Commons, Common Sense, and Community Collaboration in Hard Times

Madhu Suri Prakash
Pennsylvania State University

Back from Hell, Down to Earth: In Our Hard Times

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only. (Dickens, 1973, p. 1)

Opening *The Tale of Two Cities* with these reflections, Charles Dickens offers us vivid glimpses of other hells of hard times in human history. Hard times, today, loom over us –more ominously than Asian Tsunamis or Haitian earthquakes. How do we draw on Dickens's genius to whip off the mantel of ignorance, cynicism or plain powerlessness that keeps us moving mechanically on the mindlessness of our assembly lines, daily transporting us towards "business as usual": school work, homework, business cycles, job promotion deadlines, shopping … ? Hard times cannot but be harder to study and respond to mindfully when all the senses are systematically confused by night-long neon seductions, stuffing our Walmarts with their "sweet deals," and cleverly deodorizing the sweat and stink of our global economy's sweatshops.

A short walk to the nearest neighborhood food bank is a small first step for bringing us back to our senses, our reality, down to earth, back from the hell of illusions that numb and dumb; long enough to unload our "donations" offers a quick study of loyal, humble, generous neighborhood donors now reduced to standing in shame for their own shy share of handouts.

The worst of times? The best of times?

Searching for wisdom and guidance, what insights might I glean from Dickens's hard imes? Do I re-visit his bleak soup kitchens to check whether those in our 21st century urban ghettos give them stiff competition? Or, putting down December's hollow Copenhagen Accords with profound sadness, conclude that Dickens's times could not possibly compete with our Nuclear Age of Climate Change, World Water Wars and the monsters of Gene, Green and other

revolutions being engineered in our sanitized labs and concrete Think Tanks and then unleashed upon billions of vulnerable, innocent eaters and farmers. Clearly, our panoply of cancer-causing ogres were not around to outstare Dickens—eye-ball to naked eye-ball. Consumption [T.B.], cholera and other Dickensonian era ills pale in the presence of the global menace of contemporary corporations, masterfully hiding behind their humanitarian masks, mascots and mantras, chanting: "we are winning wars against hunger" … homelessness … poverty… cancer … or any other human ill … even death and dying … that Dickens fully failed to imagine.

Bank bailouts with billions will resuscitate our sick economy – limp and death-like in the emergency room—declare the faithful. Re-fattened corporations will surely return us our millions lost. Lost jobs, now greened, will fully resuscitate capitalism and save the whole world—chanters of the mainstream mantra announce to The Believers. Yes! Billions are seduced by all the brilliant advertisements hiding from us the hell of life lived in our day-to-day "Absurdistan" (Illich, 1989).

Our reality check compels us to listen carefully beyond the official communiqués emanating from White Houses, Kremlins or Rashtrapati Bhawans. The wisdom of Einstein offers the most relevant reminder: we cannot solve problems by relying on the same kind of mindset that engineered the global jet ways supersonically speeding us to the brink of human extinction, dragging down with human hubris the entire delicate, complex and fabulous web of Creation. The wisdom of those reflecting outside the box of Glassed-in Corporate Headquarters awakens us to the economic, political and educational policies that have pushed us out and down. Rudely roused from either complacency, cynicism or hopelessness, our hard times offer us a delicious invitation: to join in solidarity with the billions who still have the knowledge and skills to stand up and sustain their communities, despite the crises and horrors of more than 500 years of colonialism and neo-colonialism; through re-rooting themselves even more deeply in our sacred soils; offering the hospitality that teaches us how to nourish and be nourished; for staying alive (Shiva 1988); even more, actually learning to flourish in the thick of the hardest of hard times, past and present.

Goliaths and Overdogs, whose global castle of cards continue collapsing, offer us no hope and sustenance. Modern history's underdogs, however, guided by our wise Elders, can no longer be dismissed or disparaged as "uneducated." For centuries, they have taught us the virtues of cultivating humility and a long, patient hope (Glendinning 1994; Esteva and Prakash, 1998; Ereira, 1990, Peat, 1994, Williams 2008). Their prescience lucidly reveals why today's Goliaths will suffer the inevitable fateful fall of all their predecessors' tyrannies and hubris. Regenerating our strength rests in the recovery of good, honest, physical labors that teach resilience, those that heal the beauty, balance and equilibrium which we have damaged. The creative imagination of ordinary women and men reconnects us to each other and to our places; helps us taste once more the salt on our brows and the rich joys of plain dirt in our fingernails; recovering basic human dignity in our hearts and minds. Our wise elders' wisdom teaches us how to nourish back into wellbeing what modern times reduced into its three underdogs: [a] commons,

[b] common sense and [c] mutual nurturance through the generosity of community collaborations.

Commons

"Let your life be a friction against the machine." (Thoreau 1965, p. 259)

Where are your commons? Who belongs to your commons? How many commons do you belong to? Which commons increase and strengthen our common sense? What commons can you count upon to support you through both good times and hard times? In the contemporary Age of Replacement, efficient, obsolescent technologies and assembly lines impose "cost-efficient" state-of-the-art gizmos for "laying off" loving, laboring hands of a "disposable work-force;" reduced into atomized individuals. Consequently, all questions about supportive, sustaining, sustainable commons are rendered outdated, archaic and thoroughly meaningless by manpower planners, educators, the successfully employed and their ilk. "It used to be a part of good manners to ask a person you had just met, 'Where are you from?', muses Wendel Berry. "That question has now become a social embarrassment, for it is too likely to be answered, 'I'm not from anywhere.' But to be not from anywhere is part of the definition of helplessness. Mobility is a condition in which you can do little or nothing to help yourself, and in which you live apart from family and old neighbors who would be the people most likely to help you" (Berry, 2009/2010, p. 27).

Modern individuals' ignorance of their commons took me back some years ago to a conversation I had with an illiterate woman. She was squatting down on the bare earth next to her babies as she cooked potatoes and *chappatis* on two steady fires from sticks just gathered and stuck between six bricks. She was the typical brick carrier on a construction site in the developments proliferating for the comforts and advancements of India's new breeds of billionaires and yuppies.

"Where are you from, *behen* [sister]?" I asked, as she invited me to share her fresh, fragrant, humble fare: "Aaa, my *desh* [country]?" She paused long before answering. From her reply, it was immediately clear that she had zero concepts of politico-economic abstractions like India or other nation states. Innocent of modern geo-politics, she was fully knowledgeable of her place; the place where she belonged even if she could never financially fund her way back; where her people taught, learned and mastered all the practical skills of subsistence—including how to make fresh *sabzi* and *chapattis* (vegetables and unleavened breads) on a fire burning beautifully between bricks. Fully aware of her *desh*, her candid, clear answers directed me to the cluster of villages surrounding her own. My blank eyes revealed how ignorant and clueless of her referents my education left me: excluded from the lesson plans of cities and towns that I had mastered studying the best high school atlases of the world. Memorizing villages in England was an essential part of my "good education,"

while uneducated Indian bricklayers' villages remained irrelevant for my educational advancement and pedigree.

"Sister," she continued, "to get to my country, you have to travel two nights by different trains; next, you have to walk for a day; cross a river by boat …." She had a distant look in her eyes as she continued to colorfully detail the pilgrimage it took to get her back to her village. At times, her face lit up with a broad, spontaneous smile of sheer delight, remembering cherished landmarks. Invariably, her smiles faded into that distant look which spoke volumes of how far she found herself from home, traveling to become a homeless carrier of bricks for the growing global economy. Hers is the "tragedy of the commons:" uprooting and dragging millions of the most displaced humans in all history from their ancestral fields and villages to construct every nations' Super Malls and City Headquarters for Pepsi, Coke, Monsanto and other illustrious Goliaths, reengineering the global palate with its fructose corn syrup and Bt Global Empires.

The enclosure of the commons, which marked the beginning of the industrial society and capitalism, was also the beginning of the Tragedy of the Open Access Regime where dollars and other hard currencies have come to dominate, defining the economic/political power to exploit for elites' profit the world's fields, farms, soils oceans, forests or mountains—unconstrained by national boundaries or traditional peoples' ancient regimes of moral and virtuous restrains. It shaped the dominant economic orthodoxy that there are no real alternatives to property rights, privatization and market in generating wealth and human well being. Jonathan Rowe (2009) calls this "The Tragedy of Economics: Market Theory against Human Nature." The commons, he observes, "is a parallel world, defying the rules that the economists hand down." (Rowe, 2009, para. 1). These economic rules, it is now open knowledge, have brought upon us Climate Change and all the related ills of progress and development.

With awareness of the environmental crisis at long last dawning amongst the educated elites, the First Earth Summit of Rio was launched in 1992, announcing global concern, rules and regulations for "Our Common Future." Since then, "Sustainable development," the new slogan to sustain economic development (at the cost of nature and culture), continues serving the national and international interests of the developers of the global economy. It either completely ignores or fashionably green-washes the continued destruction of commoners' commons.

The Ecologist—Britain's bioneering journal—explored the situation at the grassroots at the time of the Summit. What they found all over the world were common women and men struggling to 'reclaim the commons.' The rich evidence they gathered amply revealed that "for the vast majority of humanity, the commons is an everyday reality." "90% of the world's fishers, for example, rely on small inshore marine commons, catching over half the fish eaten in the world today" (Kurien, 1993, p. 7).

"Despite its ubiquity, the commons is hard to define," they explained. "It provides sustenance, security and independence, yet typically does not produce commodities. Unlike most things in modern society, it is neither private nor

public; neither commercial farm nor communist collective, neither business firm nor state utility; neither private plot nor city park. Nor is it usually open to all. The relevant local community typically decides who uses it and how" (The Ecologist, 1993, pp. 7-8).

Evidence and research cited and celebrated by *The Ecologist's* team, however, was ignored by the elites orchestrating Rio. It had to await almost two decades—and the economic meltdown of 2008—to be finally honored with the 2009 Nobel Prize for Economics. Awarded for the first time in its history to a non-economist and a woman, it gives good clues about dents being finally driven into hardnosed mainstream economic certainties about progress and development by Ms. Ostrom's "Governing the Commons" (Ostrom, 1990, 2010). For Ostrom's research reveals traditional wisdom that has guided commons for centuries in every continent, proving the power and practicality of commoners real involvement in self-governance, independent of educated experts, investors or big governments.

Hard Times, rendered harder and more insoluble by the certainties of dominant economic models, has forced even conventional committees, such as those that brandish Nobels, to question the dominant assumptions about human nature and flourishing, those "certainties" protected by power and guns by the international educated elites of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Elinor Ostrom (Ostrom 1990) carefully documented how diverse traditional communities equitably and sustainably handle their lands. She debunked and challenged the Tragedy of the Commons, the parable popularized by biologist Garret Hardin in the late 1960s served as "certainty" to high-schoolers and Post-Doctorates alike. (Hardin, 1968) What Hardin designed was a scenario in which commons are inevitably degraded because every individual looks out only for himself. Ironically, this parable has been used by all kinds of conservatives to argue for property rights and free enterprise, in order to prevent the inevitable tragedy in a world of commons. Ostrom's research, in radical contrast, demonstrates the existence of social control mechanisms that invariably regulate the use of traditional commons before their destruction by modernizers. She made evident long before her Nobel that the famous Hardin parable was in fact a good description of the regime of open access from which we suffer today; tragically destroying everything in its grasp. The commoners, in contrast, monitor each other's use of the land, developing rules of decent, virtuous or moral conduct, and thus protecting both their places and their cultures.

After writing that any commons "remorselessly generates tragedy" because the individual gain of those overusing the commons will always outweigh the individual losses resulting from degradation, Hardin was later forced to acknowledge his mistake. He was forced to recognize that he projected onto "commons" the reality of open access regimes in which authority rests nowhere; in which there is either no shared place or only private property; "in which production for an external market takes social precedence over subsistence; in which production is not limited by considerations of long-term local abundance; in which people 'do not seem to talk to one another'; and in which profit for harvesters is the only operating social value" (The Ecologist, 1993, p.13).

Ostrom's Nobel is the long overdue official acknowledgement of what common men and women have known for centuries, and particularly during the past 500 years of struggle to resist the daily attacks and inroads of their communities from the Open Access regimes of every variety of colonizers and neo-colonizers. Celebrating Ostrom's victory over mainstream economics, we are also now celebrating the enclosure of the enclosers. This is the long awaited and desperately needed "Victory of the Commons"—a victory being documented by the International Association for the Study of the Commons (which Ostrom helped found in 1989) and On the Commons, a network of citizens and organizations. These are leading us to "look to the commons itself as a model" and "are committed to moving beyond "me" to "we," and maintaining a sense of the whole" (On the Commons, 2009).

Enclosers of the commons employed all kind of violence and the most diverse ideologies to destroy whole patterns of behaviors centered in autonomous, decentered, resilient subsistence. Hope in our Hard Times marks the dawn of a new era for new commons. What we are now beginning to see are the diverse, creative ways in which the Joneses are abandoning keeping up the race for acres of perfect lawns surrounding Starter Palaces and McMansions, a race which economists, both capitalist and socialist, have promoted to define and goad ordinary people to slave for around the clock of self-destruction. (Leonard, 2009, 2010; de Graaf, 2003) Ex-competitive Joneses are teaching and learning from each other how to start cooperating: joining together to bring life and recovery to their places; transforming lawnscapes into foodscapes; abandoned land and buildings into community gardens; and anomie and alienation into friendship and hospitality.

Ten years before Ms. Ostrom, Ivan Illich anticipated the situation. He observed the coalition between those "who struggle to preserve the biosphere, and those who oppose a style of life characterized by a monopoly of commodities over activities." (Illich, 1982, p.18) They reclaim in "bits and pieces the ability to exist outside the market's regime. The value shared by all these diverse contemporary post-modern alliances continue ancient or traditional commoners' attempts to reclaim enlarge and regenerate in some way, *the commons*" (Illich 1982, p. 18).

Our Hard Times once again remind us that every crisis offers new openings and fresh opportunities to make something good out of something really bad. Hope and heaven seems to be embedded in the hardness of our Hard Times – now demanding rooted revolutions that replace the dominant straightjackets of mainstream solutions.

What is Common Sense?

Is there a difference between having common sense and "being educated"? What are these differences that distinguish having "common sense" from "being educated"? Does our "educational system" cultivate "common sense"? How?

Alternatively, does our system sharpen our intellects while simultaneously eroding "common sense"?

Gandhi, Ivan Illich and Wendell Berry are the three philosophers who have pushed me the hardest and furthest in taking these questions seriously, addressing them in reflecting on my philosophy of education, both inside as well as outside the classroom. Gandhi's questions took center stage last November as I boarded the train that took me from New Delhi to Dehradun. For the first time in my life, I was going to co-teach "Gandhi and Globalization," a seminar conducted annually at Bija Vidyapeeth—an indigenous university started recently by Vandana Shiva and Satish Kumar in India.

Gandhi's distinctions between "common sense" and education were central to my reflections as I boarded the train. Even as it began pulling out of New Delhi's railway station, I found myself transported back 100 years earlier, when Gandhi felt compelled to go on a long pilgrimage through the heart and hinterlands of rural India (Attenborough 1981, Gandhi 1953, 1970). Gandhi found that train ride—a spiritual journey as much as it was a political one—essential for removing his self-confessed vast ignorance of Village India (Attenborough, 1982). Then, as now, most of her common women and men still dwell in Indian village, daily practicing the common sense that has still kept many of their traditions alive—despite all the damages of colonialism, followed by post WW II neo-colonialism (called "global development") (Esteva and Prakash, 1998). As I stood before the open doors of the moving train, my imagination flew open to embrace the miles and miles of lush, green, simple subsistence: centuries old traditions of cultivation relying exclusively on human hands, animal and solar power. By the side of traditional pastures and fields of mustard, women, men and their animals engaged in ancient, familiar rhythms and dances of soil cultures—free of the tyranny of tractors or Bt corn-brinjal bio-engineers. Buffalos, bulls and goats grazed and toiled alongside humans in fields and pastures. Even today, 100 years after Gandhi's historic train ride, the sides of the train tracks still remained decorated by exquisitely designed mounds of perfectly arranged *gobar* [cow dung] pattees for fueling all Indian village kitchens. The *gobar* that was not soaking in the gorgeous November warmth of the winter sun was being equally well used elsewhere: for perfectly plastering mud dwellings, their artistry and practical wisdom clearly visible from the speeding train.

Gandhian philosophy of common sense did not merely liberate me from the education that had earlier educated me to dismiss India's village "*gobar* engineers" as uncivilized, uneducated Indians, sullying their hands in filthy "animal waste"—one among many reasons for remaining behind as educated millions raced madly towards the civilized life promised by progress. Once I began opening my mind and imagination to all the marvelous riches of cultures that venerate and respect buffalo and cow *gobar*, new and surprising questions and avenues of research opened up for me about civilized peoples mis-use and abuse of human excrements.

Questions that earlier I had neither the imagination nor the temerity to ask now presented themselves as relevant, pressing and pertinent. With each passing year, these grew in urgency and immediacy. Increasingly, they demand more

profound reflection as I come to learn how the arms race has already extended itself beyond oil to water. World water wars are being waged in every continent, killing millions of illiterates (Bozzo, 2008). Meanwhile, millions of well-educated social minorities flush away trillions of gallons of increasingly scarce waters that could quench the thirsty, the hungry, the sickened and the dying.

Once I started studying our contemporary water wars, questions about the folly of our flush toilets became as central to my research as the folly of our food rendered toxic by black waters and CAFO excrements. All the questions I now find myself grappling with have everything to do with the common sense that was not cultivated by my credentials. Despite the ignorance I continue to suffer because of my academic specializations, I am learning from commoners about common sense, and how I destroy my commons and common sense each time I operate on the mentality that defines modern conceptions underlying the flush toilet: out of sight, out of mind. Consider the following paradoxes:

> What makes a person form a routine practice of taking pure, clean, sacred water and defecate into it—day after day—over the course of an entire lifetime?
>
> What makes a person, next, take this cocktail and flush it away—out of sight and out of mind?
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> What makes a person systematically throw toxic chemicals into this cocktail and then conclude the product safe and "pure"?
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> What makes a person send millions of gallons of this product thousands of miles away to rivers and oceans where divinely dancing creatures die and disappear forever?
>
> What makes a person continue doing this for an entire life time, knowing that each such act kills majestic, even sacred rivers as well as coastlines of immense grandeur—including those of the mighty Pacific and Atlantic?
>
> What makes a person call this "civilized" and worthy of being taught and learned, generation after generation, all across the earth in the name of a human right called "education"?
>
> What makes a person elevate this "education" as something higher and far superior to something common people have called "common sense" in their commons—in regards to the basics of life – starting with our intestinal tract: what goes in and what comes out every day in all persons, if they are to remain robust?

Questions like these pushed me further and further every year off the education highways … off and away, slowly walking the unpaved paths that humans have made over many centuries. Crisscrossing all over our generous,

abundant earth they use their feet, guided by the sun, the stars, the winds and all of nature's creatures as allies and teachers cultivating their common sense.

The more my common sense compels me to raise and sit alongside such questions in my waking moments, the more I find myself disenchanted and saddened by the global institutions of education which dumb down our common sense. So successfully do these achieve institutional goals that the simple habits of heart and mind needed to raise and patiently address such questions became insanely hard to cultivate.

Educated to dismiss such questions as offensive, irrelevant and plain stupid, Gandhi's philosophy of *Nai Talim* forces me to join Ivan Illich and Wendell Berry in distinguishing "education" from "common sense" (Berry, 1990; Illich, 1973). The Dalai Lama, similarly, gives us pause as he observes the many paradoxes of our Mad Max times: "We have more degrees but less sense; more knowledge but less judgment; more experts, but more problems; more medicines but less healthiness" (Dalai Lama quoted in Hopkins, 2008-9, p. 212). Common sense cannot be cultivated in classrooms that are walled off by professional experts, hell bent on protecting their expertise from the communities they are supposed to be serving. Nor can common sense be understood or cultivated in the absence of communities that have learned to regenerate and strengthen themselves—despite all the enclosures of the commons and the violence imposed upon commoners' native good sense by the industrial military complex.

Unless we learn how to address these questions in millions of communities for safeguarding our commons soils and waters, high-level meetings held in Copenhagen, Rio or anywhere will remain the predictable circus of highly orchestrated negotiations that fool no one. My courses in philosophy of education challenge us to cultivate our common sense as we explore two basics of daily living: the food we put into our bodies, and the stuff we throw out of our bodies and homes as garbage or "human waste." The intestinal tract and the neighborhood become central to our reflections on the types of challenges we need to encounter in creating new commons or regenerating traditional commons. Since we are made of soil, water and air, inevitably whatever is toxic or polluting for these earth elements is equally sickening for our bodies. And, for the same reasons, whatever works for our bodies, works for all the other creatures that are part of the grand web of life called "Creation."

Humanure is one of the many missing links in corporate-run, industrial agriculture. Humanure has been an essential ingredient in growing the food of all our ancestors, while keeping their water sources pure and abundant. Joseph Jenkins has been growing rich, beautiful and nutritious food in Grove City, Pennsylvania, for the past 30 years—for his family, friends and neighbors with the richness of untreated human excrements (dismissed as unhygienic and dangerous according to "the official story"). Grassroots, unofficial stories of his successes have carried him to every corner of the United States, where he has launched the humanure movement in family backyards, urban, suburban, and rural. His composting toilets continue to be embraced and celebrated even in music festival halls and other large gathering places where people discover the pleasures of eating food grown from their previous season's excrements. From

Mongolia in the steppe lands of Asia to Sweden and Finland's cold regions, the humanure movement is today unstoppably flowing forward because of commoners' genius or common sense (Jenkins, 2010). Sweden boasts of the first town that has legally banned the flush toilet-- a commoners' snub not only to the royalty that first started this folly in the birthplace of capitalism. Today, capitalism is joined by all the other modern "isms" that have uplifted this environmentally vicious destructive habit into a benchmark of human progress and development to be emulated by the underdeveloped (Esteva and Prakash, 1998, p. 95).

South of the border, in Mexico, my teacher and conspirator, César Añorve, has combined the genius of Guatemalan and Vietnamese peasant elders to create the *Mexicano* ecological toilet. Again, proving the simple elegance and ecological common sense of indigenous peoples' relationships with humanure, César Añorve's dry toilet does not require a single drop of water to compost human excreta, while creating instant liquid fertilizer for food and flowers that can be used the minute it is harvested in every home, urban, rural or suburban. (Del Porto and Steinfeld, 1998) It comes as a blessing to all farmers weary of urban and suburban grey waters inundating their fields, not to mention all the creatures of rivers, aquifers and oceans. These creatures are rapidly being rendered sick or extinct because of our addiction to floating our excreta in sacred waters. Taking modern journeys of many miles of sewage pipes, our human waste heads towards treatment plants that dump chemically filled waters, disrupting the health of our entire web of water life.

Garbage Warrior, Michael Reynolds has created humanure that grows bananas and other tropical fruits indoors in December in Taos, New Mexico, at 7000 feet without any carbon dependence or utilities. Homes or institutional centers reuse abandoned mountains of tires and scraps from junked washing machines, warmed and cooled thermally while surrounded by several feet of snow at temperatures dipping in the minuses, or raging summer heat (Reynolds 2010).

César Añorve, Joseph Jenkins, Michael Reynolds are leading bioneers in growing local movements across the earth wherever people are awakening to the World Water Wars being waged. Meanwhile millions of us, flushing away human excreta, prefer the tyranny of being ruled by blindness and mindlessness: "out of sight, out of mind."

What steps can our communities take so that together we can begin weaning ourselves from the flush toilet and the oceans of sewage it generates? This question exemplifies the common sense of Gandhi that I meditate and muse upon, with full membership within a growing group of mullers and musers creating daily escape routes from modernity's madnesses.

Questions about human excrements and *gobar* are inextricably married to questions about food. Through the trial and error of much experimentation, I am slowly learning to reconnect food and waste (instead of schizophrenically severing their relationship) as the center of my courses in philosophy of education.

What does it take to make the food-waste connection come alive? "Anyone who brings raw ground beef into his or her kitchen today," warns

Schlosser, "must regard it as a potential biohazard, one that may carry an extremely dangerous microbe, infectious at an extremely low dose. A series of tests conducted by Charles Gerba, a microbiologist at the University of Arizona, discovered far more fecal bacteria in the average kitchen sink than on the average American toilet seat. According to Gerba, "You'd be better off eating a carrot stick that fell in your toilet than one that fell in your sink" (Schlosser 2002, p. 221). Studying facts like these from *Fast Food Nation* (Schlosser 2002) in the beginning has zero impact on awakening students to philosophies of education that locate the centrality of food, waste and ecological literacy as central organizing principles for teaching and learning "educatively." To tickle, nudge, stretch and awaken them for engaging more actively and directly with the consequences or implications of what we are studying in the (all-too-often-paralyzing) pages of their required texts, I have witnessed the power of asking them simple, direct, personal questions about themselves and their reactions/feeling: "How powerful do you feel to make changes about the food you eat several times each day?"

Experience and many failures have taught me to wait patiently for a few weeks into every new semester before raising such personal questions in ways that are productive or useful for making real changes. The timing more often than not only works after we have had time to sit with, chew, digest and conjointly reflect upon some of the new grounds traversed, demanding new ways of thinking and acting to previously unexplored challenges. These include delving into works like *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (Kingsolver, 2007), *Fast Food Nation: the dark side of the All-American Meal* (Schlosser, 2002), *Diet for a Small Planet* (Moore-Lappé, 1971) among other readings that dare to bring food into the very center of our reflections about education. Among the important or central elements on this journey together are those people who to adjust to the "strangers" we encounter every semester. This is often done (I confess I continue to marvel at its unexplored efficacy by our institution) through the trust grown by cooking and sharing a sustainable feast together for class. Every step of the way calls for creating the climate that fosters the recognition that it is not dangerous to be honest in this course and that their transparency or candor will not jeopardize their social standing or the grade on that "all-too-important" institutional transcript.

To the question about their personal sense of power or powerlessness, once ease is experienced by the majority, they usually tend towards replying: "I am a mere student with very little voice or say on campus." They usually confess this most basic of facts about their daily experiences of powerlessness on campus with looks and voices that suggest the abject pathos of peoples trapped in totalitarian political regimes:

> I am working an 80 hour week, because I have to supplement my parents' support for school with two night jobs at minimum wage. At school, I have only time to zap inside my microwave oven stuff that Kingsolver, Steingraber, Schlosser and other authors teach me is really unhealthy for my body … for our farmers …. For everything on earth! Forced by my crazy schedule of deadlines for survival and decent grades at our

> university, that is all I am capable of: microwaving what I stuff into my mouth in the few minutes I have racing frantically between classes and jobs. Even when I go home during the break or the weekend and share with my family what I have discovered for the first time during the past few weeks, I find myself instantly discouraged by the prevalent response: that there is absolutely nothing wrong with eating Perdue chicken or MacDonald's beef / pork – whatever else we may be learning in this course! They remind me that I have grown up 'just fine' during the last 18 years on this food; it's sanitary and affordable; that's all that we will serve and we do not want to hear more about words like 'organic' or 'local' or 'humanely grown'– because all that is 'elite' stuff; outrageously unaffordable!
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> …I am powerless to do anything till I move out of my apartment (where, anyways, I can grow nothing because there is no soil to speak of; or even if there is a tiny backyard, my landlord would not ever allow me to touch his lawn or landscaping for composting or cultivation of a tiny tomato). Right! Truthfully, I have no power to do anything about food or waste till I finally graduate and get a real job with real pay as a teacher. Till then, I am forced to limit myself only to writing papers about food, waste or any other issue we are studying to get a decent GPA or make it on the Dean's List. Yes! I do now know that I need to make some real personal changes in the ways I live outside our classroom. Also, I do know that Dewey would be appalled by what I am confessing. Yet, the plain fact remains that I have absolutely no power to act or choose differently for another xxx number of years!!! Wait! It's true that I do feel powerful as a citizen of the world's Number One Nation! Yet, as an individual, I feel completely powerless, because our corporations are so powerful!
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> …The reality is that I am just one person. What I do does not have any impact; it does not make even a tiny dent in the way our society eats and lives. I feel isolated and alone in thinking about the necessity of changes we are studying! None of my roommates or the other students I meet in different classes on campus even want to discuss this 'stuff.' It's not relevant to them. I am only a struggling student, feeling completely powerless to affect any change in our university system or in my personal life. Even after I graduate, I know that I will be forced to 'Teach to the Test' to avoid being fired by the school district that hires me as a new teacher without tenure! (personal communication, n.d.)

How do I start standing on its head such pervasive feelings of powerlessness among students I encounter every semester in the world's "most powerful democracy?" This is not merely an academic or intellectually interesting question for publication and research. It constitutes my central challenge as a teacher for whom moral autonomy or environmental literacy are at the very core

of the "philosophy of education" I seek to be engaged in. My perennial search for creative solutions draw me inevitably towards the genius and strength of a very small minority I inevitably discover in every class. These are learners who, rather than being daunted or overwhelmed by "new facts" or "shattered certainties about trusting their corporations," fully celebrate the experience of really relevant classroom conversations about problems and life beyond "school work" for getting the "right grade."

In looking for authentic "turn-arounds" from powerlessness to some sense of efficacy, I look for those few exceptions to the majority voices of paralyzed, trapped helplessness amongst teachers-in-the-making, a few weeks or months before graduation? Yes! Invariably, every conversation circle has at least one or two students who exemplify the courage it takes to speak out of their sense of personal power and to begin affecting real changes today, without any further procrastination. Right now! Despite the frustrations they experience like the majority of their classmates, they are not cowed down about taking the steps needed to resist being sucked into paralysis, or beaten down by the fundamentalisms, ignorance or rejections of change announced by classmates, family or others!

These brave young voices speak out—often for the first time in their lives. They speak quietly and humbly about their power to change what they are putting into their mouths and bellies. Their voices prove every semester to be far more compellingly than any professorial declarations or urgings. It is precisely because of their so-called "student powerlessness" that their revelations and stories have a simple, magnificent message about unearthing the genuine sources of their efficacy in making small but sure changes, one tiny, tiny mouthful at a time! Their personal power courageously articulated, combined with the power of other young people or adults through images in films like *Food Inc* (Kenner 2009), *World Water Wars*, (Bozzo 2008) *Affluenza* (de Graaf 2003) or the *Business of Hunger* (Moen 1984) start to thaw that abject cold and icy sense of powerlessness expressed by most students. This tiny minority, with their genius and strength fully affirmed, shyly sharing personal stories of their own tiny baby steps, move and inspire their classmates, those with whom they share the same age and academic or social demands and deadlines.

How do we successfully break through the sense of powerlessness that school and society conspire to feed and nourish in *Fast Food Nation*? It is humbling to realize after more than a quarter century of teaching, that I can offer no one any fail-proof recipes or perfect curricula and pedagogies. The only certainty I have discovered through successes and failures is the centrality of being open to experimentation, of standing ready to change course when one conversational path arrives at a dead-end (specially and surprisingly when that same path worked so wonderfully well in a previous semester. or with another group for opening doorways to new landscapes of living and learning). I am also finding out how exceptional films and "YouTube" programs really help to bring the words of texts alive in generations raised "on the screen." Trained to overuse their visual sense at the expense of all the other senses, students are profoundly "moved" when the readings are illustrated by documentaries and films that offer

vivid images for the ideas being studied out of the printed page. Pulled out of the abstract and the textual to the visceral, the images go straight to their "gut", bones and marrow, stimulating all the senses even the most buried or incipient of senses—the common sense we have just been exploring.

After recently viewing *Food Inc*. (Kenner, 2009) for the first time, I witnessed how students actually "heard in their hearts" the words of Ray Croc and other "founding fathers" of "fast food nation." Hearing with awakened hearts, they could no longer escape the horror of eating food engineered by Founding Fathers, feeding millions with pretty pictures masking inhuman business tactics: "This is rat eat rat, dog eat dog. I'll kill 'em, and I'm going to kill 'em before they kill me. You're talking about the American way of survival of the fittest" (Croc quoted in Schlosser 2002, p. 37).

After seeing assembly line Fast Food guzzling for such "survival of the fittest" in *Food Inc*., I have witnessed an intensity of desire to "do something," "to take moral / environmental action," moved by motivation no longer confined to narrow goals like getting an "A" for the course. Organically reading their books, immediately followed by watching Schlosser, Pollan and other *Food Inc*. heroes facing up to the truths about our Founding Fathers and Fast Food Goliaths, our classroom conversations now move to new social and moral planes, expanding to issues about living for the enjoyment of wellness and balance in our shared lives. Questions of behavior, choice, conduct and moral principles that they have so far been accustomed to exploring and answering with customary classroom "political correctness," politeness or worst of all, academic detachment, are freed to move. During moments most unpredictable or orchestra-table, these suddenly come alive with a vitality, a new found sense of personal and social power that is unstoppable and contagious. These mark the first steps that I see the young poised to take to stop the abuses that they have been blind or indifferent to up to this stage of life. They are shocked, picking themselves up from the shards of broken certainties, of trust shattered in both their government and their Founding Fathers, an openness of mind, heart and imagination emerges and unfolds, with the beauty, humility and first time "hospitality" to the unfamiliar, the strange, the unexplored, the "untried" and, therefore, "uncertain."

Community Collaboration: Nurturing and Being Nurtured

The time is ripe to ask real questions about living, eating and learning in the heart, "belly" and gut of community collaborations. Celebrating all your five senses, heightened by the sixth one called "common sense," have you enjoyed the diverse fabulous flavors of growing a community organically? Or, do you invariably find yourself holding back because you are "too busy?"

How do we discover the time to enjoy the basic facts of freedom: that we are never "too busy" to start living real lives right now? How do we start doing real work (vs. "busy work") with real people, in real communities grown from the ground up; RIGHT NOW—"stepping off" and escaping elegantly the assembly

lines that transport us today like chickens for slaughter—alarm –clocked into exhausted, super-caffeinated wakefulness, in order to push ourselves into mechanically performing first one obligation followed, minus any slow breathing, to the next one; and, then, again the next one, non-stop like the immigrants and fast food employees slaving for Mac-Monsan-Pep-Cok-Walmart Empires until we drop dead in a stupor, garaging our depleted bodies and buried spirits in our condo/ apartments–falsely called "home" only to repeat the process all over again tomorrow—waiting anxiously for that horrendous modern invention called "the weekend" for somewhat slowing down—if, and only if, the lawn does not have to be mowed; marching to that horrible globalized "truth-ism" internationally celebrated as "the American Dream?"

The fossil fuels of industrial agriculture have forced us deeper and deeper into this ignorance of the "heaven on earth" that awaits us in our communities. Our hotter, less predictable climate is inviting us to learn more than words and equations on pages and screens within cinderblock classrooms. This invitation, Gandhi-style, welcomes everyone to dig our hands deep in soil, reveling in the pleasures of bread labor.

While two thirds of the people on Earth are uneducated or undereducated, most of the educated cannot find the jobs and opportunities for which they were supposedly trained. In a time in which all experts continue implementing top-down changes doomed to failure, obsessed with their social engineering, urban agriculture represents a non-reformist reform: from the ground up, rooted well in local soil. It could easily transform our schools from mere factories of drop-outs and diplomas (that only certify as hours, not specific competence) into free spaces in which learners can autonomously practice the leisure activity of learning and studying; growing organically by abandoning industrial education stuffed and starved by industrial agriculture, served on assembly lines engineered for mass-manufacturing diplomas, spreading the contagion of affluenza, or related epidemics of the diploma disease.

Illich (1970) pertinently reminded us that learning and studying can only be the leisurely activity of free people. That is our task today, a joyful, beautiful, dignified activity. And that is the kind of education the people are today claiming for themselves. If one expression could capture the main meaning of social movements currently flooding in Latin America, it would be *buen vivir*, the good life, living well, usually complemented with *mutual crianza* (mutual nurturance).

Stories of Illichian convivial modes of teaching and learning are sprouting exuberantly out of the ground on every planet, like spring time dandelions—dancing golden, yellow and abundant under the sun—in mountains and valleys, in city blocks and even abandoned Los Angeles parking lots. Which blossoms do we have the leisure to pause, applaud, and enjoy today? My colleagues down the road are discovering new pleasure and leisure of creating Veggie Commons: front lots of homes growing fresh produce and new friendships as people pause in their walks or drives through neighborhoods to ask gardeners tending their plots why corn, beans and squash are being planted together on mounds; and, yes, what is "three sisters companion planting?" Our front lot vegetable gardens are generating conversations and modes of sharing knowledge and harvests of abundant seasonal

foods that perfect lawns have been totally incapable of doing for the past half century. These are the kinds of informal exchanges that Ivan Illich (1970) envisioned as examples of more authentic learning, rather than the numbers of "ass hours" documented for credentials and certification.

The joy of all these informal learning-teaching exchanges in my own neighborhood is multiplied manifold with discoveries that there are literally countless "experiments" in teaching and learning growing spontaneously out of the real soil, without being confined to classrooms even when I hear of their existence thousands of miles away. For example, far from home, I learn of a "school," Colonia Piraí, in Bolivia. Here, students speaking six different indigenous languages produce high quality sausages, animal feed, grains, eggs and vegetables, learning by doing, applying their own traditional knowledge and values and engaging in a rich and productive dialogue among cultures, traditions and technologies. Common sense, community, commons, as well as friendship and social commitment, are the pillars of this successful endeavor. (http://www.teachamantofish.org.uk/bulletin/december2008.php)

Sarah van Gelder (2009) observes that "Food connects" (p. 1). Over a meal, co-workers become friends, strangers become companions, intimacies are shared, and we renew our spirits and our bodies at the same time. Food not only connects us with other people. It links us to traditions—our own and those of others we come to appreciate through the flavors and aromas of the cuisine they share (Van Gelder, 2009, p. 1).

For Claire Hope Cummings (2009), "a sustainable food system requires more than cutting the number of miles food travels. We must reconnect food, people, land, and culture" (p. 18). "To share and ingest a meal means the incorporation of the eater into the community," explains Martina Kaller. "Simultaneously, one's personal place within the community is assumed and confirmed. An 'oral bi-directionality' takes place during the meal: food is incorporated into the body and the body is integrated into the community." This is in fact the real meaning of hospitality (Kaller in Robert, unpublished).

Radically Rooted Commonism

"Do you really believe that personal, local, little initiatives (like tiny community gardens) will ever be able to deal with our Goliath global problems, with climate change and the rest? Don't fool yourself! You can only deal with Goliath on the gigantic scale!" We find ourselves chastised repeatedly for our celebratory reflections about small is beautiful (Schumacher, 1973), with community gardens at school, home, neighborhood or city center, urban, suburban or rural. "A community garden—what a useless gesture." I hear this sentiment time and again. And yes, as Bahnson (2007) observes, "on its own, gardening will by no means change the world. It won't feed the millions who are hungry. How silly to waste one's time growing food when a supermarket is filled to the brim just down the road. … Yet … it's exactly the uselessness of the gesture, the

smallness of it, the discomfort of doing work that is physically demanding, in which the garden finds its strength. Gardening is a 'complete action,' Wendell Berry says, because it's an act that is more than symbolic. Gardening is protest, but it goes beyond protest and proposes an answer" (p. 68).

If there is going to be real change, courageous grassroots activists like Howard Zinn reminded us again and again over the course of their rich, brave lives, we have to abandon waiting for the changes to trickle down from above; instead we have to discover how authentic change invariably works its way from the bottom up; with ordinary people taking themselves; being and becoming the change they wish to see in the world—as Gandhi is often quoted for his urgings.

How often do we need reminding that that is how far-reaching, profound social change happens? It does not emerge through magnificent gestures or great heroes, leaders, governments. Real change, constructive change, change dealing with patiently healing Mother Earth, change looking for social justice at the grassroots, change longing for Heaven on Earth can only be the consequence of the courageous effort of ordinary men and women, people like you and me, that rise up in ways surprising and small declaring boldly to the world, "Basta! Enough!" in their minds and hearts and begin doing something.

And this is exactly what is happening. Everywhere. Millions, billions of people are today reacting to the disasters multiplying in every place on earth. They are no longer waiting for the next election, the next Copenhagen, the next promise of governments or CEOs. They are taking back into their own hands their own lives; they are finding their footsteps on their own paths towards community growing.

Today, we have plenty of examples about how the modest, limited initiatives of ordinary men and women become contagious and sooner than anyone expected, begin generating profound changes. One of my favorites examples to illustrate the epic now spreading at the grassroots in the whole world comes from our "enemies:" those collaborating with "the Evil Empire." Yes, the Cubanos!

Havana, under U.S. siege and Soviet supervision, offered the world one of its best illustrations of what horrors happen when peoples' commons are destroyed by the joint forces of capitalism and socialism. Badly bereft of their traditional commons before becoming a pawn in the Cold War of the two post-WW II Superpowers, Cubanos had no recourse but to starve when the Berlin Wall came crumbling down. The average Cubano lost 20 pounds in their Special Period, suffering all the anguish of the Peak Oil crisis two decades ahead of the rest of the world.

Physically, economically, technically and politically isolated, cornered, and under siege in 1990, they faced a brand new reality minus oil, gas, subsidies and Food Aid. After 30 years of socialist revolution, which followed the tradition of the Green Revolution and other development paths, Cuba was importing 60% of the food it needed and most of the fertilizers and other chemicals required by its industrial agriculture. Suddenly, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, they could no longer hide their neo-colonial dependencies on Superpowers. With every variety of modern deprivation stalking and starving them, however, they proved

to the whole world that necessity is the mother of invention. They re-invented, re-discovered and re-generated their elders' commons, starting in the heart of Havana. Desperate for food, they turned every piece of land, from tiny lawns to rooftops, into gardens growing subsistence. Farming and gardening were re-dignified as engineers, doctors and other professionals discovered that the surest insurance against hunger was the use of human hands and skills to grow food. And with no Soviet oil to support their State-owned megafarms, small postmodern commons were birthed in all possible sizes and varieties. To make that long and complex story short and simple, Cuba is today called by some the only country on Earth that fully satisfies all the criteria of sustainability. Cubans' cities produce more than half of what their inhabitants eat. And Cuba is the world champion in organic agriculture: learning to start healing from the sickness called the Green Revolution.

From the hell of Havana in the Special Period, we now experience the outpouring of authentic hope for all peoples: commoners everywhere have the genius to create New Commons for the 21st century. Exquisitely, the Cubanos teach us the beauty of learning from our so-called enemies. Today, all of us seeking wisdom on the creation of new commons may join in the special salsa commoners are dancing in the community gardens of Havana, despite all that the development era superpowers have done to enclose Cubano Commons.

If the Cubanos could rise and overcome the enclosure of their commons, there is no reason that the rest of us cannot tap into our commons, historical or contemporary, dis-covering at the grassroots in our own home turf those common men and women already taking small, bold steps to recover their dumbed and numbed down common sense.

'Commons' began to be adopted in recent years as a way to sum up many of the aspirations of the "movement of movements:" what the anti-globalization movement has been called since Seattle in 1999. 'Commonism' is our name for a complex and plural initiative attempting to go beyond capitalism, socialism, anarchism or neoliberal globalization.

A few years ago, 'commons' alluded both to the collective lands enclosed by capitalism and to the struggle to reclaim them. Today "commons also names the possibility of collective, rather than private ownership in other domains: an ecological commons (of water, atmosphere, fisheries and forests); a social commons (of public provisions for welfare, health, education and so on); a networked commons (of access to means of communication)… If the cell form of capitalism is the commodity, the cellular form of a society beyond capital is the commons." (Dyer-Whiteford, 2007).

What we are doing today is learning and teaching for commonism*;* celebrating our realization that it is not as individual atoms but as enjoyers of membership in our diverse commons—local or even cyber—we come to cultivate conviviality. Commonism, for us, does not seek to produce a new global slogan for gathering and joining hands across the oceans. We are using the word "commonism," a word that Windows will resist in your writing, only to allude to and honor what we are already seeing everywhere—minus slogans or globalized superstars.

Gandhi, Illich, and Berry – lives exemplary in their celebrations and affirmation of ordinary peoples and their commons, have provoked our passion for creating and concocting and promoting a new word: "communism;" a word that they have never used to describe their lives's labors of love Each one of them, in their own unique and incommensurable ways, has walked and revealed paths for escaping all the modern "isms." In doing so, all three of them have also celebrated their own traditions while honoring the genius, generosity, and hospitality of common men and women, nourishing and being nourished by their commons, common sense, and communities.

And yes, as *The Ecologist*'s team discovered 20 years ago, the commons today are everywhere. Every country and continent offers a vast fund of stories about real, ordinary women, men and even children, humbly struggling to reclaim common sense in their regenerated commons, or in the new commons they are creating. Let's look at a handful of snapshots at what is happening wherever the human spirit is being stirred to rise up against the rule of corporations.

In the speedy, harried "greater Tokyo area, a network of eleven farmers feeds fifteen hundred urban families, supplying their produce, rice and soybeans" (Hamilton 2007, p 37). Drawn away from the madness of urban-suburban-rural industrial eaters totally disconnected from agri[soil]culture, many thousands are driving as far as five hours just to get to their farms. They are weaning themselves from the "illusions" of cheap food, ready to pay the just price for nourishing food not just for reasons of health. They have moved beyond angry protest to the joy of partying and fiestas where they enjoy and relish the hours they spend on their farms catching frogs and squishing mud through their toes. After planting for the next spring, they even drive out to visit their fallow fields, and when the first spring commonism emerges, to "photograph the seedlings as if they were [their] children" (Hamilton 2007, p. 39). As Hashimoto, one of the organic farmers 50 miles south of Osaka explains his passion for growing real food, he reveals that "as a natural agriculture farmer his work is to care deeply for plants and land; in doing so he produced not just food, but love. Every person who joined him meant that love multiplied. … [L]ittle by little – family by family—that love would lead to something bigger;" (Hamilton 2007, p. 39) yes, even something as big as "World peace" (Hamilton 2007, p. 36).

In Peru, between 1972 and 1992, more than 200 thousand families "illegally" took over more than a million hectares for their survival and sustenance. This almost invisible movement now produces a third of the food in the country—using traditional methods which offer higher yields than commercial agriculture (Rengifo, 2008).

While struggling for territorial defense of their reclaimed land, for the first time in history hundreds of millions of peasants have been able to create a global organization, Via Campesina (the Peasant Way), which has become a key protagonist in the world food scene.(Patel 2007) Their main argument is: food sovereignty, that is, common women and men affirming their own capacities to define for themselves what to eat and how to produce it. Vía Campesina clearly epitomizes the path currently followed by millions of peasants and farmers, in the countryside, all around the world. Parallel movements are emerging with

increasing vigor in urban settings of all sizes; seeking sovereignity not only for food, but for rights to water. Grassroots heroes are springing from the ground up—those of the likes of Oscar Olivera of Cochabamba, Bolivia -- who has recently shown the potency of peoples' power in bringing corporations like Bechtel down to size. (Democracy Now, 2006).

Autonomously, urban "new commons" [we call them] --Transition Towns, neighborhoods, and streets -- are popping up all over the United States, infected by Bob Hopkins of Totnes, Devon, England. Voluntarily passing on this happy contagion across the country from coast to coast, Hopkins is seeing it spread over 1000 communities in Britain. The Transition Town/Neighborhood/ Street movement offers daily living proof of the art and skills of the growing green movement towards Zero Carbon emissions through the natural genius of common men and women, pooling their skills and strengths and love of their places and communities, and finding creative tiny steps towards zero carbon foods and dwellings that are built to generate energy off the grid without sacrifices that sap and debilitate the human spirit. The resiliency of Transition Towns grows out of our human capacity for cultivating hope born and nourished by engaging together. It celebrates lives and labors that are convivial rather than competitive, where shared play and work become so inseparable that party time and work time are impossible to distinguish, and where expertise is marginalized when it seeks to be snobbish about common sense.

Pittsburghians recently sang their delight about their newfound 59th place in the nation for joining other U.S. Transition towns and city neighborhoods and happily spreading the grassroots movement to heal ourselves from the Triple Crises. All those parts of the Transition Towns movement are freely assuming leadership rather than waiting for political or corporate henchmen and women at Copenhagen, or other national capitals, to be the change we wish for the world. Transition towns' practical politics insist that everyone who wishes to garden and grow food will be provided land to do so by local governments. The right to urban gardening has now been recovered in the new commons of Totnes and other new British commons. This marks beginning steps of successfully enclosing the enclosers in the 21st century (Hopkins 2008).

Each Transition Town reveals the uniqueness of its memberships' genius. Among my favorites is the story of the Gang of 12 Women who started studying the insidious presence of carbon emissions in every turn and twist of their lives. Their first step was to start gathering together to stitch cloth bags that would liberate their town from the massive islands of plastic trash currently floating in the Pacific…plastics that kill creatures of the ocean or, when burnt, exude toxins associated with breast cancer. Their innocuous little gesture has become an Exmouth symbol of solidarity. These bags have the symbolic power now being enjoyed by the local currency of Totnes—reissuing its pound of 917 A.D. Local stores are offering discounts to those who support their townships' cloth bags over the plastics promoted by corporations. Sitting and stitching together, this gang of 12 non-experts offer beautiful glimpses of *schole* and all the pleasures of teaching themselves about our crises by studying together in ways convivial, non-competitive and creative, learning and teaching collaboratively while they labored

with love on their bags. They offer one of countless, humble and hope-filled examples of ways in which commoners are dis-covering the insidious emissions of carbon infiltrating rendering our lives toxic and, most enthusiastically, the tiny steps every "we" can begin taking together each day to raise our commons awareness in order to sequester it back into our soils (Clark, 2010).

On a June afternoon in 2004, Grace Hackney and others in Cedar Grove, North Carolina created a tiny, five acre community garden grown to heal the fears, anxieties and inter-racial hatreds feverishly soaring following a brutal murder in the crack-cocaine neighborhoods of Scenobia Taylor. Groping and confused about healing from its own local versions of the "drug wars," these courageous women, joined by peace seekers of both sexes and many cultural backgrounds, drew on their own faith to revisit the biblical past in order to birth, seed, and weed their own contemporary version of "The Field at Anathoth." Fred Bahnson (2007) writes eloquently of the healing of our earth, one garden at a time, starting in his hate and war torn North Carolina: "When strangers grow and share food together, the other ceases to be so threatening. The ones who were once an abstract category—the Poor Folks, the Rich Folks, the Black Folks, the White Folks, the Illegal Aliens—cease to be categories and become instead the people they've always been …" (p. 20).

Chedryl King Fisher cannot contain her exuberance as she begins telling stories of what is growing un-stoppably in Vermont: hundreds of movements concurring in an explosive mix, combining organic and sustainable agriculture with Slow Food, community gardening, farmer's markets, community-supported agriculture (CSAs), food co-ops, farm-to-school programs, the locavore movements, and too many more to be even named here (Fisher 2009).

Learning from his fabulous successes in New Hampshire as a co-founder of the farm-to-school fresh food movement, Toni Geraci (2009) combined his genius with that of his co-workers, envisioning together "land as it could be, full of life that children would help create" gardens and farms for graduating a whole new generation of locavores. After many creative conversations, they went ahead and proved that it can be done in their own Great Kids Farm, a place bustling with activities, including those of a donated herd of goats clearing up this commons for fruit trees and vegetable crops. Even fallen trees are being inoculated to produce shitake, chanterelles, and oyster mushrooms, while greenhouses all year around use techniques like hydroponics and worm-enriched vermiculture to produce mouthwatering abundance. His challenge is to offer real, slow food to 85,000 children every day! He knows he cannot do that without growing city-wide through Baltimore something as beautiful as "agri-hospitality;" through robust business opportunities that flood his city with "the stream of farm to fork." Is it possible for any of us to say "No!" to the pleasures of joining such movements?

The first weekend of February every year, for almost two decades, I have anticipated the inspiration and spirit of community I have unfailingly enjoyed at the annual gathering of PASA (Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture). Started by a handful of local visionaries and progressives who love good soil and the great food grown in it, it has now blossomed into an annual gathering of over 2200 people, many of whom arrive liberated from all

motivations of professional or career advancements, gathering to move and be moved into personal commitments and actions that promote the health and happiness of common women and men, like you and me, across the earth. Preaching is absent at PASA. The dominant spirit is that of playing and partying, of mingling with kindred spirits who reveal that we constitute the majority, hungry to end hunger and violence being perpetrated across the world under the vacuous banners of "sustainability or greening for democracy."

Grandma Grace Lefever is one among many beloved teachers and commoners who presents regularly at PASA. Her sessions are packed with hundreds of ignorant people like me, longing to learn from her all the "open secrets"of the wild weeds or plants growing robustly untended and uninvited in her backyard. These plants are central to the fact that at 85 she has the vivacity and vibrancy of teenagers, totally autonomous and free from the medical establishment. Because of her reliance on dandelions, catnip, nettles, chickweed, wild garlic and hundreds of other uninvited back yard visitors, she has found fabulous uses in prevention, healing and growth of robustness. Grazing in her garden of nature's abundance, her sense of well being is hard to hide; in fact, it is impossible not to witness and enjoy. Offering us transparent glimpses into her lifelong journeys, she honors all the Elders who she has apprenticed with who have over more than half a century given generously of their unschooled understandings, who have steadfastly helped her in all her backyard experiments necessary for overcoming our ignorance of all creatures "wild" that nature offers unasked and irrepressible, to even the most disrespectful and disdainful in our sidewalks and lawns (Burtch and Lefever, 2010).

Diane Wilson, a dyslexic shrimper /fisherwoman, has gone out in the Gulf of Mexico for her catch since the age of 18. A mother of five graduating high school by the skin of her teeth before becoming the only woman with a shrimping boat, she shared her own personal experiences taking on the chemical giants and government officials. It was by serendipitous accident that she discovered through a flier that her Calhoun County on Texas's Gulf Coast was ranked by an EPA study as the most polluted place in the United States (Wilson 2005). Her innocence and ignorance were systematically challenged as she learned how to take on Formosa Plastics and all its governmental allies, the usual alliance who had been flagrantly in broad daylight plasticizing Lavaca Bay, leaving her townsfolk, her bay and fish, their way of life and livelihood sick with toxins. As she spoke her truth with candor, humor and humility, we were all moved towards taking our own first baby steps that are necessary for growing into "unreasonable women and men." Her outspokenness not only reduced us to tears; equally, it opened us all to question our own community silences in the face of fear, perennially overwhelmed in the presence of Goliath.

The joys of sharing my own personal coming of age are contagious, inside as well as outside classroom conversations. How can I ever forget that first-taste, now almost a quarter century old, when two handfuls of families put our money down outright for our seasonal share and started the first CSA of Center County, PA, with two professors-turned-self-taught farmers, John Packard and Dorothy Blair? For the rest of my life, THAT first-taste cannot but remain profoundly and

deeply embedded in my aging brain cells: harvesting and actually coming to savor "greens" that had never-before been introduced to our culturally limited taste buds: bokchoi, Russian Chard, Jerusalem artichoke , tatsoi … plus more; or, familiar fruits that now exploded our taste buds like never before, given that we could not restrain ourselves from popping them straight into our mouths while we plucked them fresh out of the soil-minus-formheldahyded plastic packaging ...strawberries, raspberries, honey dews, water melons… More than a decade after the death of our farmer John and our first CSA, he continues to live on in our midst because of the unforgettable lessons he taught us about the beauty of belonging to commons and the fabulous flavors of eating food grown with the love that commons invariably create: the love of nurturing and being nurtured. Today, I know no other love that offers us, literally and metaphorically, "Heaven on Earth" (Hamilton, 2007, p. 35).

All that is required to create "Heaven on Earth" in every place is the cultivation of commons, community and common sense. There has been a relentless struggle between the associational ways—when the people come together by themselves, supported in their own capacities, based on the 'genius of local communities'—and "the systems / institutional approach through which experts, corporations and governments impose their designs and social engineering upon common men and women. For many years, we were exposed to the ascendance of systems over associations, colonizing the lives of everyone. As John McNight explains, "We are only at the beginning of exploring the possibility of a new vision for community. It is a vision of regeneration. It is a vision of re-associating the exiled. It is a vision of freeing ourselves from service and advocacy. It is a vision of centering our lives in community" (McKnight, 2008, p. 3). This vision grows common sense: the sense we cultivate *only* in community. It is the sense that grows as communities learn to regenerate forgotten skills: those that our ancestors had birthed, honed and strengthened before their destruction by the Industrial Revolutions' enclosure of peoples' commons.

"Suppose you had the revolution you are talking and dreaming about," suggested Paul Goodman 50 years ago. "Suppose your side had won, and you had the kind of society you wanted. How would you live, you personally, in that society? Start living that way right now! Whatever you would do then, do it now. When you run up against obstacles, people, or things that won't let you live that way, then begin to think about how to get over or around or under that obstacle, or how to push it out of the way, and your politics will be concrete and practical" (Goodman in *YES!* Winter, 2008).

Many people, all over the world, are now listening to Goodman. One among countless inspiring examples is that of Jaimie Oliver seeking to bring sanity to the food fed to West Virgina's children (Oliver, 2010). While I have much to learn from you about your multiple local initiatives for growing communities organically, what brings me here in Hard Times is our shared hope, guided by a good sense of the abundance of local genius flourishing within this gathering. It is the same genius that I got a chance to witness at the American Educational Studies Association in Pittsburg last November (2009) by listening to the stories of local regeneration shared by members of commons and communities

that Rebecca Martusewicz and her colleagues are collaborating with here in Southeast Michigan. Detroit, one of the world's "shrinking cities," with ghostly, gutted neighborhoods, "burned-out buildings and "brown fields" has the human power to enlarge us with the "big hearts" of "collaborative intelligence" (Martusewicz 2009, p. 261). Here, in the bombed-out boulevards of Detroit, Martusewicz speaks of:

> showing up each Saturday morning, joining the others in the joyful work of moving bricks and dirt, and building hope in … resilient neighbourhood[s] … [of being] welcomed and charmed, cajoled and wooed by the generosity, care, and good will (p. 262).

Such goodwill was generated by common people exercising their common sense in, and through, regenerating their commons.

All this is happening in a city rendered incapable by our Hard Times of providing even the most basic "services" of modern service institutions like water, waste removal or, dare I mention it, decent schools (45 additional schools have just been closed in the city). Speaking of the most powerful lessons being exchanged there, Martusewicz writes: "Love was always in the air. It showed up in peoples' faces, in their words, in the kindness of their gestures, and the gentle seriousness with which they approached this work" (p. 262) of growing commons and collaborative intelligence." She speaks of being "introduced to a particular language, framed by metaphors of community, mutuality, and simple kindness. An old map, but shockingly unfamiliar to me" (p. 262). In addition to these surprises, newnesses and delights, Martusewicz observes how the greening, commons-making common sensical initiatives like those of the (now disbanded) Committee for the Political Resurrection of Detroit (CPR) on Wabash Avenue and elsewhere are offering other forms of hospitality: "Detroit has become good habitat for pheasants, coyotes, and other wildlife. And the attitude of the people here [is] to welcome them with … wonder and delight" (Martusewicz 2009, p. 262).

As I read and listen to her stories, I recognize once again what can only best be described as yet another example of "heaven on earth," where hope is nurtured by loving and giving and sharing of the labors of human hands-hearts-heads (Gandhi, 1953) in the epicenters of economic despair and the hardest of Hard Times. Recently, Wendell Berry (2007) once again reminded us: "I don't know, of course, what's going to happen, but it seems to me imaginable that a time could come when we will either have to achieve community or die, learn to love one another or die. We're rapidly coming to the time, I think, when the great centralized powers are not going to be able to do for us what we need to have done. Community will start again when people begin to do necessary things for each other" (p. 75).

Berry's wisdom and prescience, as always, light up little candles for us to see with our own eyes during our darkest moments of doubt and hopelessness, confirming that the time has already arrived! What necessary things are we

already doing for each other, offering our unique genius to meld, melt and marry into unimaginable abundance the conjoined generosity and genius of our commons? Right now, right here, in our very midst, we have all the proof we need to know that commonism is healthily and robustly growing at the grassroots everywhere, with gutsy women and men thoughtfully challenging us to stop procrastinating and to start rolling up our shirt sleeves right away, for the soil awaits to nurture us and be nurtured.

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Dr. Madhu Prakash is Professor of Education and Outreach Scholar for the College of Education. Her work on indigenous cultures, grassroots movements, cultural diversity and Environmental Education has appeared in Education Theory and in American Journal of Education, Encounters. She has co-authored the books: *Grassroots Postmodernism--Remaking the Soil of Cultures* and *Escaping Education--Living as Learning within Grassroots Cultures*.