for my team to go downstairs. So I sent everybody downstairs, to um, go downstairs, and forgot that we left Teresa and some of the other interns upstairs. So when I came downstairs, Teresa was like, "Who told you guys to come down?" And I went over to her and I was like "Oh that's my fault because, I thought because Derrick was taking his crew down that it was okay for everybody to go down, so I sent them downstairs." And I said, "I'll be accountable for that." So that, so they wouldn't get in trouble because I had sent them downstairs. So, yeah.

### *Being the experts at ENYF*

Returning interns step into new roles every season (i.e. crew leader, Urban Agriculture Intern) and by nature of this added responsibility, have opportunities to act as role models and experts. After a first year of learning from the staff and crew leaders, returning interns in turn model behavior for new youth, help set the tone and maintain the culture of caring at ENYF, and act as

ambassadors for new volunteers. Notably, staff are often present in returning interns' stories but increasingly in "secondary" roles, supporting the actions of the story teller.

Kiah, who earlier reflected on her first days at ENYF when staff made her feel welcomed and appreciated, explains how her experience as a first-year helped her see why it is important to welcome everyone to the intern program. She and Tamara rather comically commiserate about the challenges of helping newcomers feel at home, expressing the discomfort that comes when newcomers are too shy to reciprocate (not unlike how they described themselves in their first year).

*Kiah:* Yeah, but I'm getting, even if I don't remember any names, I like, I try to um, like you know, interact with all of them because um, everybody in this program was once a first-year and like everybody wants that encouragement and friendship. So it's like, you don't wanna like only talk to the people that you know, you wanna talk to everybody. So that way everybody could feel you know, welcomed and not introverted and stuff. I don't force people to talk to me, that's one thing I don't do cause it's like, now, I'm forcing to get a conversation out of you and now you're looking at me like, why won't she leave me alone? Or why she keep asking me all these questions? So it's like, if you wanna open up to me then, be glad, to uh, I'll you know, have my hands wide open.

*Tamara:* I'll give you the listening ears but I'm not gonna force you. It's like cause sometimes when you try they be telling us like, talk to the interns when you're working with them but it's like, there's so much you can do cause they're like talking, and talking, it's like, it's best to stand there and talk to myself cause I'm pretty much getting back a "mhm."

*Kiah:* And then it's like yeah, you get them one worded answers so it's like, obviously when you get the one-worded answers it's like they not interested in what you have-

*Tamara:* Yeah, it's like pouring my heart out to you- it's like me pouring out to my boyfriend, "Baby, I love you," and he like, "Ok."

Schuyler tells the story of her first volunteer tour of the main ENYF garden, a kind of rite of passage generally reserved for returning interns, something that she was thrilled about and that helped her to see herself as responsible. She enjoys what she calls the privileges of her job. Building on the metaphor of family, Schuyler sees herself stepping into a new role of "parent of the garden," as she directs her peers and even those older than herself.

*Schuyler:* My moment that I felt like a returning intern even though I was a first year was cause I had to um, um, lead a tour. I was like—Daniel was like, "Schuyler, can you lead these people on a tour?" I was like, "Whoa! Lead em on a tour. I'm only a first year here!" (laughs) But I lead them on a tour and he was like, I did a great job. And the people were like, oh, I did such a great job. I got to lead like 3 or 4 tours last year as a first-year. So I was extremely excited cause nobody, it didn't seem like any other first-years got asked to lead a tour. So I'm like, yeah! I'm all responsible. (laughs) So yeah.

Well, this year...well last year I felt pr...awesome like it was my first job. And I got...it was like, we got so many like, I don't know how to explain it. It was just like really awesome. We got so many privileges and stuff, and me, I got to lead tours, which is usually something that the second-years did, or the returning interns did, so I'm like, I'm gettin' even more responsibilities than what I'm supposed to, so it's awesome for me. And this year, it's like we have so much responsibility now. It's co- it's still fun though cause it's like I get to lead people some of them, some people are even older than me, and

I'm like telling them "Hey, you do this" and "Hey, you do that, don't do that." I feel like, like, like a parent or something. Parent of the garden (laughs).

Kimberlé tells the story of leading a workshop for adults and her success in teaching others despite her nervousness that the participants wouldn't want to listen to her.

*Kimberlé:* And this year, I'm a farm education intern and a crew leader. So a crew leader is like, you work with the first-years *a lot*, and you know, you teach them a lot, and like if any questions they come to you first because you know, you're a crew leader, like they basically look up to you.

So but yeah, umm, like a crew leader, you know, you just basically help them around the garden, you know, if they don't know a certain tool you explain it to them, you know-stuff like that. And, umm, for farm education, I umm basically work with volunteers. So you know, and I also educate, and you know, cause I did this...I taught this one class about like the soil and like Daniel was there to help me like, he really\* assist me, but, I was really there, like I [too]\*...and there was like adults, you know, so I taught them about like the soil, different types of soil that's in the garden, you know. And, yeah, and like also for the volunteers, cause you know a lot of volunteers don't, um, really come, but, they come not knowing really that much about the gardens. So you know, like we give them tours, and we also teach them about like what is this, what is that, like as if they were a first year.

It was really good, like I was surprised [...]at first I was nervous cause you know like, they're adults, they probably have like, "Oh, no, you're wrong about this or you're wrong about that." But, overall, like, it was good. They listened to me, they, you know I said what I had to say, like it was really interesting. Where um, like you know, actually like, telling people, adults, about you know, soil. So yeah, it was interesting, it was cool.

Yeah, I have like, it really changes cause, you know, like, these are, these are people that you probably never seen before. And like, you know, you're like actually working with them. [...] Like, now, I'm kinda used to, you know, working with adults, or working with, you know, youth like myself or talking to youth like myself, you know? [...] you get like this feeling after you done, you done did it for you know, about three years. [...] You really, you know, calm and comfortable with like what you do, you know? So like, I feel like it has changed, cause you know when I, before I was working here, I was, I wouldn't like, you know, talk to people about gardens, and you know, stuff like that. Like, I was just like, you know, going to school. That's it, you know? Hanging out with my friends like. Yeah, so it, it changes a lot, you know, especially if you working on a job like this.

### *Developing Praxis*

Evident in some of the returning interns' narratives is the development of praxis. Returning interns are building practical theories of leadership and role modeling as they engage in practice, guided by feedback from staff and other returning interns. Cedrick explains how he draws on the "family" structure of ENYF to enforce guidelines and how he uses humor—"crackin' jokes with his crew"—to open people up and create a family, something I noticed and enjoyed as someone who really loves to share a laugh with others.

*Cedrick:* [...] I'm wanted here cause like I don't wanna be no place that I'm not wanted. And I don't wanna feel like, I don't want a person to feel like, "Oh, that person's bothering me. I'm not coming to work." Cause that- missing/messing up an opportunity, because somebody's bothering em. That's what I always tell the first-years. "If you feel somebody's playing too much, come to me." If I'm not in your group, go to your crew leader and \*, "He's playing too much." Then the crew leader'll step in and the person don't wanna stop, supervisor step in. That's when supervisors start writing comments and your paycheck get low. Then people start getting mad cause you messin with they money.

So it's like, you learn from your mistakes. So it's like, the person's like a, like a big brother type thing.

"He keeps bothering me."

"All right. You gonna stop?"

"Nope."

"All right, I'm telling mother-- Teresa. I'm telling father-- Daniel, Derrick."

It's like a big brother, it's like a little brother, big brother-- supervisors, parents. It's like a family here. And like, sometimes Teresa'll say a joke, we start laughing and everything, it's like, from last year to this year it's different. Cause [there are] more people. And like, last year you used to see the same people over and over, like you knew already, the second-years came like, who these people are? Like, oh, y'all first-years? Oh, ok. ... So it's like, our group was like, a little family. So it was like, everybody in my group, cracking jokes and everything, ahh- so it's like, not a lot of arguments. \* not with me.

*Jesse:* How'd you learn how to talk about that kind of stuff? How'd you make your group like a family?

*Cedrick:* Laughing. \*\* the laughing and everything. Everybody just started like, "Cedrick, stop. You make my stomach hurt." So it was like, once I make them laugh, the walls just come down. It just crumbles. So it's like, in the summer, they took some people that I had built a wall with- they took em and put em in another group. I'm like, oh man, I gotta start over with other people. So it's like- some people I already knew came in my group so it was like, that wall was almost down, then like the first 2 weeks, the wall is down already. So it's a big family in my group. We play a lot- \*, everybody cracking jokes. So it's like a big family. Every time I sit back and think about it, I start laughing. Cause it's like, everybody- it's like Group B, it's just a big family.

Returning interns' praxis is informed by straight talk with supervisors and other returning interns. Schuyler explains that they've learned a lot about gardening but that there's still more to learn especially about leadership skills, "cause not everybody's perfect." The ability to receive

feedback shows maturity and returning interns' reflection on their practice demonstrates an important, subtle quality of leadership: the desire and ability to always be honing one's craft. Returning interns recognize leadership as a process rather than a discrete accomplishment. Kiah explains what it's like to receive straight talk and how she uses this feedback.

*Kiah:* Um, like how do I feel getting it? Um, it feel, like it's pretty good because it allows me to become a better person. It, it's like a constant reminder of me always having to work on something, like I'm not perfect and I'll never be perfect but to strive for perfection is like you know, is amazing because um you don't have people on a daily basis telling you about yourself-- *in a polite way*-- like you don't have like people telling you, you know, and um it's really good to know, to know what you always can work on and what you did good because you could feel good about yourself and you know that the next time, I messed up on this so now I got the opportunity to change that and I got the opportunity to fix my mistake, you know? Life is all about learning. Learning and loving.

I learned like, money management, time management, um, responsibility, maturity, um, and then-- I'm still working on it but learning to take initiative and um—like educating, informing people about things, knowing more about things (laughs) knowing more about compost and stuff like that, so-- it's cool.

Well um—like Saturdays, Saturdays when I'm doing the compost table and stuff, it's really um, good because like I actually take the initiative to you know, tell people about compost and you know, the lady that I'm working with, Maria, she you know, don't have to be like, oh well, um, she don't have to like, be like— when are you gonna talk to the customers? Like, um, do you want to talk to them now or like, can I please um, get your help? She don't, never got to come to me about that because I'm always on top of it. Um, but I'm still working on it, I'm, I haven't perfected that yet but I'm still working on it.

*Teaching others outside of the program*

Angela recounts how presenting workshops to a group of 33 people at ENYF prepares her to be more confident when presenting publicly at conferences with other young people. She also points to her improved communication skills.

*Angela:* I'm learning about like being more calm about things, yeah, and like um like saying my stuff like, if I say it one way, if I say like um, do this certain way, let's say they don't understand it, I could switch up the words into a way that they do understand it so that a way that I'm still gettin' what I want out but they're understanding it now and also like um leading with the workshops, public speaking, yeah, I'm much better at it than before. So like when I went to this conference it was 16 people and I was comfortable because we have 33 people who're looking at you, don't know what to\* do, like if you stutter, messed up or let's say you say the wrong word, yeah.

Kimberlé recounts working in the garden that her mother planted after Kimberlé started working at ENYF. She explains that her eating habits haven't changed entirely but that she's willing to try new things and share what she's learned at ENYF at home.

*Kimberlé:* I feel like they do change, but it's still kinda the same, you know, I eat my little, I eat a little junk food once in a while. Like, I try a lot of new stuff. That's one thing like, they be like, they'll be like "Oh you know you should try it, it tastes really good," like, you know? Like, I... tasted this, Daniel made me taste like this four-leaf, like the three-leaf clover. That's like grown, that grow, that, it really grows in the garden a lot. And he told me that it's good for soil. And I really, and I tasted it and it tastes kinda like s...it tasted like, you know, kinda salty. So yeah, like, it's really good for the soil and I, uh, my mother grows a lot of flowers in her backyard so, she tried to like, cut, she tried to cut some of the clover things and I'm like "Don't cut it, it's good for the soil." She's like

really? (Jesse laughs) I was like “yeah,” she was like “okay,” like, so yeah like. Like stuff has, really has impact especially home, at home too so.

Well like last year, my mother, she had umm, cherry tomatoes and a plum tomato she was growing. And she also had umm, peppers, sweet peppers. Like they was really growin’ a lot, so like last year, you know, I would even go back there and help her harvest some, you know like. And next door, our next-door neighbor, um, he has like, um zucchini, lettuce, tomatoes growin’. So it’s like I really look at it and I’m like, “I’m growing all this stuff too, back at my job.” So it’s like, you know, it’s really good.

Schuyler recounts a compelling story of a conversation with her aunt about nutrition while they were preparing a meal. In her retelling, Schuyler explains how she grappled to explain and debate with her aunt about the complexity of corporate sway on the food industry and how this affects people’s health. In the interview she apologizes for going off topic but is articulating the basic elements of an argument against a neoliberal agenda as it manifests in the U.S. food system. Evident in her story is her own surprise at engaging her aunt in this kind of conversation, especially a debate in which Schuyler feels confident expressing a strong, critical opinion.

*Schuyler:* Actually, yesterday when we was in the kitchen cooking, she was just like, like talking to me, and I’m, we’re like debating about health and things and stuff like that, she’s like how her nutritionist was talking to her cause nutritionist tells her like different things. We were like having a real conversation about nutrition- and I’m like, “No, it doesn’t matter, it doesn’t matter what you do since you not be healthy until you leave America because America is like the fast food corporation of the world. It makes all the fast food and like all the unhealthiest things in the world. The only way you gonna ever be able to actually live a healthy life is if you don’t live here. The only way to do it is to move like out of America cause I mean, it seems like everything is unhealthy that we make, cause we so hipped on like making things fast, production is a high demand on

goods and stuff like that, so, it's like everything is being produced real fast in factories and stuff like that and it's startin', people don't even care if it's healthy for you anymore, they just making food to be, to make a profit and it's really sad because that's why a lot of people- they say the kids in 2000 has the high, anybody born after 2000 is gonna have to deal with a lot of obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes. They say that people born in 2000 gonna have the highest high blood pressure and diabetes, in like, in history.

It's sad. It's a really\* sad, sad thing. And it seem like there's nothing we can do about it. But she was telling me how some obese people are startin' to actually sue McDonald's. I'm like, McDonald's is a worldwide corporation, it's gonna take more than just one or two people suing McDonald's to actually stop the flow of things. She was like how, it wasn't just one or two people, it was a couple, it was like a lot of obesity people was starting to sue them and how a lot of the cases were gettin' won. But um, I'm still sticking with what I said: McDonald's is a worldwide corporation and it's gonna be really hard to stop the flow of things. They're not gonna just change up what they're doing because a couple of obese people are feeling that their food is making them big, they're just gonna be like, well, why do you continue eating there? They're gonna come up with excuses of why they don't have to eat at McDonald's and then, why they shouldn't have to change their, the way they do things around there, so, ha, I just don't eat McDonald's. So, yeah. I'm sorry I went off topic.

Gloria is a thoughtful yet playful young person who participates in the internship program with her younger sister Faith. Drawing from a segment on Gloria's explanation of her "weaknesses," I include a story that points to the ways in which she is growing and exerting leadership despite her own self-criticisms. In Gloria's story, she explains how she shared ecological knowledge learned at ENYF with peers and staff at her other summer internship to make sure that they were recycling and composting properly.

*Gloria:* I think one of my weaknesses is keeping things to myself, like keeping things bottled up inside. Um, I don't know, maybe when I have an idea, um, I'm not like the first one to say "Oh, I have an idea!, like, um, um, here's a faster way to do this, here a"-- and I think, um, like, part of a leader I haven't yet, like-- like, trying to be, one-- like, trying to be a good leader I haven't yet mastered that yet. Um, this program is definitely helping me but, like it's so hard! (laughs) to like, cause, you know sometimes you're like skeptical about what people will say like, um, "Would this really work out?" or "What is she thinking?" or something, I don't know. Maybe that's one of my weaknesses but, I should just like, not care about what people think, and just like, say it, or, voice my opinions sometimes. Yeah, I think that's definitely one of my weaknesses...

But I just did not know that it [Gowanus Canal] was in Brooklyn. Just like East NY Farms!-- I did not know it was Brooklyn, I'm living here all along. Yeah, it's just so cool.

But it was pretty cool and we did a little experiment at the office that um, how much garbage somebody can have in a week or a day and we all like, whenever we went on lunch break, we would all put our garbage in one bag, and we will see how much garbage we have at the end of the week- and somebody also wrote on that. So we was thinking like, what are the things we can do to um, to, um, like, to um make sure that- you know what I mean like, to...what are the ways we can avoid using like napkins and garbage and we came up with like bringing towels that you can reuse or um, or our own bags, we don't have to throw away water bottles, you can use\* a reusable bottle, and you can save leftovers, you don't have to put them in the garbage. And me, (laughs) they had three garbage piles- ones you can't avoid, one you can avoid and recycle, and one that's compostable- and no one knew what compostable means so I was the one telling them, like all browns and greens, paper bags and um napkins and paper plates, you can put them in the compost pile.

Many of the returning interns reflect on the ways in which they and other teens doing community food work are defying stereotypes of what teenagers are “supposed” to be like by being leaders in their community. They also express awe and inspiration at attending conferences in which youth take active leadership roles, seeing themselves as part of a larger youth-led movement.

Nova was one of the very first youth that I met from ENYF. A passionate and outspoken leader, I heard Nova tell the story many times of how before she came to ENYF, she wouldn't talk in front of even a small group. In her interview, she explains that she used to be afraid of her life but that ENYF helped her come out of her shell. The shell is still close by: “I won't break it. I will leave it there just in case if I need to crawl back in there,” but her enthusiasm for young people is contagious. Nova recounts her experience at the Youth Food Summit at Cornell in July 2011 and how inspired she was by the number of youth involved—a sentiment she had the opportunity to share with an auditorium packed full of hundreds of young 4-H participants at Cornell for a different event. She earnestly expresses a wish that more people could see young people at ENYF and elsewhere working outside, laboring to make their communities better. Nova has profound faith in the strength of young people and wants to one day become a social worker or pediatrician-- implied in her statements is the need for adults to see and understand that youth are struggling to succeed and meaningfully contribute to their communities.

*Nova:* Yeah cause like, when I went there I was very surprised cause you see so many youth involved in so many different things, especially for the 4-H program which is wonderful and beautiful and I just love it, I just feelin' the vibe like I loved it.

Only\* if\* you know other people could come out and actually see like, youth who put their time into this cause usually you don't have no youth, any youth that would do this but you see that you have youth actually putting their time into working the garden out in the hot, blazing sun, in the storming rain, cold weather, you know, doing what they gotta do, they \* actually gaining knowledge about something that they didn't even know about and changing you know their habits, so yeah.

Cedrick gives an account of his experiences at Rooted in Community hosted in Philadelphia in the summer of 2011. Amazed by the youth coming from all over, Cedrick sees that he's part of something bigger than himself or ENYF— and that these connections will benefit him in the future. In this space, youth articulate their demands for the food rights of future generations, demonstrating leadership in forwarding a youth-driven agenda.

*Cedrick:* It was like, all right, now I know I'm not the only person doing it. I know different people, around New York City, in the United States is doing it, so I'm like, okay. People from Cali, Chicago, Louisiana, north Carolina, Kentucky, Texas, Boston, it was like, a lot of different people, \* like, okay, where you from? Where you from? You closest to me. Ok. You, you made a lot of friends, you might see in the future, that might help you, in different ways. Be like, Oh, remember me? Can you do me a favor? So it's like a lot of people, it's good, knowing\* a lot of people.

Yeah, at the conference. Youth bill of rights. I was just like \* food justice, we want all food good to be organic- we want at least 5 pounds in each store of fresh fruits and vegetables from the community, so it was like, it was all about food justice- it was just saying what we demand, as youth and everything, to make sure that our generation, and the next generation doesn't suffer\* from the generation that's in front of us. So it's like we just want a healthy and better lifestyle than other people.

Kimberlé also attended one of the annual Rooted in Community conferences the year before and responds to one of my questions about what stood out to her from the conference that summer.

*Kimberlé:* Umm, well, umm, like, it was mostly the, it was like the youth that was in charge of the conference. It was like, like, you know like the supervisors would just step back. So it was like really cool, you know, listening to like another person that's just like, seventeen, or eighteen, you know, or sixteen. Like it was really cool, like I didn't, it was no adults, like. Like if they were actually you know, say, all supervisors, you know, step back, or supervisors come with me, and then the youth come over here, you know, like. It was really good.

Angela explicitly articulates that collectively, all of the interns at ENYF are changing the way people see teenagers. Angela is incredibly dedicated to young children and education-- she asserts that many teenagers are being of service and accomplishing good work in their communities and hopes that adults can recognize and support this positive work.

*Angela:* Well I feel like I'm doing a good deed, for the community, cause um, you see like you will always walk down the block and there's at least a corner store, Chinese restaurant, or something that's really unhealthy, and so people like when they, you hear people, "I'm in the mood for, Chinese food." You never hear nobody, "Oh, I'm in the mood for a nice piece of watermelon." That should be a phrase! instead of saying, I want Chinese food.

It's not something I had to do it's something I chose. It's like everybody around it's like, they all chose to do something and we're all changing like the way people see teenagers. Instead of being rude \* we're trying to help the community and being respectful. It's like adults and all. So I was like, this is good so that people don't always stereotype us, or like say that we are one thing, when not everybody's like that- some people are also nice and respectful.

Kimberlé echoes Angela’s sentiment about the pride that comes from being of service and working for a good cause.

*Kimberlé:* Yeah, it’s really like, it’s really exciting, like, I grew this and now I’m about to sell it. Like You know it’s like you lookin’ back like, it’s a good cause, you know, like I’m really growing this and it’s healthy, like I’m not growing something that’s like mad salted or you (Jesse laughs). Like, yeah, it’s like really for a good cause. Like you’re really being, and you’re really excited that you’re actually growing something, and the way you see it grow, too, like, I planted the okra, that’s in the garden, like I planted too much stuff that’s in there. Like, and that’s like you’re looking at it and it’s like “I grew this,” and you know okra’s just like tall, like I planted some of the beans. Like, I planted a lot of stuff in there. So it’s like you, you’re really proud of yourself that you’re actually, you know, growing something, like, as to another job, you don’t really do anything like, a lot of hands-on stuff like you know, doing a lot a stuff. So yeah, like, it’s really good and exciting.

<b>Somewhere to Become Yourself</b>
<i>New sense of self</i>
<i>Triumph over the past</i>
<i>Success on their own terms</i>

**Table 5.** Somewhere to become yourself subthemes.

### **Somewhere to become yourself**

Well, I feel like I learned how to, you know, like, you learn to gain... confidence in yourself. Not to always be shy because that's how I was when I first got in here. Like I was just so shy and quiet[...] But yeah, this program really helps you to like, shaping yourself up, you know. Learn a lot of stuff, gain a lot of knowledge about the garden and the fruits and vegetables and like, during the protest you know, even though I was nervous, I just shook it off, and you know, I'm doing it for a right cause. So yeah, it was like [clears throat], it was really exciting, you know? And like you just really learn how to just, you know, be yourself.

*Kimberlé, 4<sup>th</sup> Year Intern*

Returning interns tell stories that reflect a *new sense of self*, the restorying and development of a new self. Though partly the natural development of youth becoming young adults, many returning interns point to a *triumph over the past* or their possible future. Out of this triumph comes the explicit choice to pursue a particular individual decision or even major life course--most striking in these decisions is that returning interns now have the knowledge and ability to define and pursue *success on their own terms*. In this section, longer excerpts are organized not by theme but by the youth interviewed. These segments were selected to demonstrate the ways in which returning interns express a new sense of self, how this expression of self represents a triumph over the past, and how they now define success for themselves, on their own terms.

#### *Tamara*

Tamara explains how working with diverse youth helps her to be able to trust others. That Tamara feels she can give trust more readily is truly no small thing, as is made obvious in the other stories she shares about her life that demonstrate why she feels hesitant to rely on or care

too much about others. Tamara also explains that the guidelines around confidentiality help her to feel comfortable confiding in staff.

*Tamara:* I think my life is different cause like, having to work with a bunch of like kids and then like, always having that, you always, like they always pair you up with a different person it's like, a different person, a person of different gender or different background and it's like sometime-- like I never used to like trust people and it's like, I always like to be by myself, wanted to do everything on my own, I didn't want no help, nothing. And then coming here and having to work with like another person and they havin' to help me like, shovel something or doing somethin' that had to be worked in a pair and then having to trust the person that\* the person's gonna do it and I think I like-giving trust is easier for me and it's like, I don't know, yeah, giving trust is easier for me to do now and it's like, it helped me out because if I needed somebody to talk to I know I can always run to one of my like other co-workers or one of the supervisors and talk to them and let them know something and know that I won't have to like hear it back another minute or somethin' like that.

Tamara explains that what's now possible for her is to be able to pursue her dream of becoming a doctor since she will be able to work directly with others.

*Tamara:* I think mine will because like, working with people, I think that's mine\*, working with people because I think if I was trying to be a doctor and like, wanted always to be by myself, then-

*Kiah:* It wouldn't really work out because you wouldn't know how to tell people stuff.

*Tamara:* Like my nurses coming in and you know, like, some doctors have that one nurse that follows behind them--

*Kiah:* --assistant nurse.

*Tamara:* --it's like, sometimes I be like, why are you behind me? It's like, with the way I am, I'm like-- so I think I've gotten to that so now I can be like, ok, you're behind me still but—you knowww, I get used to it. [laughing] So yeah, I think it could be good though.

*Kimberlé*

Kimberlé shares the progression she sees in herself from being a shy first-year to a returning intern confident speaking at protests and in front of cameras. Earlier in her story, Kimberlé talks a little bit about being in high school. As with some of the other returning interns, she explains how the disrespect of teachers often provoked her to react angrily. Angela articulates a similar idea, that teenagers only get angry when they are being disrespected. Though there are most definitely teachers who supported Kimberlé and stand out in her mind, if school also represents a place where she is not always respected, ENYF becomes an alternative space in which she can safely define herself with the support of caring adults.

*Kimberlé:* ...in high school like, sometimes it, there was just some teachers that really gave an awful lot of attitude and you know, I used to be like, you're not talking to me like that, like you know, I used to just snap, you know, like sometimes I used to-- some of my teachers was like, you really have like anger issues, I'm like, no, I just don't like being disrespected and stuff like that, but it was just some of the teachers but like, overall, it was a good experience in high school even though I really wish I was in a big school but I like it, you know, it's small so you know it's better.

Kimberlé explains what she has learned and how she has grown during her time at ENYF.

*Kimberlé*: Like, this program...it really helps you be yourself because like, you know, like, it really shapens you up for like the outside world. You know, cause in the outside world, you know, you're alone, you're doing what you have to do, you know, not everyone is always gonna be there to, you know, help you or push you, you know? So yeah, like that...it really shapens you up to, you know, the outside world, to be yourself, you know, have confidence in yourself, leadership, you know, in yourself, so you can also learn and teach, you know? Just everything is just like you know, being yourself and keepin' it real.

I feel like, I changed a lot, you know? Starting from first-year when I was just so little, and like now I'm just all grown up and like I know what to do, like, I know how to handle situations in the garden, or you know, I don't really have to look at Daniel to, you know, if someone asks me something like I don't have to look you know, look at Daniel so he can answer. Like, when before, like, if people would ask me something I'd get so nervous and you know, like I don't know what to say. Like I, I've been in front of the camera like a whole bunch of times, you know? I'm really used to it, so you know like you get like this feeling that, you know, "I'm used to doing this," so it was like, it's nothing like that can really make me think, "Ohmygosh, what am I gonna do now?" Like, you know? Like I feel like if, umm, they'll leave like you know, the returning interns with the first-years interns, I feel like we'd do well... since you know, I've been working here a lot, I know how stuff goes. So yeah I feel like I've changed, you know, mental-wise, like, I learned a lot, like and physical-wise, you know, I got to do a lot of stuff, like, in the garden hands-on. So you know, like, that's another thing.

Well, umm, something I've been working is umm, always be motivated. Cause last year, like, I wasn't really always you know, up to work or you know I always wasn't really like up to, you know, being so happy and jolly, you know? So like that's what I'm, uh, I try to improve on, like I'm trying to do it now, but. Yeah, like, there will be some days you know, I'll just have a lot on my mind, so it's like lemme just, it's just one day, you know, but yeah. I really feel like I have improved on that a lot. Like, cause now, I come into

work, I'm happy, you know, especially the summer time, like, you come, you work almost you know, every day. It's really good you know, and when you get your paycheck you happy cause you got a lot of money, you know? Like, it's really good, so, like, yeah, come to work, and then, you know, see Kiah or see anybody that you know, I'm really cool with, or see you, or you know, anybody, like, so yeah, it's like really good, so I was like, there's not really a day that I'm not really like, unmotivated. So yeah.

Well, my strength I remember um, well, my strength is I'm so outspoken, I do a whole bunch of interviews you know, camera in my face and all that. I remember I did a protest with Teresa last year, yeah, to keep the gardens open. I spoke to like, in front of like 150 people, you know, like, yeah, I'm really outspoken. I'm not shy like- I'm shy but like once you shake it out of me I'm like, whoo! you know? (laughs) Like yeah, when my niece came [to work at ENYF], I was like, don't be shy, you know like, we're not gonna do nothing-- you know, it's really fun, like I feel like this program really like shook the shy outta me cause you know, the first time I applied I did not get in cause I was just like so quiet in the interview but the next year I applied, I was just like hi! you know, I want to go! and stuff like that, so, like this program really does, you know- it really does shake your nerves off...

Though ENYF is not the sole reason for Kimberlé's success, it supports her in creating a life of her own choosing. She explains one of several situations that could draw her into violent activities, keeping her from pursuing her goals of completing college and becoming a doctor.

*Kimberlé:* And I would be there like doing the same thing cause you know, that's my sister, I wanna you know, be with her even though she's older than me, like I would have been like, Mom, you really woulda had two problems, like two big problems, like me and her would have been, you know, fighting like- and you know, that's how I feel like, sometimes I feel like I, like if my sister really wanted me to be there, I'm not, I mean, I mean like fighting is not always, like you know, like the outcome of every situation but I feel like, you know, if my sister would really call me and be like, oh my gosh, these girls

are really about to fight me and jump me, I would like run over there you know, go crazy, you know.

## DISCUSSION

Youth interviews illuminate a practical theory of change that reflects the goals of PYD and critical pedagogy of place. The major themes of this practical theory include experiencing a feeling of belonging, being pushed, grappling with complexity, practicing leadership, and becoming oneself. The subthemes identified within each of these major themes demonstrate features of effective PYD settings and PYD assets (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) as well as indicators of what Gruenewald (2003) calls *decolonization* and *reinhabitation* (Table 1). The educational literature on care (Noddings, 1984) and authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999) offers a context for understanding staff and youth caring at ENYF and this practical theory of change, presenting the possibility of crafting a more critical and more heartfelt urban EE.

**Table 6.** Major emergent themes and related theoretical constructs (drawn from critical pedagogy of place and positive youth development literature)

Major Themes                      Matching Construct                      Matching Category

<b>Somewhere to Belong</b>		
<i>Feeling welcomed</i>	Opportunities to belong; supportive relationships; positive social norms	Features of PYD settings (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)
<i>Feeling safe</i>	Physical and psychological safety	
<i>Feeling cared for and connected</i>	Supportive relationships	Features of PYD settings; (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)
	Connectedness; sense of social place	Social developmental assets (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)
<b>Somewhere to be Pushed</b>		
<i>High Expectations</i>	Positive social norms; support for efficacy and mattering	Features of PYD settings; (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)
<i>Clear Structure</i>	Appropriate structure; support for efficacy and mattering	
	Planfulness; confidence in one's personal efficacy; responsibility for self	Psychological and emotional developmental assets (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)
<b>Somewhere to Grapple with Complexity</b>		
<i>Complex Tasks</i>	Opportunities for skill building	Features of PYD settings; (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)
	Confidence in one's personal efficacy	Psychological and emotional developmental assets (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)
	Learning to live well in a place	Reinhabitation (Gruenewald, 2003)
<i>Complex Concepts</i>	Expanding horizons	Features of PYD Settings (Schusler & Krasny, 2010)
	Rational habits of mind; optimism coupled with realism	Intellectual developmental assets; psychological and emotional developmental assets (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)

<i>Table 6 (Continued)</i>	Grasping the impact of exploitation; social and ecological critical consciousness	Decolonization (Gruenewald, 2003); critical ecological literacy (Cermak, 2012)
<b>Somewhere to Practice Leadership</b>		
<i>Responsibility &amp; Accountability</i>	Sense of personal autonomy/responsibility for self	Psychological and emotional developmental assets (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)
<i>Being the Experts at ENYF</i>	Confidence in one's personal efficacy	
<i>Developing Praxis</i>	Knowledge of essential vocational skills; rational habits of mind; good decision-making skills	Intellectual developmental assets (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)
<i>Teaching Others Outside of the Program</i>	Knowledge of and ability to navigate multiple cultural contexts	Intellectual and social developmental assets (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)
	Learning to live well together; restoring relationships to people and land	Reinhabitation (Gruenewald, 2003)
<i>Youth as Leaders</i>	Commitment to civic engagement	Social developmental assets (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)
	Undoing damage done by oppression	Decolonization (Gruenewald, 2003)
<b>Somewhere to Become Yourself</b>		
<i>New sense of self</i>	Positive self-regard; personal identity formation	Psychological and emotional developmental assets (Eccles & Gootman, 2002); (Lewis-Charp et al., 2003)
	Restoring, transforming potentiality	Decolonization & reinhabitation (Gruenewald, 2003)
<i>Triumph over the past</i>	Good health risk management skills	Physical developmental assets (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)
	Undo the damage done by oppression	Decolonization (Gruenewald, 2003)
<i>Success on their own terms</i>	Planfulness; sense of a larger purpose	Psychological and emotional developmental assets (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)
	Learning to live well in a place	Reinhabitation (Gruenewald, 2003)

Mapping out the themes present in returning intern interviews charts a cycle of change experienced by youth at ENYF (see Figure 1). *Somewhere to belong* is characterized by interns' stories of feeling welcomed, cared for, and safe. Interns explain the ways in which staff create a safe, welcoming, and supportive environment, reflective of EE as a means toward positive youth development (Schusler & Krasny, 2010; Kudryavtsev & Krasny, 2012). *Somewhere to be pushed* is characterized by clear structure and high expectations, illuminating how features of PYD settings are put into action and the ways in which youth continue to develop PYD assets by taking on new challenges.

Within *somewhere to grapple with complexity*, returning interns build on the experience and knowledge of their first year spent with ENYF and begin to perform challenging tasks and think through complicated issues. Interns' stories demonstrate the development of both transactional and transformational leadership skills and qualities (van Linden & Fertman, 1998)—doing leadership tasks such as delegating responsibility during harvest time and *being* leaders by modeling and reinforcing community norms while facilitating workshops. Paired with ENYF being *somewhere to practice leadership*, the internship program becomes a testing ground for autonomy—returning interns assume greater responsibility each year for crews of their peers and projects. Consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the proximal zone of development, the support of caring adults and competent peers allows interns to perform above their current ability, creating opportunities to grow into new roles and perform identities that once seemed out of reach (Sabo, 2003). Similar to programs that teach science for social justice (Calabrese Barton, 2003; Fusco, 2001), returning interns demonstrate personal leadership situated *in and for community* at ENYF and bring their expertise to other arenas of their lives, branching out beyond

the program to teach peers and family what they have learned. Returning interns' discussions of environmental and social issues reflect the process of grasping the impacts of exploitation on people and the environment as well as the formation of a critical ecological literacy (Cermak, 2012). In the face of sometimes overwhelmingly large socio-ecological problems, youth appear to remain optimistic as they practice ecological and community stewardship, build relationships with peers, and work with adult and elder community members, learning and teaching about how to live well in a place.

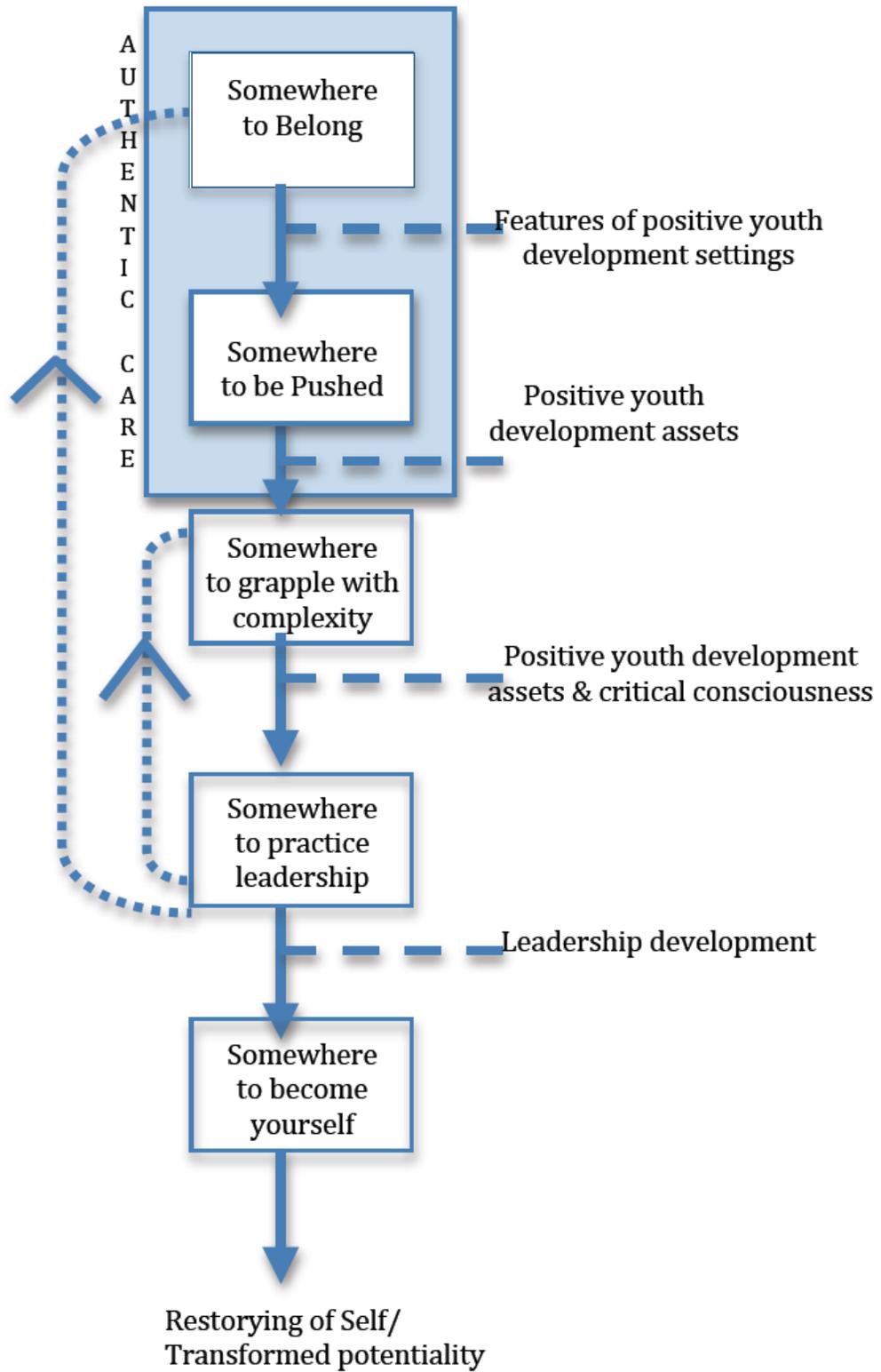
When youth come to see ENYF as *somewhere to become yourself*, they are drawing on the skills, experiences, development, critical analyses, and relationships that support them in defining and creating the story of their future, defining success on their own terms. Though structural barriers to their success have obviously not disappeared, youth leave the program with new ecological and social awareness that prompts them to freely invent a future of their own choosing, knowing that they have the support of not only staff but a community of their peers who came both before and after them. Education at ENYF, as a process of developing critical consciousness, values and benefits the larger community (Fusco, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999) and becomes an access to personal power.

Using the literature on authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999), womanist experiences of caring (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002), and other “politicized” understandings of care (Bartolomé, 2008) as additional lenses helps to integrate the youth development and critical pedagogy of place frameworks. Out of the original research questions, a major theme emerged focused on the presence of a kind of familial intimacy— the scrutiny of habits, characteristics, mannerisms—

what youth referred to as “people notic[ing] things about you at this job.” Authentic care offers a critical sociocultural perspective for understanding this intimacy and how returning interns are initiated into and then help create a culture of care and caring at ENYF.

Figure 1 maps out the ways in which the major and subthemes resonate with critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003), positive youth development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), and authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999) frameworks. This figure is not intended to draw causal relationships between ENYF’s practices and outcomes for returning interns but instead to serve as a map for the places of synchrony between data and literature, how they inform one another, and to theorize the elements of a practical theory of change in urban EE programming.

**Figure 1.** Major Themes of a Practical Theory of Change in Urban EE



Utilizing a politicized understanding of care frames the first two major themes—somewhere to belong and somewhere to be pushed-- as intertwined components of authentic care rather than as separate, seemingly apoliticized features or outcomes of youth development settings. In this case, authentic care can be defined as the caring from staff that is characterized by affection and a welcoming spirit but also by high expectations and rigorous demands. Staff's caring takes on the quality of political clarity defined by Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) in which young people are cared for inside of individual relationships with attentiveness to the greater political landscape in which the child is living. The care modeled by staff is later assumed by returning interns who practice leadership at ENYF by caring for first-year interns, creating a feedback loop between the theme of practicing leadership and the two major themes that comprise authentic care. The culture of caring (for self, others, and the environment) that is created by staff and returning interns calls forth the reinvention of self and place (cf. Gruenewald 2003) by creating a safe space in which youth are expected to succeed and are given the space to reinvent themselves and contribute to the restorying of the spaces and places around them.

Integrating authentic care into our practices and theories of urban EE allows us to draw on the strengths of many distinct yet related bodies of literature as we continue to define and craft the field of urban EE. This one possible model of change in urban EE theorizes the development of participants—including emergent critical ecological and social literacy—as well as the practices of staff, based on the stories reported by young people. This model draws from PYD and critical pedagogy and builds on studies of urban science education programs that share a focus with urban EE of making learning hands-on, relevant to the lived experiences of the participants, and situated in the community (Fusco, 2001). The practice and theory of urban educators, in both

formal and non-formal education settings, contribute to the evolution of a culturally relevant, liberatory urban EE.

### **Creating a culture of authentic caring at ENYF as an alternative to not-caring**

There remains a question posed by staff: *why* is it better to have caring relationships than uncaring relationships (conversation with ENYF staff, 2011)? Based on the interpretation of returning interns' stories, authentic care in an urban EE setting provides access to fulfilling youth development outcomes as well as creating a safe space in which youth can begin to critically question the socio-ecological system around them. Youth are empowered to define success on their own terms, regardless of the discrimination or low expectations they might face in other parts of their lives, and to participate in a community organization that is promoting a healthier, more just neighborhood food system.

Returning interns at ENYF participate in and promote a culture of caring as an alternative to not caring. All returning interns bring with them some past or current experiences of caring—relationships with family, friends, or a supportive teacher—but there are still many environments in which authentic care is missing. Returning interns point to the places in their lives where respect is not present-- disrespect from teachers, peers who talk badly about them or try to “distract” them, teachers who have low expectations. These stories reflect trends in East New York and other urban centers where there are high rates of disconnected youth (Measure of America, 2012). ENYF is a counterpoint to these non-caring spaces. The program empowers

young people and helps prepare them to encounter and resist these challenges in the rest of their lives.

An urban EE model grounded in authentic care focuses attention on how “political clarity” (Freire, 1987 as cited in Bartolomé, 1994) in urban EE practices and theory can promote youth development outcomes, emergent critical consciousness, and a culture of caring for both people and the environment. Building on the assertion that all education—and so all environmental education—is political, this work helps integrate an explicit commitment to social change into urban EE. For participants, this opens the possibility of moving beyond “inactive caring” (McKenzie, 2006) in which students care about the environment but feel unable to make positive change. For urban EE practitioners, we can draw from the strengths of the education field to craft methodologies and pedagogy that empower both individual students and the collective through culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; 1995b) and teach from and for an awareness of systemic inequities through politically relevant teaching (Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1999). This orientation focuses attention on the greater contexts of the lives of urban EE participants in regard to their experiences of race, socioeconomic class, gender, orientation, and age in a way that allows authentic care to be present and hopefully in turn creates greater opportunities for spearheading meaningful, positive socio-ecological changes in the local environment.

At ENYF, returning interns were restoring their own potentiality with the support of staff, community members, and peers. By seeking deeper meaning, we begin to generate a distinct theoretical understanding of urban EE as well as possibilities for practice. This work highlights

the particular attention to the political dimensions of care or a lack of care. In the case of a large population of white educators and growing populations of youth of color in urban areas this is particularly important for the effective practice of urban EE so that our research and practice is consistent with an empowering, humanizing, and restorative agenda.

## CONCLUSION

*Young people who have developed a sense of connection to place and community will be more likely to invest their intelligence and energy in efforts to restore and preserve that which is necessary to support their lives. When they have developed skills and understandings that allow them to differentiate between life-enhancing and life-destroying activities and practices, they will be better able to resist those who would exploit and colonize them and to participate in activities that will regenerate the social and natural commons once central to the perpetuation of human communities.*

*(Gruenewald & Smith, 2008, p. 357)*

Authentic care creates an overarching framework to encourage productive “conversation” between positive youth development and critical pedagogy of place frameworks. Authentic care draws on a rich history of radical scholarship and is practically useful for implementing programming and urban EE that considers the complex identities of students, educators, and the places in which we teach and learn-- going beyond individual development or positive experiences in nature—and asking, how can youth be empowered and experience self-determination out of a liberatory urban EE agenda and pedagogy?

Integrating youth development, critical EE, and critical educational literature into a model of urban EE opens up new possibilities for understanding and envisioning a liberatory urban EE

practice that connects young people in cities to nature, empowers youth as leaders and citizens, and helps to create long-term environmentally conscious social change. Additionally, this inquiry builds on conceptions of social justice youth development (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002) that call for a focus on critical consciousness and social action with urban youth—there is potential to craft culturally responsive PYD practices and theory by more robustly integrating politicized notions of care. Ginwright and Cammarota (2007) call for youth workers to see youth as agents of social change and facilitate the cultivation of critical civic praxis—critical pedagogy of place offers the potential for this praxis to be place-based, concerning both social and ecological issues; exploring the influence of critical EE or civic ecology education (Krasny & Tidball, 2009) on PYD also offers an interesting direction for future study. Similarly, theory and practices motivated by authentic care and social justice might benefit from geographically situated environmental education and stewardship practices. Urban EE becomes a potential nexus for the dynamic voices and influences of these diverse practices and bodies of literature, creating a rich, multi-faceted, responsive field that is dedicated to social and environmental justice. Future research can help us theorize the practice of urban environmental educators based on their own accounts—both what is told and how it is told—as well as study the long-term effects of urban EE programming in order to better understand their impact on youth, communities, and the environment.

Urban EE can be a space in which to pursue social and environmental transformation. Crafting an urban EE that is informed by awareness of systemic inequity and a commitment to socioecological justice will allow researchers and educators alike to knowingly engage their work as political actors. My hope is that we will be inspired to reflect and take action on the

normative belief that authentically caring makes a difference. Communities such as ENYF in which care, community, justice, and service are honored and privileged fights back against a dominant system that bullies forward an agenda of exploitative individualism. This is worth striving for.

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