Youth participation in changing food systems: Toward food justice youth development

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Youth participation in changing school food systems

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Preview

- Transforming school food systems
- Studying youth participation using Photovoice
- Photovoice in Holyoke, Massachusetts
  - Nuestras Raíces youth program
- Participatory visual research and food justice youth development (FJYD)
- Conclusions
Transforming school food systems

• School meals
  – “Commodity-food” system
  – Health resource for children and youth

• Farm-to-school
  – Changing institutional procurement policies
Studying youth participation

- Photovoice research (Wang 1999)
  - Photo = youth-generated images
  - Voice = discussion of images, captions
  - Audience = presenting research to wider public, policymakers
Research Setting

- Holyoke, Massachusetts
  - Early industrial city
  - 85% of students qualify for free/reduced school lunch
  - 70% of students identify as Latino

- Nuestras Raíces
  - Community development org. since 1992
  - Growing concern about access to and quality of food in Holyoke
  - Urban gardens and La Finca community farm
  - Youth leadership group
Nuestras Raíces Photovoice

• Youth group
  – Food justice focus
    • Holyoke Food and Fitness Policy Council
    • Farm-to-school
    • School lunch quality
    • Gaining a voice in decisions
  – Photovoice project
    • Documenting path of food from community farm to students’ plates in school cafeteria
Step 1: Food is grown at La Finca
Step 2: Nuestras Raices Farm Manager contacts School Chef
Step 3: Food is picked up at farm & delivered to local warehouse
Step 4: Food delivered to warehouse and distributed to Holyoke schools

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Step 5: Food is prepared and served at Holyoke Public Schools
Presentation to School Committee

Policy window of food service contract:

“We care about healthy food.”

“Students should have a say in decisions about what we eat at school.”

“When kids have a chance to try healthy foods, we learn to like them.”
Exhibition and FEEST!
Food Justice Youth Development

• Ginwright and Cammarota’s “Social Justice Youth Development”
• Using Photovoice to build youth awareness and outcomes at three levels
  – Individual
  – Social
  – Global
FJYD: Individual level

Youth assert themselves against boring after-school meetings with no snacks!
FJYD: Social level

- Analysis of “big P” and “little p” policies
- Identifying decision-makers and stakeholders
- Presenting to Holyoke School Committee
FJYD: Global level

Connecting school food + labor: NR youth meet Coalition of Imokalee Workers (CIW)

Connecting school food as a “push-out” factor
Nuestras Raíces Youth Photovoice: Conclusion

Through Photovoice process, youth gained:

- research skills
- knowledge of food system; farm-to-school vs “commodity food”
- policy savvy
- representation on School Food Task Force
- Individual, social, and global awareness as food justice activists
Thank you!

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