Bringing Community Back into Community Gardens: 
Working with Children First/CIS Family Resource Center at Emma to Revitalize their Communal Space

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Abstract

Community gardens take many different forms for many different reasons. Some gardens are faith-based and others serve an educational purpose for school children. However, the community garden in Emma located in west Asheville is a hybrid that has served many different purposes over the years. The garden was established ten years ago as a part of a grant awarded to the Family Resource Center at Emma (FRCE). The concept of the garden was to use it as a tool to strengthen connections within Emma and provide fresh fruits and vegetables to members of the community in a food desert. The garden is suppose to directly engage the community by having community member’s plant, water, weed, nurture and harvest fruits, vegetables and herbs from the garden.

The focus of this project is to work with the Family Resource Center at Emma to create a survey that would inform community members about the center while also determining if the community still wants a community garden. The garden was supposed to function with the main help and support from the Emma community, but as time went on, the interest in the garden decreased. The need for the survey arose when community involvement fell to an all-time low and members of the greater Asheville community began maintaining the garden. Now the garden serves as a secondary source for fresh fruits and vegetables for Emma community members receiving food boxes from the FRCE. The data collected from the survey will influence how the FRCE will proceed to
better serve the Emma community. Workshops and community planting days have been
designed to help reengage the Emma community with the garden. This project
demonstrates different strategies and approaches to maintaining and reestablishing
community involvement in a shared space based on the residents-defined needs.

**Keywords:** survey, community garden, food desert, food disparity, feminism

**Origins of the Project**

According to the Food Access Research Atlas (FARA), the immigrant Emma community
in Asheville, North Carolina is located in a food desert. To qualify as a food desert as
measured by the FARA, the community must be in a low-income census tract where a
majority of residents are more than ½ mile from the nearest supermarket, according to
2010 U.S. census figures. Buncombe County as a whole is also marked as an urban tract
that has a relatively high number of households (8%) without vehicles that are also more
than one-half mile from a supermarket. This combination of being in a low-income area
(a tract with a poverty rate of 20% or higher, or tracts with a median family income less
than 80% of median family income for the state or metropolitan area) with low access to
a nearby grocery store and low vehicle access (tracts in which more than 100 households
have no access to a vehicle and are more than ½ mile away from the nearest supermarket)
qualifies the Emma community as part of a food desert (ERS, 2013).

In addition to the findings from the Food Access Research Atlas, the Food Environment
Atlas has also marked the Emma community and Buncombe County (based on previous
census data from 1999-2011) as being on the increase for household food insecurity from
the percentage being 11.10% as the average in 1999-01 to an increased average of
17.10% in 2009-2011. A rise in averages of students eligible to receive reduced-price-
lunch, summer food and student free lunch also reflects this increase in the community
need for access to food and food security (ERS, 2012).

With that background knowledge on the need for easy access to fresh fruits and
vegetables in the area, the survey project formed from a need by the Family Resource
Center at Emma (FRCE) to reinvigorate community volunteer participation in the
community garden. Despite the statistics based on previous census’ reports of a rising
need for easily accessible food at an affordable price, there has been a growing lack of
community members actively engaged with the FRCE community garden. The survey
formed out of a realization that the direct Emma community, for whom the community
garden was originally designed to serve, was disengagement.

When the garden formed ten years ago as a part of a grant to address the growing food
disparity in the Emma community, it was a prime example of a thriving sustainable
communal space in an immigrant community identified as being within a food desert.
Unfortunately, due to a number of reasons the interest in the garden waned, and it came
to the state it is today. Today members of the greater Asheville community come out to
the garden on an as-needed basis (weekly and monthly) either individually or in groups to
help maintain the garden. The sense of accountability for the garden then falls upon the
FRCE who is then expected to coordinate and solely maintain the garden with volunteers.
in addition to assisting the Emma community with the many different accessible resources the center provides as a service.

The deviation the community garden has taken from an Emma community garden to an Asheville community garden is reflective of the perils of organizing and sustaining a community garden.

The survey was created with the intention of getting direct input from the community about the garden in order to reevaluate the FRCE’s communal space. By spreading the survey into the community, outreach work is also done to reestablish a connection between the FRCE and the Emma community.

I began volunteering in the garden a year and a half ago and through my work with the Family Resource Center we began an open dialogue about the lack of community involvement in the garden. Originally, I had planned on helping the FRCE with community events and workshops for the garden but through our continued dialogue the FRCE decided to create a team of volunteers to find an answer from the community. This emphasis on working within the community to find out what the community wants and needs is at the core of the entire process. To make the work mutually supportive and cooperative for the survey team, the community and myself is the most important factor of the entire development and conception of this project.

**Methods and Work Undertaken**

Based on the Family Resource Center at Emma’s need and desire to reestablish a connection with the direct Emma community for the benefit of the communal space occupied by a community garden, community leaders working at the resource center recruited and assembled a team of people to address the issue of lack of engagement by the Emma community within the “community garden.”

The team consisted of Asheville community members with experience in community gardens, interns at the FRCE and myself who had been volunteering within the community for two years and working directly in the garden for a year and a half. Members of the team had not worked together before and did not know of each other until an interest meeting was called by the FRCE for a dedicated group willing to tackle the issue of disengagement and come up with strategies for reengagement.

Before the first meeting was called, many of us volunteered in the garden the weekend prior as part of the Martin Luther King Day of Service to help the FRCE Volunteer Coordinator lead a group of volunteers from the greater Asheville community in the garden. Members, which would soon become a survey team, met for the first time there and discussed an interest and excitement for working together to help the FRCE reinvigorate the community interest in the garden.

At our first formal interest meeting, six of us were able to attend and begin to think of strategies and methods we could implement to help the FRCE with their issue. The Volunteer Coordinator at the Family Resource Center at Emma, Jodi Ford, explained the resource center’s current situation with the garden and asked for our help to think of methodologies we could use to address the situation. A strong sentiment she conveyed
was the importance of bringing the community back into the garden as a logistical way of helping the resource center with the upkeep of the garden. She believed that the visual state of the garden reflected upon the resource center due to its direct position in front of the resource center. If the garden did not look well, then morale might fall and clients from the community might lose hope in the resource center. Jodi’s language reflected this worry, “If clients from the community come in to have us help them pay their electricity bill [in an emergency], how will an unkempt garden reflect upon us? Don’t you think they might lose hope or question how we can help them maintain their home if we can’t even maintain ours [the garden]?"

The services the resource center provides for the community are numerous. The FRCE mission statement is to improve family’s financial stability by providing emergency assistance through 1) a food pantry to decrease food insecurity, 2) a clothing closet, 3) emergency financial assistance for rent, utilities and medical expenses, and 4) holiday assistance. In addition, they provide case management to those who are requesting assistance on an on-going basis. They work with families individually to bring them out of crisis and into financial stability. Their services are also available in both English and Spanish to better accommodate the diverse immigrant communities that make up the Emma community.

Jodi’s concerns then are very real. With an understanding of the FRCE’s vital role in the Emma community, it makes sense that losing clients due to lack of trust is a very real concern for the employees of the FRCE.

After much thought and deliberation, we all concluded that a survey would be the best method of gathering quantitative data to better understand the needs and wants of the community. As a Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies major, I understood the need for giving minority communities the space to voice their opinion and input. Everyone in the team was comfortable and eager to begin the survey process. With the guidance of the experienced staff at the FRCE, we began brainstorming important ideas we wanted to convey in the survey.

An important aspect for me during this process was to be mindful and intentional with every aspect of the process of creating the survey to prevent the perpetuation of any oppressive ideologies (Collins, 2000). In later discussions, I referenced Joey Sprague numerous times to make the survey team aware of the importance of intentionality and a non-objective way to approach research (Sprague, 2005).

The dynamic of the group was also something to be noted as it played a major role in the way the survey was created. The survey team consisted of two FRCE employees/advisors, two UNCA students (one FRCE Intern and me as a volunteer), one AB-tech student and a local community member who has worked in a community garden in the past. The group consisted of five women and one man. Two of the women identify as Latina and the rest of the participants are white Anglo-Saxon.

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1 Two systems of oppression include racism and classism. If I were to perpetuate oppressive ideologies in this instance I might use negative societal ideas of what kind of people live in trailer parks and use oppressive stereotypes to facilitate how I interact with people in the community. Those ideas could also play into the creation of the survey and be the basis of my understanding of the community. It could be seen in the language used in the survey to further oppress people in the Emma community.
Because we were all so eager to begin the work and strategize on how to get the survey out into the community, we decided to focus on that aspect before we finished formatting the questions that would be on the survey. I proposed that we have another meeting the following week to decide on the wording for the survey so the group decided to table the questions for our next meeting.

We decided that the meeting that day needed to address how we were going to get the survey into the community, other ways to involve the community in the garden while we waited for results from the survey to come in and a timeline for the survey’s completion, proposal, translation and dissemination.

The group began to bounce ideas around on what strategies would work best. Due to our previous organizational experience, we quickly realized we needed to pull out our calendars and begin setting deadlines for tasks.

I tried to assert a non-hierarchical form of facilitation for the meeting and instead focused on discovering and highlighting the different skills we all brought to the table. I have found that this strategy works well when working with a diverse group of people who have different skills but do not have a common language of community organizing.

We all worked together to incorporate our different skills and began planning the overall process we were going to follow for the creation and dissemination of the survey.

The overall process could be categorized into three different phases.

Phase One: Creation

- First, we created a survey using Google docs and then translated it into Spanish and Russian.

Phase Two: Dissemination

- When we finalized the survey, we disseminated it into the community through three ways:
  
a) Through the Emma Elementary school, we held a contest and rewarded whichever classroom returned the most forms by giving them a basket of books.

  b) By asking anyone that came into the center to receive food boxes to also fill out the survey as they waited for the center to fill their food box.

  c) By going into the community door-to-door and asking people to fill out the survey.

Phase Three: Data Analysis, Reflection and Action

- As we received forms back, we entered them into a database so we could track who responded and what people want.

- During the month of April, the research group and members from the Emma Resource Center are meeting and discussing the findings collected thus far and making a decision on whether or not the garden will continue to be a part of the community or whether there are modifications to its operation that would make it more viable for community members.
• If the data demonstrates that a significant portion of community members still want a garden, we will hold an event to regenerate interest in the garden. The event will consist of art activities for children and childcare as well as planting starter plants for the new season. This event is planned for May.

• If the community does not want a garden, then we will look at our findings to see what the community does want and try to plan accordingly. In this case, this will be the last year of the garden and after the harvest season we will try to reshape the space to whatever form the community and resource center collectively want.

Our overall deadlines were to have the survey completed by February, distributed into the community during the month of March and data collection and analysis completed during the month of April. The implementation process is behind by about a month due to the careful planning and issues that emerged as we designed the survey.

In addition to our ambitious goals and deadlines, our group was also the only steady volunteers the FRCE had to maintain the garden so we not only had the responsibility of creating the survey but also felt compelled to help maintain the garden as best we could.

In an ideal world, we would have been able to stick to deadlines and work in the garden every day; but unfortunately, reality hit mid-way through the spring season, and we recognized that the community pace might not align completely with a university schedule. After the fourth version of the survey still presented issues that we needed to carefully consider, such as the tone of the overall survey, I began to reevaluate the importance of our deadlines and instead favor a practical approach. I was worried the survey took an accusatory tone and could make the people taking the survey feel guilty for not volunteering in the garden so I rearranged the wording of some of the questions and changed their order.

At the survey team’s third meeting over breakfast at a community member’s house, I checked in with the group on the current status of the survey. We all agreed that it was more important to get the wording of the survey to reflect the positive place we were all coming from than to rush the natural process and put a survey we were not proud of into the community. We wanted to make sure the survey came from a place of respect and sincere interest in honoring the voices of the community since we would be traveling door-to-door with the surveys and be seen as outsiders asking a lot from the community.

After version six, we finally agreed to send it for final approval by the Director of Children First/Families in Schools and we quickly began our dissemination plan.

Ties to Academia

My feminist background and knowledge from my Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) classes was invaluable in the entire survey experience. Readings from Joey Sprague helped me understand the role of feminist researchers and my impact on the entire process. Through reading Sprague’s book *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*, I began to uncover the importance of understanding my social position in order to have a better reflexive lens and to consider how my own assumptions, agenda and privilege come into play within the research. As Sprague
articulates, “knowledge is socially and historically grounded” (Sprague, 2005, p. 3). Thus a better understanding of my epistemology was important to understand how my own knowledge is constructed.

My interest and excitement in working on this project was to merge my love for community engagement, grassroots organizing and feminist praxis. The idea of putting feminist methodologies into practice excited me and drove me to be as ambitious as I could be with the practicalities of the project. I wanted to be as thorough as I could be throughout the entire process. Archiving emails, documenting survey versions and journaling during each step became my life, and I devoted as much time as I could just to become more immersed in the community.

To be as transparent as possible and follow Sprague’s example which counteracts many researchers notions of objectivity, I will explain to the best of my knowledge my positionality and epistemology so the reader can understand what I bring to the table. I am a cis-gendered, able bodied, woman of color. I was born in Peru but was raised in a suburban town outside of Charlotte, North Carolina, with my younger brother from Guatemala by two amazing women. I come from a middle class family but have always occupied an outsider’s position. My two moms raised me in a marginalized predominantly white lesbian culture. This gave me access to a minority community from a young age, even though I have not always identified myself within the LGBTQ community. As an outsider-within, to work with Patricia Hill Collins’ terminology to describe individuals who occupy positions between groups, I learned how to navigate spaces that I did not easily pass into or inhabit (Collins, 1986). As a Latina who does not speak Spanish but speaks English with a southern accent, I have experienced both the privilege and perils of speaking English without an accent. In working in the Emma community that is mainly made up of Hispanic, Latino and Eastern European immigrants, I had to constantly be aware of my epistemology and identity as a non-Spanish speaking woman of color.

The sense of navigating spaces and working through gatekeepers to communities outside of my own is something else I have grown up with and have been given a language for articulating through the WGSS program, specifically through the work by feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa. In her work, *This Bridge Called My Back*, Anzaldúa calls for the importance of bridges and bridging as a means of accessing and navigating borderlands and liminal spaces of personal growth (Anzaldúa, 2002).

In the Emma community my advisor, Norma Brown, was my community gatekeeper. We practiced bridging, and she worked to help me better understand and consider factors the specific Emma community might encounter that I might not realize. In the Emma community, Norma is a large community figure so at different instances when walking door-to-door to have people fill out surveys I would sometimes use Norma’s name as a way to engage people and enact a sense of connection through a mutual acquaintance, thereby allowing me and my fellow surveyors access into important information they might not have otherwise shared.

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2 The table as in the fictitious feminist dinner table that serves as a site of resistance.
3 A verb introduced by Gloria Anzaldúa to describe the relationship, dynamic, and work done between people inside and outside of a community for accessibility.
A large part of my continued feminist reflexive lens throughout the entire process focused on my understanding that I was an outsider within the community. I made it a practice to always check-in with myself by understanding that I am working from outside the community and need to rely on such gatekeepers as Norma, Lisa Barlow and Jodi Ford. The strength of this project comes from the understanding that I am working with the Family Resource Center at Emma to respond to a need and want they had: to learn how they could better serve the community. Although I am leading the survey team, that does not mean I am working solely based on my own intentions or agenda. By being cognizant of my role as an interested outside party, I believe that helps me become more receptive to feedback and critiques from the community and the FRCE.

**Challenges Faced and Responses to those Challenges**

In the beginning formation of the survey team, some of the challenges we encountered were the fact that we all had different experiences organizing with different people. Although I took on a leadership role, my previous organizational experiences modeled a non-hierarchical leadership style where leadership responsibilities rotated among members. Other group members looked to the leaders who naturally emerged from our conversation while others tried to push their own agenda. As time went on, we all learned to highlight what skills and jobs we were good at and could contribute to the team and worked from there to form our own functioning dynamic group.

I also worried about the gender make up of the group and wondered how that would affect the one man working with us. After much thought and deliberation, I checked in with him after the first meeting to see what he thought about the dynamics of the group. He said that he was happy to be on a team of such dedicated people and was excited to see how our work progressed. He also identifies as a feminist, and he shared with me that he sees his role as a helping role and tries to always make it a practice to give the floor to marginalized communities before he speaks or shares his thoughts. His notion of progressive stack alleviated any concerns I had before speaking with him and made me more comfortable with our gender dynamic.

In thinking about the gender dynamics, I decided to research more about women as leaders in communities, and I found that historically women have been the heart and soul of grassroots organizing. In researching women’s role in community development, I discovered that we have a rich history and that history could be ascribed to the idea of women’s accessible role in the private sphere (Hassan and Silong, 2008). Women have not always been able to have access or visibility in the public sphere and so a progression of women leading out of their homes and within their immediate communities has been documented and resonates with my own observations of the survey team and the leaders at the Family Resource Center at Emma.

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4 An organizational tool used to help facilitate discussions in order of who raises their hand and what minority status they identify with. In progressive stack cis-gendered white Anglo-Saxon men speak last and women of color are centered within the discussion. The importance of the voices of marginalized people is respected by letting women speak before men and women of color speak before white Anglo-Saxon women.
Another issue we had was that we were juggling too much responsibility. Organizing to be in the garden as much as we could and administering the survey at the same time was draining work. Luckily, the leaders at FRCE sensed our struggle and accepted two Warren Wilson interns to help lead the garden in June. The addition of them to our team greatly alleviated worries and anxieties of doing too much and has allowed us to progress even farther and organize daily door-to-door outreach initiatives.

In our door-to-door outreach, we encountered a few other problems as well. We discussed how to knock on doors and not sound like La Migra (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) or La Poli-Migra (a new term to describe the blurred line between police and ICE) (Pomareda, 2008). We also discussed what to wear so as to not be confused with religious groups or someone too intimidating to talk with at the door. We also just made conscience decisions to introduce ourselves by name and have a Spanish speaking person with us whenever possible. We wore nametags to identify our volunteer status at the FRCE (see Appendix 1), and we went over the subject’s consent to participate form with every person with whom we talked. Overall, after taking these precautions and other small ones, such as always be respectful and not talk about someone as soon as you leave their house or leave laughing because it might make people think you’re talking about them or making fun of them, we talked to many people and received many beneficial responses.

**Results**

After many drafts and different revisions, we finally created a survey that reflected our group work and dedication to creating a tool for the Family Resource Center at Emma. The final English and Spanish versions of the surveys and information sheets created are compiled in Appendixes 1 through 5.

In reference to the surveys created and provided in Appendix 3 and 5, the preliminary results from the survey were surprising. In reference to the first question, a small majority knew there was a community garden at the FRCE. The results for this question were almost even, but still a slight majority of people claimed to have known about the garden prior to the survey. This result may have been skewed from surveys collected at the resource center itself.

Responses to the second question indicated that most people did not receive fresh fruit from the garden as a part of their food box in the past year. Since surveys in the preliminary results were taken from the community, the school and the resource center, the results show that even though most people knew there was a garden at the FRCE, they received other services from the center.

The third question mirrored the second question, with a majority of people claiming to not share food from the garden with anyone or having someone share food with them. The second question showed that an overwhelming majority of people from the preliminary findings, which were mainly from door-to-door interviews, did not receive food from the garden and did not receive any shared food. Two people did claim to share food or have had someone share food with them, but the majority of people did not report
any food sharing. In retrospect, I wonder if the words vice versa were at all misunderstood or if the concept was not translated or understood in terms of reciprocity.

Question four reflected an overall voice of approval from the community that the garden is a good use of community space. Use of the word “community” space as opposed to “communal” space is something I personally deliberated on but decided community conveyed the same meaning and was a more accessible word to understand than communal. Only one person thought the garden is not a good use of community space.

Questions five and eight were the only open ended questions on the survey. Results from the fifth question expressed a real need for more children’s activities in the community. Most people suggested that the garden space should host children’s activities. Other suggestions included events for mentally challenged youth and community events. From going door-to-door with the survey team and volunteers from UNC Asheville, I found that many people understand that there is a large majority of multi-child households in the community and a need for activities geared towards engaging youth.

Question six results showed that most people have not volunteered in the garden in the last two years. Given the results that an almost equal majority of people did not know about the garden as opposed to those who did, this finding helps to further illuminate the need for this survey and outreach effort. Given the current lack of community involvement in the garden, this finding corroborates the FRCE’s lived reality of absent immediate community support in the garden.

Most people would be disappointed if the community garden were to discontinue. Question seven results indicate that even though many people did not previously know about the garden, now knowing that it exists to serve the community, they would be disappointed if it no longer existed.

An interesting observation made during the door-to-door dissemination process was that even though the Emma community is mainly made up of trailer parks with limited outdoor space, many families had small gardens next to their homes. Many potted gardens existed along with small raised beds. This visible trend towards a desire to tend to and care for plants was reflected in question seven. A possible explanation for this observation and result is the understanding of the community demographics and culture. Emma is an immigrant community and comprised of Hispanic, Latino and Eastern European immigrants - many of who have previously had lots of land in their country of origin. One man we spoke with invited us into his garden made up of flowers, a koi pond and a vegetable garden currently being used to grow cilantro. He mainly spoke Spanish but because an interpreter was not present we communicated mainly in English. He explained that in Mexico he had 60 acres he farmed and grew many different crops. People call him a green thumb in America, and he is currently in the landscaping business at three different locations around Asheville, North Carolina. He recently volunteered in the garden this past summer and personally brought over his tiller to till the dry garden beds.

He expressed a sadness that he was only called upon to help out once and shared with us that he sees kids play in the playground beside the garden and take plants from the vine without asking or working in the garden. He suggested we have someone in the garden
everyday to tend to it and patrol the crops. This lived reality of crop theft is something community garden organizers have to deal with nation wide⁵.

In Seattle, Washington’s Danny Woo Community Garden, the gardeners have accepted theft as a part of their every day and night lived experience working in that space. Because the space is easily accessible to the public, accessibility has shown to have some drawbacks as well. At another community garden named Thistle in Seattle, theft has lead to gardener’s becoming upset, frustrated and misunderstanding of one another. Community garden organizers have responded in different ways to theft based upon the structure and diversity of their garden. Some gardeners put up signs to deter theft; others do not confront the situation because “theft” is understood as a real need some people have to access food. (Hou et al., 2009, p. 171)

Cultural customs and language barriers seen in tensions in Seattle gardens echo some misunderstandings in the Emma community garden as well. A few years ago a group of mothers in the MotherRead classes planted some heirloom medicinal flowers and herbs in a small plot in the garden. Unfortunately due to a lack of cultural knowledge about the plants healing properties and appearance, an Asheville church group dug up all of the plants because they thought they were weeds. This misunderstanding lead to a distrust and uneasiness in the mothers who worked hard to plant the herbs and little to no accountability upheld by the outside volunteers. This later lead to mothers expressing interest in harvesting the flowers from growing squash plants for squash blossom quesadillas but then did not come into the garden space to harvest them.

Miscommunication and accountability are two major factors that are being addressed in the coordinating of outside volunteer groups within the garden. Community input on these matters and a more comprehensive understanding of how to respect cultural differences are key aspects in building trust within the Emma community.

Our conversation with the community member with a green thumb was fruitful not only as far as community input but also in terms of physical goods. In addition to inviting us into his garden, he offered us two large handfuls of cilantro with the roots attached from his five flourishing rows growing within his vegetable garden. We thanked him and assured him that we would call him to volunteer within the garden and share the harvest with him in due time. Reflecting back upon this experience, I wish we had been able to speak to him in Spanish. When people speak and share stories in the language they feel most comfortable speaking, they tend to tell more colorful stories and elaborate on different aspects of their experience that might get lost in trying to speak a common language other than their own.

Question eight brought on a multiplicity of answers reflecting a multiplicity of concerns the community has about the space. One person asked for the garden to be more accessible to people with different bodily abilities. We found that people over the age of 50 were interested in the garden but faced different obstacles with mobility and accessibility than would a younger adult. Some people were physically handicapped and

⁵ I choose to keep this statement restricted to nationwide and community gardens because that’s what has been reflected in the case studies I have researched. I have not researched vandalism on a worldwide scale and choose to have my research only reflect what I have researched as opposed to making generalizing statements.
expressed an interest in being a part of the garden but disclosed that their body would not allow them to volunteer to the full extent their heart would like to participate.

Other suggestions for making better use of the space for the community were creating a farmer’s market to bring more visibility and interest to the space, doubling the size to allow for more community space and more of a variety of food grown and creating more outreach into the community, including harvesting bee hives and growing tobacco. The rich answers given had to be condensed in order to write on a survey sheet but the overall ideas expressed reflect a lack of knowledge about the garden but a multitude of ideas and interest in keeping it thriving.

**Sustainability**

The overall question of sustainability in regards to the Emma community garden community involvement initiative is a multilayered answer that needs unpacking to be fully understood.

Sustainability as Andrea Smith explains it in relation to a cooperative community project is a collective job (Smith, 2013). Smith explains in her keynote speech that it’s not up to one person to create and sustain a community project or initiative. It’s up to everyone to work towards a new model of community engagement that benefits all parties mutually and will continue to benefit the community into the future.

The new model of community engagement Smith calls for deviates from the traditional mission model that helps the outsider more than it does the community. Smith calls for an ongoing structure of accountability on behalf of organizers within and outside of the community. A reflexive lens and interpersonal lens are needed to evaluate and work on embracing the principle of accountability. Smith also calls for an ending of an individualized process of accountability and instead calls for a collective process of accountability that acknowledges issues of privilege and critique.

In keeping with Smith’s new model of community engagement, the question of sustainability is collectivized and instead of all of the responsibility falling on one person or group of people, it is instead spread to everyone involved in the process.

The knowledge of the process and intentionality of every step lives within the body of the people who created it but that does not mean that it is trapped within us. It is up to me to share my experience in hopes that it will influence others or encourage others to continue my work or critique it in hopes of improving productivity or best practices. Through sharing my story, I’m doing the work towards sustaining the project’s overall aim and emphasis on learning from the community and working alongside community members. This is in contrast to asserting my own agenda or bias onto a community that I do not belong to in hopes of creating change and feeling good about it (a reversion back to the mission model). I also am not simply swooping in and doing my work and leaving. The fact that I have been working in the community itself for two years and will continue to work on this project after my undergraduate career is a testament to my devotion to the sustainability of the community.

It is up to the other members of the survey team to continue working alongside the community on this project and teach others about the work being done. It is also up to the Family Resource Center in Emma to continue doing the work their doing to make an
impact in their community. By continuing to bring in volunteers and working with them to help in their self-education on intersectional struggles facing such communities as theirs, they are sustaining the conversation and doing the work needed to be done in the garden and community. Members of the Emma community can now choose to either become reengaged in the garden or engaged for the first time in order to work towards sustaining the work begun by the FRCE and survey team.

The work needed to sustain the project is a collective job with many layers of responsibility and accountability that need to intertwine harmoniously in order for an overall understanding of sustainability and implementation to work. The work needs to continue after I leave and the benefits to the community after I leave will be the real measure used to determine if the project was sustainable or not.

**Conclusion**

The overall experience of this project was monumental to my newly emerging understanding of how to do sustainable, conscious, cooperative work alongside a community. Through this project, I was able to intertwine everything I’ve learned at UNC Asheville and weave together my feminist lens and community engagement work. Putting feminist theory into practice was my own personal goal for this project, and I think that by being super aware and intentional throughout the entire process I have satisfied this ambitious goal for myself.

I learned that even if a community space is in existence it needs to be advertised and actively visible in order for people to begin understanding and using it as such. One of the most common sentiments people shared in our door-to-door work is that they thought the garden was a part of the school or the resource center and not open to the community. The outreach work needed to educate the community about the garden was being done through the survey, but it could also be done as a separate project. A suggestion a community member had to remedy this is to create a large sign to help advertise the space as communal to others. The creation of the sign is being addressed and after completion will face the main road through Emma.

The process gave me experience creating a survey, leading a diverse group, helping a community create a product they need and putting feminist theory into practice. Through this work I hope to ultimately help the Emma community and the Family Resource Center, but I also would like to help change the overall process of community engagement by offering a new model based on the pillars of collective accountability, sustainability and support.
References


Appendix 2

For the Protection of Human Subjects
Consent to Participate in a Survey

Thank you for taking time to complete this short survey.
If you have already completed and submitted this survey please do not resubmit it.

Privacy: The following information you share in the survey will be kept confidential. We will not
collect any personal information from you that will identify you by name. The information
collected will only be seen and used by the Children First/CIS Family Resource Center at Emma
in order to better serve the Emma community.

Purpose of Study: The goal of this survey is to find out if people in the Emma community would
like to continue to have a community garden, or if they would like to put something else in that
community space.

What Will Happen During the Survey: During the survey you will be asked nine questions.
Two are yes or no questions and seven are open ended questions.

Your Rights: The decision to participate in this survey is completely up to you. If you would like
to not participate in this survey you are able to stop at any time without any consequences. You
will not be punished or treated any differently if you choose to not participate in this survey.

Costs or Compensation: There are no costs to participate in this survey. There is no
compensation to participate in this survey.

Possible Risks or Discomforts: We are unaware of any personal risks or discomforts you will
experience from taking part in this survey.

Possible Benefits: By participating in this survey you are directly benefiting yourself by
expressing what you would like to see in your community space so that the FRCE can better
serve your community.

If you have any questions about the survey please contact the CF/CIS Family Resource Center
at Emma at (828) 252-4810.

Summary: By filling out and submitting the survey you agree that you have read the above
statement and consent to participating in this survey.
Appendix 3

Emma Community Garden Survey

If you have already completed and submitted this survey please disregard the following. Thank you for your time.

1. Did you know there is a Community Garden in Emma at the Children First/CIS Family Resource Center?
   ___ Yes       ___ No

2. Did you receive any fresh organic vegetables from the Emma Community Garden in the past year? (Ex. As a part of food boxes)
   ___ Yes       ___ No

3. Did you share extra food from the garden with somebody or vice versa?
   ___ Yes       ___ No

4. Do you see the garden as a good use of community space?
   ___ Yes       ___ No

5. What kind of activities would you like to see in the garden space? Ex. Kids activities, workshops, community event etc.

6. Did you volunteer in the garden in the last two years?
   ___ Yes       ___ No

7. How would you feel if the community garden and its produce were to discontinue?
   ___ Disappointed   ___ Neutral   ___ Happy

8. What do you think would make this space a better use for the community?
Did you know?

There is a community garden in your neighborhood and last year we grew...

Yukon Gold potatoes, lettuce, snap peas, squash, cucumbers,

    corn, lavender, jalapeños, Peruvian hot peppers,

ghost peppers, cayenne peppers and tomatillos.

Our community garden is abundant through the warm months and provides organic fresh vegetables for our food box recipients and volunteers. Last summer volunteers worked in the garden at least 30 hours per month during the gardening season. We need your help to keep the community in our community garden!

The community garden is located next to the Children First/CIS Family Resource center at Emma.

Would you like to support us?

- Volunteer in the garden
- Bring your family to volunteer in the garden Children love it!!
- Bring your own tools to the garden.
- Babysit for volunteers.
- Give rides to shuttle volunteers.
- Help teach others about gardening.
- Prepare snacks and drinks for volunteers.
- Provide music for volunteers with an instrument or radio.
- or just come hang out and join us in the garden!

Anyone and everyone is welcome in the garden. The garden is meant to be a community space to share knowledge and ideas. No experience in gardening is necessary in order to volunteer

To sign up to volunteer or for more information on the FRCE please call (828) 252-4810.
Appendix 5

Cuestionario sobre la huerta comunitaria en Emma

Si usted ya ha completado y entregado este cuestionario no necesita hacerlo otra vez. Gracias por su tiempo.

1. Si _______ 2. No _______

¿Sabía que hay una huerta comunitaria en el vecindario de Emma al lado del Centro de Recursos Familiares CF/CIS?

1. Si _______ 2. No _______

¿Recibió algunos vegetales orgánicos frescos de la huerta comunitaria de Emma durante el año pasado? (Ej. en las cajas de comida)

1. Si _______ 2. No _______

¿Compartió comida de la huerta con alguien o alguien compartió con usted?

1. Si _______ 2. No _______

¿Cree que la huerta es el mejor uso de ese espacio comunitario?

1. Si _______ 2. No _______

¿Qué tipo de actividades le gustaría ver en el espacio de la huerta? (Ej. Actividades para los niños, talleres, eventos de la comunidad, etc.)

1. Si _______ 2. No _______

¿Pudo usted ayudarnos en la huerta durante los dos últimos años?

1. Si _______ 2. No _______

¿Cómo se sentiría si la huerta comunitaria y sus productos se suspendieran? (Por favor marque una opción)
- Decepcionado  - Neutral  - Feliz

¿Cuál cree sería un mejor uso de este espacio para la comunidad?

Appendix 6
Sabía usted que...

Hay una huerta comunitaria en su barrio y durante el año pasado cultivamos...
papas, lechuga, guisantes, calabazas, pepinos, maíz, jalapeños, pimientos peruanos calientes, chile fantasma, pimientos, tomatillos, cayena y hierbas como lavanda y menta.

Nuestra huerta comunitaria es abundante durante los meses de verano y provee vegetales orgánico frescos para los recibientes de las cajas de comida así como los voluntarios. El verano pasado los voluntarios trabajaron en la huerta al menos 30 horas cada mes durante la temporada jardinera.

¡Necesitamos de la comunidad para que nuestra huerta sea realmente comunitaria!

La huerta comunitaria de Emma está ubicada al lado del Centro de Recursos Familiares CF/CIS en Emma.

¿Le gustaría apoyarnos con nuestra huerta comunitaria?

Usted puede

- Trabajar en la huerta
- Traer a su familia para trabajar en la huerta (a los niños les encanta!)
- Traer sus propias herramientas.
- Enseñar a otros como mantener una huerta.
- Preparar los bocadillos o bebidas para los voluntarios.
- Tocar música para los voluntarios con un instrumento o traer una radio.
- ¡Visitarnos y disfrutar de la huerta!

Todos son bienvenidos a la huerta comunitaria. La huerta está destinada a ser un espacio para compartir conocimientos e ideas. ¡No es necesaria ninguna experiencia previa para voluntariar en nuestra huerta!

Si desea inscribirse para ser voluntario en la huerta comunitaria o para mayor información sobre el Centro de Recursos Familiares de Emma CF/CIS, por favor llame 828-252-4810.