



## Editorial

## Reflecting on food pedagogies in Canada

Michael Classens\* and Jennifer Sumner

University of Toronto

The original deadline for submissions for this special issue was March 1, 2020, just days before the destabilizing and disorienting first wave of pandemic-related shutdowns in many parts of Canada. The (r)evolution in food systems pedagogy we were hoping to document and celebrate was promptly preempted by an abrupt transition to virtual learning. In an instant, teachers and learners alike were attending to a pedagogical revolution of another kind altogether. The enduring impacts of this upheaval remain unclear. In the immediate term, though, the shift to online learning presented a crisis (a hasty ‘pivot’ to online teaching and learning) within a crisis (the daily reality of living within the context of a deadly global pandemic). For many critical food systems students and teachers, these new crises layered on top of the already front-of-mind crises propelled by the capital-intensive, industrialized food system. Like peering through translucent nesting dolls, we squinted through layers of pedagogical disruption and pandemic to remain focused on the economic, social and ecological devastation wrought by our dominant food system, and for glimpses of the pluriverse of food systems alternatives that inspire and nourish us.

Food systems scholars were quick to dismantle the facile refrain so often repeated in the early days of the pandemic, “we’re all in this together,” by incisively demonstrating the ways that familiar patterns of social and ecological injustice were worsening in the days of COVID-19. At the same time, as this special issue demonstrates, food systems students and teachers were boldly pressing on with the task of teaching and learning for more sustainable, just and equitable food systems, in spite of the challenges. As we potentially enter a post-pandemic period, the question of how to teach for food systems transformation seems more pressing than ever.

It wasn’t so long ago that Sumner incisively observed, “those who study learning have not often turned their gaze toward food, while those who study food have generally overlooked the learning associated with it” (2016, xix).

\*Corresponding author: michael.classens@utoronto.ca

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This isn't to say that teaching and learning about food wasn't occurring—there is indeed an inevitability to learning about food, with every bite we take we're learning in an informal way. In more formal registers, agricultural education at the postsecondary level has existed for about as long as postsecondary institutions. Yet this more conventional curriculum is often narrow in scope (for example focused on yield maximization) and disciplinarily bounded (Jordan et al., 2014). In the past decade, however, critical food systems scholars have insisted on a capacious and critical approach to food systems pedagogy, making the case that meeting the challenge of food systems transformation requires, “fundamental changes...in both *what* and *how* we teach” (Galt et al., 2012).

Recent scholarship on food systems pedagogy reveals interdisciplinary, and ontologically and epistemologically diverse, approaches to teaching and learning about food (Valley et al., 2017; this issue). Relatedly, this work makes explicit value claims by committing to addressing economic and socio-ecological inequities resulting from the contemporary food system (Flowers and Swan, 2012; Galt et al., 2012; Sumner, 2016). Importantly, beyond the impulse to unpack and expose various power dynamics that are reproduced within food systems, scholars are also reflecting on the ways in which these same economic and socio-ecological relations are being reproduced pedagogically.

As an example, Deana Leahy and colleagues (2015) expose how the so-called ‘obesity epidemic’ has imprinted responsabilizing and moralizing discourses on ‘sustainable’ food systems learning. Within this context, finger-wagging ‘what to eat’ discourses refract through the possessive individualist lens of neoliberalism to misguidedly teach us that skinny people are better for the planet (see also Guthman, 2011; Russell et al., 2013). Similarly, others have demonstrated how garden and farm-based education operates to reinforce inequitable power relations that cleave along categories of gender, class and racialization (Flowers and Swan, 2012; Sumner, 2013). In many cases, garden-based learning is animated through appeals to local food and terroir, though it fails to problematize the “unbearable whiteness of alternative food” (Guthman, 2011, 263), or other ways in which structural dominance is reproduced in these spaces.

One cannot escape the issue of *power* when attempting to teach for more economic and socio-ecologically equitable food systems. While the material and ideological forces that structure inequity within food and education systems may differ, both are reproduced through the persistence of unequal power relations. Within this context, Meek and Tarlau (2016, 246) insist that critical food systems educators are confronted with an explicitly political choice, to “use education to reproduce the current food system, raise awareness about the inequities of the food system, or *utilize education as a means to form individuals who are determined to transform the food system*” (emphasis added). Educators, as hooks reminds us, have power too—and this isn't necessarily a negative thing; it just depends on what we do with it (1994, 197).

## Overview of the papers

The overwhelming response to this special issue is demonstrative of the extent to which scholars and advocates are actively engaged in thinking about, animating and practicing reflexive and critical food systems pedagogy in these territories known as Canada. The issue features 17 contributions in total, including, one Art/Design Work, two Perspectives, six Field Reports, and eight Research Articles.

The cover image for the collection was created by Luciana Godoy in Sumner’s “The Pedagogy of Food” graduate class at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. As you’ll read in her artist’s statement, Godoy challenges gendered culinary expectations through a provocative embrace of them. Her “Chocolart” homage to Rosie the Riveter results in a compelling expression of visual and edible pedagogy.

In the opening Perspective piece, Hernandez scrutinizes conventional approaches to food literacy, suggesting that they are typically too narrowly focused on nutrition and food skills. In contrast to this, Hernandez offers a Food Literacy Conceptual Model that integrates multiple conceptual and interdisciplinary perspectives as a way to broaden the conceptual scope of food literacy, and ultimately, make it a more useful concept. Following this, Doyle’s Perspective offers reflections on the role that schools do (and can) play in broader food systems. Doyle makes the case that schools in Newfoundland and Labrador are at the forefront of catalyzing broader food systems change in the province.

The six Field Reports that follow provide, in different ways, glimpses into innovative pedagogical interventions from the assignment to the program level. They also, not surprisingly, reflect a variety of adaptations in response to the constraints and opportunities related to COVID-19. Kavcic, Moraes, and Rahouma report on an assignment, steeped in experiential and decolonial pedagogical approaches, in a course at Ryerson University called FNU100—Canadian Cuisine: Historical Roots. The assignment asks students to encounter food places—or sitopias—as sites themselves of learning. Through photovoice, presentations and reflection, the students are guided to better understand the history of cuisine through encounters with downtown Toronto. Bujold, Fox, Martin and Pictou draw similarly on experiential and decolonial pedagogy within the context of a program in rural Nova Scotia designed to engage youth in intergenerational learning about their traditional foodways. The adjustments they were forced to make in response to COVID-19 revealed to them the ways that technology can gamely facilitate intergenerational, land-based learning.

Connell provides insight into a disruptive course-level intervention in a summary of how he designed his syllabus for a first-year course at the University of Northern British Columbia. Connell begins the course, provocatively, by simply writing “food” on the blackboard. This is the opening move in inviting students to co-create the syllabus for the course, based on their own interests and experiences. This, Connell demonstrates, provides students with an opportunity to express some autonomy over, and directionality with respect to, their own education.

In their Field Report, Ng and Cole describe a similarly disruptive process of introducing dietetic graduate students at the University of Toronto to the complexity of food systems, beyond the positivist and nutritionist approaches typically employed in the field. They conclude that being clear about intentions, deliberate in facilitation, and embracing of the tensions that arise are successful pedagogical strategies for introducing critical food systems concepts to their dietetic students. Scott and Stahlbrand's piece extends beyond course-based interventions to consider pedagogical design aspects of an entire program. In their Field Report they share their experience developing Canada's first Honours Bachelor's Degree in Food Studies (BFS). The program, offered by George Brown College in Toronto, finds opportunity for transformative change by bringing together culinary training with critical food studies education. They argue that the former grounds the latter in an applied materiality, while critical food studies opens up a dialogue with respect to socio-cultural, political-economic and environmental issues within conventional culinary training.

In the final Field Report of this special issue, Barndt and Gelis report on their multi-year, intergenerational, intercultural and multi-media exploration of knowledges and practices related to food sovereignty. Readers will learn more about their innovative Field to Tables Legacies Project, which brought together activists working toward food justice in dialogue and discussion, and resulted in a variety of pedagogical outputs, including a website, videos and photo essays.

The first two of the eight Original Research Articles included in this special issue engage with the concept of food literacy within the high school context. Based on qualitative research with teachers and students at two high schools in Ontario, Martin and Massicotte demonstrate the importance of focusing on both health and broader agrifood systems issues in critical food literacy curriculum. Similar to Hernandez, Martin and Massicotte are dissatisfied with conventional approaches to food literacy, and argue for agrifood systems literacy (AFSL)—an approach to food literacy that insists on including social and ecological lenses to deepen the analysis and impact of food literacy. In their piece, Campigotto, Barrett and MacRae identify several barriers to integrating more wholistic food literacy curricula into the elementary and high school levels. They find that K-12 pre-service teachers are keen to teach food literacy in ways that highlight issues of equity and environmental justice, though they are lacking the supports in their training to implement such an agenda.

Food itself, not surprisingly, plays a central role in many of the pedagogical approaches written about in the pages of the special issue. Four of the Original Research articles, in particular, demonstrate the effectiveness of using food as a pedagogical tool.

Sweatman, Anderson, Redcliffe, Warner and Annett demonstrate the effectiveness of community-engaged and community-service learning as a strategy for teaching about complex food systems issues. A partnership between the School of Nutrition and Dietetics at Acadia University and the Wolfville Farmer's Market led to the development of Kitchen Wizards—an initiative that brings together first year dietetic students with six-to-twelve-year-old children to learn about food through taste-testing based on food from the Wolfville Farmers Market.

Across the country, in Vancouver, Soma, Wilson, Cao and Mackay explore the role of intergenerational and cultural approaches to food waste. In a course titled Building Sustainable Food Systems at Simon Fraser University, students are asked to interview relatives as a means of documenting traditional food preservation techniques. The authors conclude that intergenerational storytelling as a pedagogical intervention can increase food literacy, improve cultural connections and challenge the commoditization of food. Also in Vancouver, Coca interrogates the role of food as a pedagogical tool within the context of the linkages and socioecological relations that exist within the procurement process. Coca explores the Farm to Cafeteria Canada (F2CC) network in Vancouver and demonstrates the many ways in which points along the procurement process provide pedagogical experiences for various stakeholders in a range of education settings. Finally, in a course at Quest University Canada, Szanto integrates food with a pedagogy of performance in a course designed to activate intersubjectivity, emotions and relationships to food. Szanto argues that performance is a framework through which we can learn about food, and the course provides opportunities for students to mix discursive and embodied learning while examining complex food systems issues. This creative intersection, Szanto concludes, transforms and activates students.

The final two Original Research Articles in this special issue take a broader stance, to examine the state of (critical) food systems pedagogy across the country. Corkery, Valley and Dring explore the design of food justice curricula in Canada and the U.S. They use the Understanding by Design instructional design framework to analyze and sort food justice course goals and learning outcomes, pulled from syllabi from fifteen postsecondary institutions. They identify a number of challenges and opportunities for instructors of food-justice courses, and provide insight into supporting student development in the context of food-justice education. Finally, Stephens and Hinton report on their project interviewing program administrators and faculty members of food studies courses and programs across Canada. They are interested, in particular, in exploring the normative commitments and philosophical orientations of various food studies (and cognate) programs. They find that food studies programs in Canada are critically orientated, broadly speaking, but note that there is a gap in terms of moving from critique to action.

The contributions to this special issue demonstrate that food pedagogy as it exists in Canada is indeed dedicated to confronting power and inspiring transformation. Again, hooks is instructive in noting, “Conversation is the central location of pedagogy for the democratic educator” (2003, 44). We hope that this collection—itsself a form of food pedagogy—opens space for conversation and dialogue, and that it provides inspiration to teachers, students, advocates, and practitioners struggling for food systems change.

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