Re-visioning Action: Participatory Action Research and Indigenous Theories of Change

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Abstract   This article observes that participatory action research (PAR), by nature of being collaborative, necessitates making explicit theories of change that may have otherwise gone unseen or unexamined. The article explores the limits of the reform/revolution paradox on actions and theories of change in PAR. Citing examples from two recent youth PAR projects on educational issues, the author submits that when met with such a paradox, one can only move to a new vantage point. Four alternative vantage points, drawn from Indigenous epistemologies, are illustrated; they are sovereignty, contention, balance, and relationship.

Keywords   Participatory action research · Action · Theories of change · Indigenous · Sovereignty · Balance · Epistemology · Reform and revolution

Introduction

Often in my writing and teaching I discuss stories told to me by my grandmothers, and the importance of grandmothers' stories. One of my all time favorite stories, a story that comes from outside my Aleut culture, is the story of the emperor's new clothes by Hans Christian Anderson. As a young person I craved this story, relishing the differences in the ways that it unfolded from my grandparents' and parents' mouths.

Broad strokes of the story include a kingdom consumed by status that is visited by a pair of loomers. Playing upon the king's vanity, the loomers are commissioned

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to create a suit made of a fabric that can only be seen by those who are worthy enough to see it. Demanding secrecy to conduct their work, the loomers enjoy the king's hospitality over several weeks. Periodically, they are visited by the officers of the king's court, who see nothing on the loom or the work tables, but afraid to reveal their unworthiness, return to the king reports of the cloths' magnificence. When the day of celebration of the king's new garment arrives, the loomers dress the king. The best tellers of this tale offer an insight to the king's thinking as he looks at his own unclothed body in the mirror, just before he will lead a procession in front of his entire kingdom: "No one must know that I, the king, am unworthy of seeing what everyone else is seeing!"

This conceit carries him into the awaiting crowd. They are silent. They dare not reveal that they see nothing. Or, in another telling, they are uproarious, throwing confetti and cheering the genius of the design. Either way, there comes a moment of quiet (when the king does a few leg lunges to demonstrate the flexibility of the fabric?) and a young voice in the throng yells (and we, the anticipating listeners yell too) "Hey, the king has no clothes on!" The king, stark naked, is left to deal with the consequences while the crafty loomers, pockets filled with their payment are already miles away. In my father's tellings of the story, there are consequences for the townspeople too.

If stories could be made threadbare, this one would have been worn nearly see-through by the jokes, games, and references of my childhood, and like other great stories, this tale took on new significances as I grew older. I began to see not only the child who yelled (as we yelled along) "Hey! The king's got no clothes on!" but also the loomers as the heroes of the story: The sly loomers exposed the vanity of the town, their obsession with the appearance of intelligence or purity of heart.

My brother would pass the words, "emperor's new clothes" to me when we came across someone who stuck feathers in his sweatband or lipstick on his face for Halloween or a Thanksgiving play to mark a deeper meaning of the story in our lives. The phrase was a way to point to the appropriation and mocking of our and other tribes' traditional regalia, and how this appropriation revealed the ignorance and unworthiness of the wearer. Throughout my life this story has become more meaningful, as I navigate the academy, as my country moved to war under threats of weapons of mass destruction, as I consider what I research and don't, what I say and keep silent.

In other writing (Tuck 2007) I have discussed how the ways in which we do research and theorizing are in the ways we do other risky things in our lives. For me, this means that I approach research with a commitment to complex personhood, with a responsibility toward preparedness, listening, reflection, and reparation, and I approach it from within collectivity (Tuck 2007). Here, I'd like to add that I approach research and theorizing from an ontology of the king's got no clothes on.

This article begins with this ontology as a way of thinking through theories of change in participatory action research (PAR). I'll describe two recent PAR projects that I have completed with New York City youth, and discuss how our research design and our data pushed us to rethink our theories of change.

As I'll detail later in this article, I entered both of these PAR projects with a somewhat ambiguous theory of change, ambiguous because it straddled a paradox

of reform versus revolution. At that time, I didn't know what feels obvious now: PAR is hinged upon theory/ies of change. They are implicit in any PAR project's design, and left implicit, can present some confusing and even bewildering moments for a PAR collective. Implicitly (but better to make it explicit) PAR forces a collective to ask and answer, "How do we believe that change happens?" This question brings the paradox of reform versus revolutionary change to the forefront. "Does change happen incrementally, over time?" Or, "does change happen like the turn of a new page?" Each requires a different, even opposite, strategy of action.

Working with my youth co-researchers helped me to better understand this paradox, but more importantly, this work helped excavate new vantage points from which to view and re-vision it. This article will discuss these new vantage points, though in Indigenous frameworks, they are not at all new. They are sovereignty, contention, balance, and relationship. Not only vantage points or re-visions, they are epistemological shifts, brought forth in these PAR projects by our collaborative design and our data. I understand these shifts in this way because of my own Indigeneity, and because of my reading of Indigenous scholars such as Taiaiake Alfred, Vine Deloria, Jr. and Sandy Grande. This article engages the Indigenous epistemologies of sovereignty, contention, balance, and relationship as steps towards resolving the paradox of reform versus revolution that can limit theories of change in PAR. In my writing and in anticipation of your reading, a new question comes- Are these steps towards theories of change, or theories of change themselves?

The ontology of "the king's got no clothes on" informs this article, and has informed both my decisions to do PAR, and my willingness to constantly re-assess the underpinnings of PAR. In this article, I apply the ontology to the action components of PAR. But before I further go into what I mean by theories of change, by the paradox of reform versus revolution, and by the Indigenous epistemologies of sovereignty, contention, balance, and relationship, I turn to the two PAR projects that anchor this discussion.

CREDD and the Gateways and Getaways Project

As part of my dissertation research, I formed the Collective of Researchers on Educational Disappointment and Desire (CREDD) with a handful of high school aged youth in February 2006 to initiate research on the use and overuse of the General Educational Development (GED) credential option in New York City public schools. After observing the shrinking number of options for youth to complete a high school diploma in New York State, particularly because of the New York Regents, a now mandated series of exit exams, we suspected that the GED option was more frequently thrust upon students who, for a range of reasons, were unlikely to pass those tests. Observing also that the GED is an alternative, but not an equal alternative to the high school diploma, we designed our study to capture the experience of students who voluntarily and involuntarily exercised the GED option; the circumstances before and after; the school policies and practices that push students out of school, preventing them from secondary school completion; and possible connections to larger social inequities.

In the beginning, CREDD was a mix of young men and women aged 16–22. None of the youth were in high school, some recently completed a high school diploma, others recently completed a GED. Several of the youth were enrolled in 2 and 4 year colleges.

Over the next weeks, we familiarized ourselves with the existing literature on the GED, on the diminished value of the GED, and on unfair school practices that pushed students out. Right away we noticed that few of the existing studies relied on youth expertise, or developed a valuation of the GED from the perspective of youth or adult GED earners. We saw this as a gap in the literature, and set about designing our project to address that gap.

Our research design sought to capture data within four inter-related areas of inquiry (see Tuck 2008 for a more in-depth discussion on our areas of inquiry): the value of the GED, push out practices in NYC schools, educational options to exit exam based curricula, and myths of meritocracy and the American Dream. Our path for analyzing our data was integrated into our areas of inquiry from the very beginning, as our areas were based on the following axioms:

– School and social policies have unintended consequences that can undermine school completion.
– School policies such as mandatory exit exams can over determine school curricula and undermine school completion.
– The prevalent epistemologies of meritocracy and individualism paired with the widely held belief in schools as social equalizers serve to pathologize youth who do not complete school rather than indict institutions that engage in systematic racism and classism (along with misogyny and homophobia).
– There is much to be learned about why youth desire a seemingly diminished credential by both asking them to talk about what is valuable to them about the GED, and by putting their valuation of the GED in the context of their disappointing secondary school experiences.

In other words, we used our readings and our former experiences as students to create areas of inquiry that were primed toward theorizing alongside the youth who would participate in our study. Over the next three months we sketched out our research plan and developed and piloted our data collection instruments.

The design of our project, which would later be named the *Gateways and Getaways Project* (because it interrogated the GED as both a *gate way* to higher education and employment, and a *get-away* from inhospitable high schools), centered around dozens of interviews with youth GED earners and seekers and adults who had earned their GEDs as youth ($n = 45$), a city-wide survey of in and out-of-school youth ($n = 485$), and a series of dynamic focus groups with youth GED earners and seekers ($n = 10$). Our focus groups utilized popular education and popular theater exercises, a re-vamped board game, and group and individual mapping. (Our study also included several secondary data collection methods, which are described in-depth in Tuck et al. 2008.)

Over the first three months, the make-up of our group grew and shifted to involve more young women, including some who were in process of completing their GED. By the end of May 2006 we had piloted our interviews, survey, and focus groups,

using the pilots along with sessions I facilitated as the basis for their preparation to collect data. We collected data between June and December, and celebrated both the end of the year and the end of our data collection.

In the early months of 2007, as we entered our survey data into SPSS and waited for transcriptions of our data to be completed, we wrote a book chapter together on our work as a youth PAR collaborative (Tuck et al. 2008). We spent the months of March through the end of June 2007 collectively analyzing, theorizing, and identifying findings in our data.

The Youth Researchers for a New Education System

In early 2006, Michelle Fine was contacted by members of the New York City based Education is a Human Right Campaign, a federation of small and large organizations motivated to question mayoral control in NYC, and infuse public schooling with a collaboratively crafted, community led, Human Rights based approach. The federation was interested in ways of involving youth in the campaign, and in the possibilities for PAR in their work. We met to share ideas, and several months later, in August, we began planning a youth PAR project that I would direct, with the help of my youth co-researchers in CREDD.

Many, many meetings took place before the group of youth researchers that would become the Youth Researchers for a New Education System (YRNES) began to work together- this was a campaign that had many moving parts, and as a piece of research commissioned by the campaign, it was at first difficult to get clear on what could be expected. Soon, we did come to an understanding that although the PAR project was requested by the campaign, and the PAR project would take up questions of school control and the need for human rights based public schooling, it would be the youth researchers that would have ownership and decision making power over the research questions, design, data collection, and analysis. In this way, the new youth research collective, YRNES, would be another one of the sovereign working parts of the campaign.

The Independent Commission on Public Education (iCOPE), one of the lead groups of the campaign, promoted the formation of the research group to youth across the city, and provided a series of Saturday workshops on subjects such as human rights, anti-racism, and the 1968 New York Teachers' Strike throughout the month of December, 2006. In January 2007, CREDD researchers and I began to work with the group of youth to develop and implement a PAR project.

This group included 6–8 young men and young women aged 16–20, some who were still in high school, some who over the course of the project would complete a GED, and some who had completed a high school diploma. The researchers participated as part of an internship with iCOPE, and hailed from all over the city.

Using the process of constructing and then deconstructing a problem tree (described later in this article) to determine our research questions, this project's focus was on two sets of relationships, which we also referred to as areas of inquiry: (1) CONTROL: Poor communication and lack of access to needed information in schools—the external (mayoral, police) control of schooling—the widespread belief

that power and knowledge go from the top down. (2) COMPETITION: School rules and policies are arbitrary—the perception that there are "not enough seats" for all NYC students—the purpose of schooling is foggy and not agreed upon.

This project utilized the methods of a city-wide youth survey ($n = 580$), focus groups with education activist young people ($n = 3$), and a problem tree, a method tri-purposed in planning, data collection, and analysis. (See Tuck 2008; Ferreira and Ferreira 1997) The survey was conducted with support from the National Center on Schools and Communities, Fordham University. We planned and piloted our methods during February through April, collected, entered, and began to analyze our data during May and June, and completed our analysis and identification of our findings in August and September of 2007.

Un-out/timelining the Projects

Presented linearly in a timeline as above, both of these projects appear to be deceivingly coherent and orderly, belying all of the simultaneous and disjointed aspects of doing participatory research. There are many learning curves to accommodate when doing collaborative research- whether with new researchers or not- and sometimes the curves we anticipate are not as steep or shallow as we had at first guessed, and often unanticipated curves can move us beyond the territories we had initially mapped. This is to say that now, in hindsight, I can provide an outline of how each of these projects unfolded; had you asked me at any point during the projects, the direction and pace would have been much more difficult to define.

Still, what makes both of the outlines incomplete, is the absence of any discussion of action, the very heart of PAR (indeed, the middle word!) At first crack it might seem that the action comes just after where I stopped in each of my project outlines. In a way, that's true: now that CREDD and YRNES' research is complete, both groups are involved in various ways of sharing our findings in person and on paper. For example, CREDD is publishing a youth to youth guide to the GED filled with advice for students who are considering leaving high school to complete a GED from youth who had once also been at that crossroads. YRNES is collaboratively producing an e-report on our findings, both so that our data can inform the strategies of the Education is a Human Right Campaign, and to share with other youth and the public.

However, as PAR researcher Zeller Berkman (2007) insists, action in PAR cannot be contained to the final stages of a project. (See also Tuck et al. 2008) In fact, when working with youth, Zeller-Berkman argues that it is vital to their learning and satisfaction in a PAR project that action happens early and often, over the course of a project (Zeller-Berkman 2007). I have come to think of action as having the role that fires have in the forest growing cycle of interior Alaska- forceful, with somewhat unpredictable trajectories, but necessary to regenerate and make room for new growth. Of course, fire is a bold and dangerous metaphor; maybe leg waxing captures this same goal without such high, high stakes.

Lucky to have been advised by Zeller-Berkman on the need for frequent opportunities and creative interpretations of action, I supported both research

collectives in designing methods that blurred the lines between method and action, that were pedagogical or provocative, and that served in our projects as dynamic interventions to unfair practices. For instance, CREDD introduced an Augusto Boal (2002) technique to youth GED earners and seekers in our focus groups to get people thinking and talking about unequal power relationships in schooling. As a method, this technique revealed patterns in dysfunctional power relationship across many youth representing many schools. As action, this technique provided participants a forum to identify prior disempowering encounters, to collaboratively theorize the dysfunction, and to imagine solutions and reparation.

In another example, somewhat serendipitously, we administered YRNES' survey at the same time that the Mayor's office was administering a city-wide survey on public schools. The two surveys were vastly different: our survey was geared toward capturing youths' perceptions on school leadership and control, competition and cream cropping, gaps in communication and resources, and real and imagined purposes of schooling. The Mayor's survey (for students) was intent on capturing student experiences in the classroom and with their teachers. These differences are significant- our survey would yield an analysis and critique of the ideologies and practices of the school system, while the mayor's survey would yield an analysis that would pathologize the teacher-student relationship. There were no questions that would yield a critique of mayoral control on the mayor's survey. As a method, our survey revealed a statistical view of youth opinions and the explicit and implicit messages of schooling. As action, by describing our survey as "not your mayor's survey" we interrupted the hegemony of that survey, calling into question what was up and not up (and what should have been up) for discussion.

Blended method-actions were not the only opportunities for action in these projects. Researchers in both projects participated in several academic and community conferences to present their work, and both groups worked on collaborative and individual writings that discuss both PAR and our data. This aspect of our actions was less successful; unfortunately, my youth co-researchers came away from these endeavors, especially the conferences, deeply dissatisfied.

Anticipating that conferences are not always spaces in which attendees do their most ego-free and generous listening, we worked tirelessly on each of our presentations so that our audiences would have no excuse but to take us seriously as researchers on extremely relevant and sophisticated topics. No matter how thoroughly we prepared, the youth researchers came away feeling like novelty acts, and over several repeats of this experience, it was hard for all of us not to feel somewhat bitter about the point of participating in conferences. The question of the point of presenting at conferences underlined another question that we had to ask, "What is the point of doing research?"

That troubling ontology of the king's got no clothes on.

The reasonable, totally fair expectation that anyone would have for participatory action research is that a PAR project's actions would be aligned with its findings and insights. Lewin's famous maxim "No research without action, no action without research (cited by Adelman 1997, p. 81)" concretizes this intrinsic relationship. However, it is also important for a project to be finite, not sprawling on for eternity, and have some milestones built in so that researchers can feel a sense of completion

and accomplishment. In CREDD's project, a project that was very much about what happens in lives denied completion (of secondary schooling), this need for indicators of accomplishment was especially poignant.

The limitations of funding, ongoing complicated lives, the number of hours in a day, and how many one can spend working on a particular project, and the ability to live with unfinished business start as nuisances, but over the lifetime of a project become the barriers to the kinds of actions that would incite or inspire systematic change. In an obvious example of this dynamic, capitalism and exploitation were identified in both projects as systemic contributors to persistent injustices in schools. Neither of the projects, because of funding and our already over-extended lives, could sustain our collaboration long enough to impact the influence of capitalism and exploitation, an irony that did not escape us. We would turn to one another and say, "How in the world are we supposed to affect capitalism anyway?" The routes to solutions we saw were beyond our capacities as groups.

Further, to resign ourselves and our projects to serve to merely identify injustices seemed like a whole lot of work in order to do something that we were pretty good at doing in the first place. It wasn't a surprise to any of us that capitalism and exploitation were major forces in issues such as school push out and mayoral control. Now we had thousands of pages of evidence to support this claim, but who exactly, now that we're thinking of it, needed convincing? (See also Guishard, this volume.)

Of course, it was powerful to our own lives to have this experience, but painful and depressing; yes with glimmers of hope but still an almost overwhelming sense of the hugeness of the need for change.

"What can research do anyway?"
"How do we think that change happens?"

In both of our projects, we careened into this existential crisis, knocking off and stepping on our glasses, and like a character in Goonies, we had to rely on one another and our grasping limbs to avoid the booby traps and feel our way out.

Earlier in this piece, I refer to a paradox of existing theories of change, reform versus revolution. This paradox was staunchly present in our internal conversations about change and action. Some insist that reform *is* revolution, but the urgency of our data, including a dismal 43–50% graduation rate in New York City public schools, and youths' reports of urine on the floor, and crumbling walls in their schools render this statement less than satisfying. When more students are not completing secondary school than are graduating, it's hard to be patient for reform. It is difficult to have faith in piece-meal changes when what's needed is a total overhaul.

Re-visioning Change

For CREDD and YRNES, designing our actions to be only reform-based was problematic, both because we had little trust that we would be listened to by city council or the mayor's office, or other decision making bodies. Further, the kinds of

changes that we wanted to see were deeper and more systematic and ideological than those bodies could inform. On the other hand, though we entertained it, taking it to the streets and calling for revolution wasn't realistic for us either. Despite our respect for those who engage in civil disobedience, most youth in both groups, because of their social locations, could not financially or academically afford to be arrested. Though the nuances of each of our decisions regarding action were bound up in considerations of consequences, audience, time, and (potential) effect, again and again it felt like we only had variations of the two predominant theories of change: incremental reform over time and an absolute break, a revolution.

Craig Gingrich-Philbrook writes about Eric Peterson and Kristin Langellier's articulation of the *double-bind,* that which has two poles- the aesthetic and epistemic- as in the double-bind of a theatrical performance that demands sincerity and at the same time, pretending. (2005, p. 303) The double-bind I describe here features the polar demands of ethic and epistemic: One pole, demands that, "revolt is the only way out of the colonial situation, and for an absolute solution. His condition is absolute and calls for an absolute solution; a break and not a compromise." (Alfred 2005, p. 25 quoting Memmi, 1991 p. 120) The other pole urges incremental change, but promises sustainability… which is the faster route to filling a hungry belly?

What we are faced with is an irresolvable paradox between existing theories of change- a "double bind" between cleaving completely as Memmi asserts, or one-foot-in-front-of-the-other change, that in its stability could more immediately alleviate suffering. Participatory action research necessitates a theory of change, and so is confronted by this paradox.

I submit that when met with an unsolvable paradox, all we can do with it is walk to a new vantage point. To this end, I will discuss four new vantage points that are not at all new in Indigenous frameworks. These vantage points can be understood as epistemological shifts. Elsewhere I have written about epistemological shifts as inner angles of a circle rather than the opposing angles of a square (Tuck 2007).
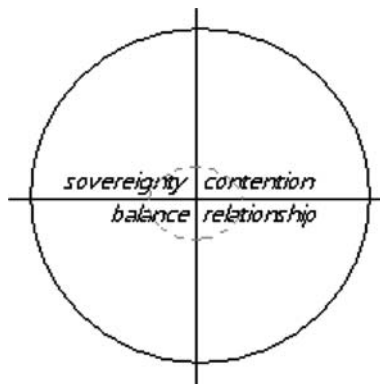
Let's not mistake these angles as opposite angles of a square, but read them as the intimately bound corners of a circle—not too much travel between them,

like standing on the four corners of the US states of Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona, that meet on the lands of Navajo and Ute nations… They are not in a fixed order as it is only a single footstep, or a shift in weight between New Mexico and Arizona or New Mexico and Utah, all afforded by the hospitality of Ute and Dine people. (Tuck 2007, p. 147)

The epistemological shifts that I discuss in the remainder of this chapter (sovereignty, contention, balance, relationship) are drawn from my work with youth in the CREDD and YRNES projects, both from our data and from our collectives' inner workings. Drawn from our collaboration, I have applied an Indigenous framework to them- one inspired by my meta-process conversations with my co-researchers, my understanding of my own Indigeneity, and by my readings of works by Indigenous authors. "To honor the spirit and yet have an approach that respects our values and is effective against our adversaries and enemies, we need to define "struggle" in a way that makes sense for us in our circumstances" (Alfred 2005, p. 51).

Sovereignty

The first shift that I discuss, sovereignty, is often viewed by whitestream[1] society as a right or condition, but it really is an epistemology. Sovereignty encapsulates what I know about knowing, where knowing comes from and goes to, how knowledge stretches and rises, even and because of the punching down. It is not just internal however, not a state of mind, but a *real thing*, a lived thing that through the treaties, through the apologies, through our survivance,[2] through the reconfigurations, removals, and repatriations is still unrecognized.

Broadly, sovereignty is a call for recognition and full realization of rights to social, cultural, and spiritual (tribal) identities and to our own envisioned political development. It is a call for respect for our integrity as whole, significant, contemporary civilizations with long histories (some, like mine, spanning 10,000 years) and even longer futures. This respect is shown specifically through US (or other) government non-interference (Laenui 1994). Sovereignty is difficult to translate into Western culture, or any culture that expects a one to one ratio of meaning. I was recently told by a white colleague that every time I use the word "sovereignty" he mentally crosses it out and inserts the word "autonomy." (Beyond the immediate insult is the larger insult that your listener only listens to you if what you say is directly applicable to them.)

Along with other Indigenous authors, Sandy Grande has written about sovereignty as a prerequisite democracy insisting, "(T)he discourse of democracy must be fused with considerations of sovereignty, particularly indigenous sovereignty, if it is ever to realize its potential." (Grande 2008, p. 85) I see participatory action research spaces as spaces in which to praxis sovereignty and re-imagine

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[1] Claude Denis (1997) and Sandy Grande (2004).

[2] Gerald Vizenor (1994).

democracy. (For expanded discussions on sovereignty and PAR, see also Tuck 2007 and Fine et al. 2007.

Contention

In this discussion of the Indigenous episteme of contention, I will draw from the work of Taiaiake Alfred, both because of his profound eloquence, and because his book *Wasase: Indigenous pathways of action and freedom* moves in rippling circles to truly envision Indigenous creative contention as "the middle path between armed rebellion and conventional protest" (Alfred 2005, p. 228). Alfred encourages Onkwehonwe [original people] to confront their fears of confrontation, and citing Indigenous economic and personal dependence on the colonizer, links this fear of the "consequences of change" to the colonized experience. Instead of harboring reluctance towards contention, Alfred insists, "People seeking harmony and balance must embrace the process of contention." (Alfred 2005, p. 76) Alfred cites the Taoist I Ching teaching of contention as sincerity, and tells us, "the Chinese hexagram for 'contention' shows both internal desire and outward strength" (Alfred 2005, p. 75).

In these ways, contention can be understood as a theory of change that the process of colonization has tried to extinguish through fear and shame, but, when embraced, can yield justice and peace. How is it that contention brings peace? It is a process, purposeful and deliberate, that can happen across long and short spans of time. First, contention is a process of individual and collective self-education. "The process of gaining knowledge (what we call 'education') is a radical action, an act of defiance against conventional reality. Education, in this sense, defines a warrior" (Alfred 2005, p. 149). In both of the projects described in this article, our processes of education outside (and in spite of) our schooling within our research collectives were integral to what we saw as both the short and long term objectives of our work.

Second, contention is a process of interrupting hegemony, linearity, and unilateralism. This is where the contestation gets con-testy, and meets with perhaps the most resistance. Folks are fine (even if uncomfortable) when groups of youth or first peoples or disenfranchised peoples educate themselves; but when these groups begin to openly and creatively challenge dominant assumptions, rhetoric, and colonial infrastructure, the groups are discredited as unintelligible, undeveloped, and unpatriotic. Non-Indigenous scholar Craig Gingrich-Philbrook makes this observation: "Those in power cherish and selectively deploy their ability to find the experience of others incomprehensible as they fetishize 'clarity' which is to say, anything that confirms their worldview." (Gingrich-Philbrook 2005, p. 298) Contestation as "finding ways to live together without agreement, without that confirmation, without clarity" (*ibid*) not only interrupts, but shifts the criteria for what counts for wisdom and experience, power and expertise. (See also Ayala, this volume.)

Lastly, my conceptualizing of contention draws upon Alfred's insistence, "How you fight determines who you will become when the battle is over…" (Alfred 2005, p. 23). That is, contention is a process requiring intact ethics. Indeed, the process of

contention may be a process in which to determine and hone these ethics. How to ethically en/counter systems determined to destroy us may be the biggest question we will ever face (Alfred 2005) but how to prepare for these encounters by utilizing our spaces of collectivity is a question that research collaboratives might ask themselves any day.

An example of how contention (as education, as interruption, as ethic) played out in CREDD's research is our slam books. I brought the idea of doing slam books to CREDD early in our design stage, and after hearing a little about my idea, my co-researchers jumped right in and crafted it as a method.

Slam books are a school-yard or hallway game that make appearances in elementary, middle and high schools across the United States. In a slambook, a topic is listed at the top of each page of an ordinary notebook; topics might include favorite song, favorite teacher, best tv show, your crush, but also crueler topics such as ugliest couple, worst dressed, and worst breath (hence the *slam*.) Then, the notebook is passed around and each person fills in one line of the entire book. What results is an accumulation of many students' scathing opinions, and the notebooks can become objects of intrigue and scandal, before they are almost inevitably scooped and locked up in the desk of a teacher or dean.

What we like about a slam book, in contrast to a survey or opinion poll, is that youth can see one anothers' answers. When designing our project, we saw slambooks as a way to contend with what is and isn't considered a normal experience of schooling. We saw slambooks as a pedagogical and reciprocal method of collecting data, and because of the questions we posed and the answers our slambook participants provided, the slambooks became small acts of creative contention.

For example, we asked participants to list three words that described their school. They told us:

Cesspool! Cesspool! Cesspool!
Miseducation, conformity, dire
Drama, comedy, life
Boys, sexually active, hell
Immigrant/minority tower
Filthy, "hibouncious", science skills
Dirty, stinks, nasty
Confining, uninspiring, something to flee
Drama filled, diverse, boring
I just laughed all day
Bored, hot, unorganized
The best thing that happened to me
Small, colorful, jail
Eew, eew, eew.
Enjoyable and smooth
Fun, serious, good
Learning sweet shit
Completely lacking in education

Evil, ridiculous, painful
Huge, diverse, prison
Center of drama
Dumb, rich, white
Smart, segregated, divided
Drama, borderline,
Hilarious, random, diverse, chill
Diverse, huge, loud

The answers our participants provided help to break up monolithic visions of secondary schooling by applying specific yet generalizable, and contradictory yet coherent descriptors of their schools. Reading this list from one slam book gives a glimpse to the incredibly nuanced and complicated relationships students have with their schools, and for a young person who comes across this list, the resonance of other youths' experiences with their own might be simultaneously alarming and comforting.

In another example, youth stretched our prompt "In the future, I will be…" to include not only careers, but lifestyles, benchmarks, and worldviews.

Running a non profit
Nominated for an Oscar
Married with children
A pediatrician
A sport agent
A successful Black woman
A tender teacher, successful and a role model
Not a gold-digger
A husband and entrepreneur
A police officer
Famous!!!
An independent person who does my own thing
Just me!
Moshing with fantastic fans
Waiting with arms wide open
A cultured and worldly man
The best fashion designer
Dead or on my bike
Teaching and playing musics (sic)
Going to Costa Rica
Speaking fluent French
Out of America
Working (I hope)
Playing videogames

These responses creatively contend with curricula that hold passing the Regents (a New York State exit exam) as the only goal for student learning. Further, they contest views of youth as apathetic and hopeless. Rather, we see that youth envision

a diversity of futures, and do so critically, in critical relation to their current situations.

In the end, 15 of the 30 slambooks CREDD created were lost or confiscated. Sometimes someone would email us at the address we stuck on the front cover, telling us they had filled it out and passed it on, and wanted to keep updated with our project. Once, someone emailed us to apologize for leaving a slambook on the subway. Someone mailed a filled slambook to us from out of state. Someone else mailed us a note saying the notebook they had was full, so they made a new one, and added some questions to it. In some ways, it seems that our slambooks have traveled further than we could ever have hoped for our research to go. Or maybe, they have gone exactly where we hope our research will go.

Balance

Recently CREDD wrote a chapter for publication in a book about youth PAR. (Tuck et al. 2008) After each chapter, a senior scholar responded to the ideas presented, and we were honored that Quechua scholar Sandy Grande agreed to respond to us. In her response, she observed,

> At times it seems that they [CREDD] struggle with equality (one of the root metaphors of democracy) running into tensions when someone is not taking their equal share of responsibility or assuming more of their share of power. In contrast, when framed through one of the root metaphors of sovereignty—balance—it becomes clear that power and responsibility can never be equally shared, nor should they. Elders have very different roles, responsibilities and levels of power in a community, as do men, women and children but when considered *as a whole,* they act in balance to each other (Grande 2008, p. 86).

We were so appreciative of Sandy's reminder to work for balance, not homogeneity. As a facilitator of the Gateways and Get-aways Project, it was difficult at first for me not to become preoccupied with equal distributions of knowledge, power, responsibility, and vision- it was easy at first for me to believe that diversely distributed knowledges, balance, could only be achieved over time. I was wrong that balance can only be achieved over time, although that is how CREDD achieved balance. When we began working with the group of youth that would become YRNES, we tried another approach, seeking to build our collective in balance (rather than as a synchronized swimming team) as much as we could from the very beginning. In many ways, the Indigenous epistemology of balance can serve as a counter to latent dogmatism, such as fetishizing equal distribution, market logic, or even "democratic" practices such as one person, one vote. (Alfred 2005; Smith 2000)

Balance is not only necessary for distributions of knowledge and responsibility within a collective, but also for a process of decolonization, or "a process of discovering the truth in a world created out of lies" (Alfred 2005, p. 280). This concept also came up in CREDD's interviews with youth GED earners and seekers. Alex told us about his process of sorting the truth and the lies when he answered our

question about the most important thing he had ever learned. "The most important thing I learned is to not give up on myself, keep my head up high, have some self respect for myself. And once I did that, I got my GED and everything. And everyday I wake up and I pick up my head high and have respect for myself."

CREDD: So when and how did you learn it?
Alex: Actually, I learned it on my own.
CREDD: Do you think it is rare that you didn't learn this in school?
Alex: No, actually, in school, they would make you want to put your head down. It's like, when you pass by a teacher, they give you that certain look like you just want to put your head down and hope she didn't see me.

Jordan told us that it was his neighbors that helped him sort the truth from the lies,

"There was a whole number of people in Brooklyn, they all saw me and they said, 'You're bright. You're going to make it. But not if you do this [do not complete a high school diploma or a GED]. Don't give up. Just come on, get back on track, yadda, yadda, yadda.' I mean, I was hearing constantly from like a billion different people, I think that's one of the biggest things that stuck with me. I think that's why I want to go to college. That's why I'm not letting the man shove me down."

Both Alex and Jordan talk about the power of balancing voices- from within or from community- to motivate youth to search for evidence of counter truths. In this way, balance can be not only a practice, but a stasis from which youth can make decisions about their lives and work.

Relationship

The final inner angle I discuss here is relationship, and I do so in two ways. First, relationship is concerned with space between people(s). Second, relationship is concerned with space between ideas. There are, of course, an infinite number of configurations, but I take up these two configurations for reasons that I hope become very clear.

Taiaiake Alfred, endorsing Six Nations member Thohahoken's distinction, defines the Indigenous episteme of relationship as being concerned with the "'aural tradition," meaning that listening is the true Indigenous way, as opposed to the more common understanding of it as 'oral tradition,' which of course is all about speaking and not listening" (Alfred 2005, p. 199). This he contrasts with the colonial relationship as a "dynamic relationship of arrogance, complacency, and complicity" (Alfred 2005, p. 113).

For many Indigenous peoples, the defacto expression of relationship is tribe, collectivity, "the only valid form of supra-individual participation." (Deloria 1988, p. 226) Relationship is not an extant fastening of individuals, as in imperialist structures (imperialist structures need to be individualistic, otherwise, how could

they destroy so easily without recoiling at the smell of blood?) Instead, relationship is among, within, between, a collective of *us*.

Vine Deloria, Jr., in a discussion on the role of humor in Indigenous worldviews, provides this account of relationship:

> For centuries before the white invasion, teasing was a method of control of social situations by Indian people. Rather than embarrass members of the tribe publicly, people used to tease individuals they considered out of step with the consensus of tribal opinion. In this way egos were preserved and disputes within the tribe of a personal nature were held to a minimum.
>
> Gradually people learned to anticipate teasing and began to tease themselves as a means of showing humility and at the same time advocating a course of action they deeply believed in. (Deloria 1988, p. 147).

Deloria Jr's description of the tribal relationship reveals a way in which collectivity is implemented, and I include it here not because it paints a perfected picture of tribal relationship, but because it shows that collectivity is not just an extension of individual needs and goals to the group. In my experience, this concept is difficult for non-tribalized people to see at first. Collectivity does not start with the individual as the "real" first unit and build up to the group. Rather, collectivity begins with the group, and stretches to include, celebrate and support the diversity of its members. Further, collectivity involves what Maria Torre calls mutual implication, informed by Gloria Anzaldúa's (1999) concept of *nos-ostras.* Mutual implication includes the remembrance that together "we have overlapping histories and our identities are made up of 'leakage' from our experience with each other" (Torre this volume.)

Because Western ideology holds the individual a priori to the group, it's difficult to translate the concept of collectivity or tribal relationship in a way that does not get reduced to giving up autonomy (an individualist idea) for the steamrolling wishes of the group. Rather, collectivity is concerned with sovereignty, which may always be disregarded in the West as a red (both Native, and socialist) ideal.

Still, the process of relationship involves what Alfred calls *regeneration*, the "direct application of the principle of acting against or ingrained and oppressive fears" in order to embrace "the struggle to transcend what has been done to us rather than the effort to gain compensation for the crimes or to placate feelings and sensibilities." (Alfred 2005, p. 151) This insistence on moving beyond tit-for-tat retaliation calls upon our capacity to collectively envision a future from a position outside of our very real degradation. *This* is the fabric of relationship. Alfred tells us, "Regeneration means we will reference ourselves differently, both from the ways we did traditionally and under colonial dominion" (Alfred 2005, p. 34).

In YRNES' research, we applied this theory of regeneration not only to relationships between people, but also to relationships between ideas. For example, we utilized the popular education technique called the problem tree (see also Ferreira and Ferreira 1997; Tuck 2008; Tuck et al. 2008) to map the relationships between the everyday occurrences and root causes of a dysfunctional school system. CREDD utilized the problem tree as an approach to research design and data

collection. However, in YRNES' research, we built upon CREDD's use to craft it as a method of data collection *and* collaborative theorizing.

In YRNES' problem tree, we began with the problem, "The school system isn't working" then asked researcher/participants to write the everyday ways they saw this problem thrive in their schools on leaves that would represent the symptoms of the problem. Next, the group identified the common attitudes and (mis)beliefs that supported the leaves, and these became the trunk. Finally, the group identified the ideologies and systems that grounded the trunk, forming the root causes.

This exercise was very useful to us in getting the ideas on the page and in front of our eyes, but difficult to use as a course of action because it was so linear. In many ways, it embodied the reform versus revolution paradox that I described at the beginning of this article: to only reform the leaves would ensure a new crop of leaves in the future; to only revolutionize the roots might take too long, sacrificing those who are already or will soon be tangled in the tree. (For an extended treatment of this critique, see Tuck 2008).

To address this, YRNES deconstructed the tree, and began re-organizing the leaf, trunk, and root parts as clusters that our research would explore. Although we created six clusters, because of limitations of time and resources, we decided to focus on two, anticipating that even two would have a ripple effect on the remaining four.

CONTROL: Poor communication and lack of access to needed information in schools—the external (mayoral, police) control of schooling—the widespread belief that power and knowledge go from the top, down. This cluster includes symptoms such as "the school never lets us know about any changes" and "guidance counselors don't provide guidance," and "guidance counselors aren't told about better opportunities and alternatives for us." The researcher/participants then linked this lack of access to timely and accurate information to mayoral and police control in schooling, because decision-making does not happen in the building, but rather in an office on the other side of the city. Further, decisions are not made for the specific school community, but for those students along with 1.2 million other students in the NYC public school system. Finally, researcher/participants connected both of these realities to the commonly held belief that power and knowledge should flow from top down, and locate this belief as a stronghold in Western ideology.

COMPETITION: School rules and policies are arbitrary—the perception that there are "not enough seats" for all NYC students—the purpose of schooling is foggy and not agreed upon. This cluster involves every day symptoms such as school overcrowding "my class is overfilled when there are ten students in other classes," a mismatch between the curriculum and student realities, and illogical distribution of resources to determine that school rules and policies are incoherent and arbitrary. Researcher/participants related this idea to what they described as a general yet pervasive feeling in their schools that there isn't enough room or "seats" for all students. Recognizing that this feeling can be tied to societal obsessions with competition as a result of capitalism, youth noted that this feeling is in contrast to expressed commitments to public education. For this reason, they theorized that competition is enforced by default within a schooling system that- for reasons of economic change, political disagreement, and lack of vision- has lost sight of its purpose.

YRNES' reconceptualizing of relationship between ideas affirms Indigenous frames of relationship and regeneration while at the same time attempting to see beyond, in order to (as Scott Lyons offers as lessons from Vine Deloria Jr.'s work and life) "Adapt, don't accommodate. Blaze a trail, don't authenticate. Embrace tradition on the other side." (Lyons 2007, p. 67).

Return to Naked Kings

I began this article with a story, with a hero, the young person who does not fail to do what all others failed to do, call out the king for his nakedness. Within a paradigm of perfect heroes, this young person is the only hero of the story; but within a paradigm of imperfect heroes, the loomers too are heroic catalysts for change. They are imperfect because they are selfish, covert, maybe even merciless in their allowance for the king to appear before his people so fully exposed (and undisguised). Though flawed, I appreciate their role in the story, their theory of change. In part, this is because their roles remind me of another hero, Raven.

Raven is a hero in stories of many peoples in the North, and some of my favorite stories feature Raven (the trickster) seeking a resource or knowledge for self-interested reasons, but through his approach, yielding results for all of the surrounding peoples. "Raven challenges our conceptions of 'good' and 'bad' or 'good' and 'evil.' Instead, the lessons Raven brings us are ones that demonstrate the complicated nature of living, knowing, and being." (Brayboy 2008) Raven stories bring together the inner angles of sovereignty, contestation, balance and relationship, putting into motion all of these working parts of Indigenous theories of change.

Stories of the loomers and Raven have taught me to move to a different vantage point when considering theories of change and courses of action. These stories have taught me even more about what the role of research can be.

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