Eating As If It Really Matters: Teaching The Pedagogy of Food in the Age of Globalization

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Abstract

To survive, we need to eat. And yet eating is much more than just ingesting fuel to keep our bodies going. Besides being a source of sustenance, food is a cause for celebration, an inducement to temptation, a weapon for wielding power, an indicator of well-being, a catalyst for change, and a vehicle for learning. In the age of globalization, these characteristics are magnified and obscured – magnified by the complexities of globalization and obscured by the powerful interests that drive this process forward. Within this global context, this paper describes the development and teaching of an adult education course called The Pedagogy of Food. Born out of the recent upsurge in interest in food-related issues, the course focused on eating as a pedagogical act, and invited students to become part of the global dialogue on food.

Key words: global food system, pedagogy of food, resistance movements, globalization and change.

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Food is a necessity of life – people have to eat every day. And while some of us may take it for granted, many others can barely get enough to survive. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2010), over 1 billion people around the world are estimated to be undernourished – more than at any time since 1970, the earliest year for which comparable statistics are available. At the same time, an equal number of people are obese, as a result of a global food system that pushes cheap, empty calories onto vulnerable populations, not only in the global North, but now also in the global South:

> As affluent western markets reach saturation point, global food and drink firms have been opening up new frontiers among people living on $2 a day in low- and middle-income countries. The world's poor have become their vehicle for growth. (Lawrence, 2011, p. 8)

And yet, food is more than just fuel for the body. In the words of Michael Pollan (2008):

> Food is also about pleasure, about community, about family and spirituality, about our relationship to the natural world, and about expressing our identity. As long as humans have been taking meals together, eating has been as much about culture as it has been about biology. (p. 8)

In the age of globalization, and particularly with the predominance of a global food system, food merits scrutiny by academics and practitioners of all sorts, including adult educators (Sumner, 2013). This article will address the interconnected issues of food, globalization, and adult education through an exploration of the development and teaching of a special-topics course in the Adult Education and Community Development (AECD) Program of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. It will begin with an examination of globalization, including the globalization of food, to set the larger global context for a discussion of the design and teaching of a new course called *The Pedagogy of Food*. It will conclude with some reflections on how globalization plays out within the practice of teaching adult education.

Globalization

Globalization is a fairly recent word in the English language, first appearing in 1959 (Simpson & Weiner, 1989) and gaining momentum toward the end of the twentieth century. While sometimes used to retroactively describe historic waves of colonialism and imperialism, it is mostly associated with current phenomena, such as the spread of neoliberalism, the diffusion of American culture, the overcoming of borders, and the development of worldwide communications. For example, Sharan Merriam (2011) argues that globalization is characterized by a technologically linked worldwide market economy, and by the movement of people, services, goods, and ideas across national borders.

Seen by some as "the process whereby the population of the world is increasingly bonded into a single society" (Albrow, 1993, p. 248), globalization has also been described as a "world system in which powerful, interconnected, stateless corporations nullify national boundaries and

incorporate whole societies as cost-effective sites of production" (Ratner, 1997, p. 271). In the words of Laxer (1995), globalization is a term that "carries much freight" (p. 288) – it implies a kind of worldwide connectedness while hiding an economic agenda that favours transnational corporations. For example, geographer David Harvey (2001) sees globalization not "as an undifferentiated unity but as a geographically articulated patterning of global capitalist activities and relations" (p. 403). For Harvey (2001), "capitalism is a constantly revolutionary force in world history, a force that perpetually re-shapes the world into new and often quite unexpected configurations" (p. 403). He refers to the newest configuration of capitalism as flexible accumulation, which rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption. Turnover time in production, always one of the keys to capitalist profitability, is reduced dramatically under a regime of flexible accumulation, but this accelerated turnover time would be useless unless the turnover time in consumption was also reduced – hence the advent of such consumer trends as 'disposable fashion' and endless electronic upgrades.

It is clear, then, that globalization is a deeply complex phenomenon. Like a mantra or catechism, it is endlessly repeated, but often without a clear understanding of what it means. In order to cut through the vagueness and gain greater understanding, it is important to ask what is being globalized – are women's rights, environmental protections, public education, universal healthcare, and life security being globalized, or are corporate rights, environmental de-regulation, privatized education, cash-and-carry healthcare, and police surveillance being globalized (Sumner, 2008a)?

Regardless of political orientation, it is clear that in the age of globalization, the latter are being favoured over the former. This explains the plethora of negative social, environmental, and economic impacts of globalization found throughout the literature (see, for example, Mander & Goldsmith, 1996; Brecher, Costello & Smith, 2000; Ellwood, 2001; Sumner, 2005).

And yet, globalization has also offered unprecedented opportunities, including the worldwide connectivity that facilitates global communications, increased travel and migration, and the introduction of new music and cultures. None of these opportunities, however, has been more exciting, or more controversial, than food.

The Globalization of Food

Food has long been globalized as "a process of homogenization whereby the cuisines of the world have been increasingly untied from regional food production, and one that promises to make the foods of the world available to everyone in the world" (Kiple, 2001, p.1). Phyllis Thompson (2007) describes how early dispersals were largely due to nomadic migration, with the first systematized long-distance food trading undertaken by Sumer and Egypt three thousand years ago. Over time, she argues:

> Significant agents of dispersal included forces as various as Spice Route merchants, the Mongol and Norman conquests, galleons carrying silver from Spain to the Philippines, colonists and the colonized, and the slave trade. (p. 3)

But it was not until late in the twentieth century that food was formally organized into a

global trading system. At its most basic, the global food system can be understood as an interdependent web of corporate-controlled activities at the global scale that include the production, processing, distribution, wholesaling, retailing, consumption, and disposal of food (Sumner, 2011a). Globalizing food in this manner has produced mixed results, reflecting the complexity of both globalization and food. On the one hand, it has created an interconnected series of catastrophic problems, succinctly described by Rosset (as cited in Albritton, 2009):

> Why must we put up with a global food system that ruins rural economies worldwide, drives family and peasant farmers off the land in droves, and into slums, ghettos and international migrant streams? … That imposes a kind of agriculture that destroys the soil, contaminates ground water, eliminates trees from rural areas, creates pests that are resistant to pesticides, and puts the future productivity of agriculture in doubt? … Food that is laden with sugar, salt, fat, starch, carcinogenic colours and preservatives, pesticide residues and genetically modified organisms, and that may well be driving global epidemics of obesity for some (and hunger for others), heart disease, diabetes and cancer? A food system that bloats the coffers of unaccountable corporations, corrupts governments and kills famers and consumers while wrecking the environment? (p. 200)

On the other hand, globalizing food has resulted in the introduction of new foods to unaccustomed palates, facilitated the spread of ethnic cuisines, and opened up avenues for worldwide social-justice initiatives, such as fair trade. For these, and many other, reasons, the problems, and the opportunities, presented by the globalization of food have sparked the interest of academics, as well as the general public, as evidenced by the proliferation of food-related social movements: the local food movement, the organic farming movement, the fair trade movement, the Slow Food movement, and the food justice movement. Within this larger context of the problems and opportunities of globalization, including the globalization of food and the ensuing interest in issues related to food, I developed a special-topics course called *The Pedagogy of Food.*

Designing *The Pedagogy of Food*

I arrived at the study of food through multiple paths: sustainability, globalization, and agriculture. Based on a graduate background in rural extension, my PhD had focused on the sustainability of rural communities in the age of globalization, and a SSHRC post-doctoral fellowship had leveraged an earlier diploma in agriculture to study the contribution of organic farmers to rural community sustainability. From an involvement in organic agriculture, it was a short step to the study of food, within both adult education and the new interdisciplinary field of food studies, culminating in the co-editorship of the first book in Canada on food studies (Koc et al., 2012).

The methodology or overarching theoretical approach to designing this course is consistent with the critical paradigm, which – as in research design – has the goal of transformation and empowerment, and is concerned with action informed by reflection (Kerka, 2005). And just as critical research begins from the premise that all cultural life is in constant tension between

control and resistance (Thomas, as cited in Creswell, 1994), critical course design posits the same tension, particularly a course about food developed within a larger context of the dialectic between the growing control of the global corporate food system and the burgeoning resistance evidenced by the rise of a wide range of social movements – the Slow Food movement, the local food movement, the organic farming movement, the food justice movement, and the fair trade movement. Working from this perspective, I studied courses devoted to food in other disciplines, reflected on courses I had developed within the field of adult education, and considered the issues I thought students should understand by the time they finished the semester. From inception to execution, the course took shape over approximately a one-year period.

As I began to develop this course, I quickly realized that it had to reflect the excitement that was already building around the possibilities and pitfalls associated with food. In terms of readings, this meant riding the wave of cutting-edge academic research as well as books that used this research to bridge to more general audiences. In other words, I needed to find a balance of scholarly fare and more popular publications. And since I teach from a critical perspective – mainly political economy – I searched for sources that would not accept food at face value, but problematize it. This task was made easier by working in Toronto, which has a vibrant food community (known as 'foodies') and a myriad of people writing about food. In the end, I chose a mix of scholarly and popular articles, including, for example, not only the work of journalist-turned-academic Michael Pollan (2008), but also a scholarly article by Julie Guthman (2007) entitled "Commentary on Teaching Food: Why I am Fed Up with Michael Pollan et al." I also chose two books by local authors, both of whom agreed to come to the class and speak to the students: *The No-Nonsense Guide to World Food* by Wayne Roberts and *Locavore*: *From Farmers' Fields to Rooftop Gardens – How Canadians are Changing the Way We Eat* by Sarah Elton. In this way, I hoped to appeal to the reflexive practitioners who make up the majority of AECD's Masters students, while reaching from the local to the global.

When developing the course description (Sumner 2011b), I anchored it to a statement by Wendell Berry (1990), which has global implications.

> Following the lead of American essayist Wendell Berry, who has argued that eating is an agricultural act, this special-topics course will focus on the idea that eating is also a pedagogical act. What do we learn, and unlearn, from the food we eat? How is the food on our plate connected to such issues as food systems, food politics, food justice, food security, food sovereignty and food movements? Can we consume our way into a more sustainable future, or does this simply reinforce our current unsustainable way of life? This course will explore these and other questions, keeping in mind that food can be a catalyst for learning, resistance and change (p. 1).

The questions were meant to pique students' interest and encourage them to see themselves in the course material, while the past, present, and future of Canadian adult education was alluded to in the phrase, "learning, resistance and change" (Sumner 2011, p. 1). I particularly wanted the course to align with the three main and enduring traditions of Canadian adult education, as identified by Nesbit (2006, p. 17):

1. A set of unyielding social purposes, informed by passion and outrage, and rooted in a concern for the less privileged.

2. A systematic and sustained philosophical and critical analysis that develops the abilities to connect immediate, individual experiences with underlying societal structures.
3. A keen attention to the specific sites, locations, and practices where such purposes and analyses are made real in the lives of Canadians.

These three traditions can be used as benchmarks to assess the past, understand the present, and guide the future of adult education. According to Nesbit (2006), they highlight the fact that

> The practice of adult education in Canada is not the manifestation of a set of abstract concepts, but one part of a broader and vital mission for "really useful knowledge" that helps create a more equitable world at individual, family, community, and societal levels. (p. 17)

The three main and enduring traditions of Canadian adult education dovetail with the critical perspective brought to the course and with the relatively new concept of critical food pedagogies, which entails a range of approaches that are concerned with the kind of social change that addresses power and injustice (Sumner, 2013b in press). They also interface constructively with adult learning theory, and can be understood as criteria for putting theory into practice, while highlighting that "adult learning is more than cognitive processing, that it is a multidimensional phenomenon, and that it takes place in various contexts" (Merriam, 2008a, p. 97). The three traditions were discussed in class, and students were also provided with a handout that they could refer to when writing their final paper.

After writing the course description, I searched the literature for course themes. Like all course themes, I wanted these themes to focus student thinking and help them reach out beyond themselves to issues that affect other people around the world. After much consideration, I chose three course themes:

- Eating is an agricultural act (Berry, 1990)

- Eating is a pedagogical act (Sumner, 2008b)

- Food is an edible dynamic (Belasco, 2007)

When I first came across Wendell Berry's aphorism several years ago, it exploded in my mind, gathering all the disparate knowledge I had acquired regarding agriculture and food, and fusing them into a cycle with no end. It made the links from field to fork, and brought a holism to my thinking that had not existed before. I hoped it would do the same for students, especially since such holistic understanding is important when studying issues like food and globalization. In a global food system, people often experience what Kneen (as cited in Koc et al., 2012) referred to as distancing – the separation between consumers and the sources of their food – to such an extent that many of them assume that food comes from a store, not a farm. Berry's words expose this distancing and encourage us to participate more fully in knowing where our

food comes from.

From Berry's aphorism, I determined that eating has many other facets. It is a social act because a great deal of food preparation and consumption is done in social groups, particularly families. Eating is also a political act, not only when people participate in boycotts and refuse to eat something (such as the boycott against Nestlé for promoting its infant formula over breastfeeding in developing countries where the water mixed with the formula is not safe to drink) but also when they participate in boycotts and preferentially eat something (such as deliberately choosing local food or organic food). Eating is also a cultural act, which can pass on cultural knowledge such as preparing food and marking celebrations. It is an economic act, which can support a vibrant local economy or decimate it. And eating is an environmental act, which can contribute to sustainability by reducing pesticides through choosing organic food or eliminating the carbon emissions associated with imported food by eating local food.

Most importantly for adult educators, however, eating is a pedagogical act:

> It involves teaching, learning, inclusion, enculturation, etiquette, environmental awareness, sharing, alliances, celebration, and transcendence. Food catalyzes the potential for experiential learning, social learning, lifelong learning, transformative learning, informal learning, incidental learning, embodied learning and collective learning. It can develop ecological literacy, promote indigenous knowledge and invite questions about what sustainability can mean in practice, how to implement it and the role of adult education in the implementation process. (Sumner, 2008b, p. 35)

In many ways, conceptualizing eating as a pedagogical act can help to promote the kind of global consciousness so necessary in the age of globalization. It can make us aware of the structures and processes that shape our food system, which can open the door to questions about other vital global issues, such as water and energy.

Belasco's (2007) famous quote that food is an edible dynamic seemed appropriate for the third theme, reflecting his understanding that food can become "a way of integrating the world, seeing the social consequences of private actions, and reminding us of our moral responsibilities... It is a visceral, lived daily link between the personal and the political" (Belasco, 2005, p. 217). His quote highlights the fact that food is a powerful, fluid, and ever-changing force that can promote integrative thinking and link the individual with society. Overall, the three themes encompass the idea that food can be a catalyst for an integrative, global vision that can critique our current food system and model a more sustainable one.

In terms of evaluation, I developed four assignments that I hoped would stimulate students' thinking regarding food and learning. The first assignment was a personal reflection worth 10% and due the second week of class. It was designed to encourage students to begin reflecting about food, to make connections and to think both locally and globally. For the assignment, they were required to include a number of parameters: the role of food in their life, their understanding of what we can learn from food, and their vision of the role that food can play in the search for a more sustainable world.

The second assignment was a group presentation worth 30% and scheduled during the last

part of the semester. Group assignments are not only an opportunity for group members to learn about a particular subject, but also a chance for the class to learn as the group presents their material. Students are encouraged to consider group presentations as teaching and learning opportunities, and to employ adult education techniques during their presentation, such as class discussions, break-out groups and learning activities, while mixing their presentation modes. For this assignment, students were asked to present an analysis of a program or organization that focused on food, using a critical lens of their choice. The program or organization could be local, regional, national, or global, as long as it dealt with food. The parameters for evaluation included a description of the program/organization (e.g., its history, mandate, etc.), a discussion of the adult education aspect of the program or organization, a discussion linking the program or organization to at least one of the food issues discussed in the course (e.g., globalization), and a critique of the overall effectiveness of the program or organization, including a discussion of whether or not it met the criteria of the course themes.

The third and fourth assignments were tied together. The third assignment involved preparing a poster, and giving a ten-minute presentation on the subject of their final paper. Each poster needed to include a mix of print and pictures, arranged in such a way that it became a teaching tool. The parameters for the assignment was that the poster should convey a central theme, message, or idea; make connections to course readings; portray an overall vision of the pedagogy of food; and show creativity and originality. Worth 20% of the final grade, these poster presentations were scheduled for the last two days of classes, with the aim of helping the students to reflect on what they had learned during the semester.

The fourth assignment was the final paper – worth 40% of their final grade and due on the last day of class. Using the course readings as a basic resource, students were asked to write a final paper that would concentrate on one theme of the pedagogy of food, such as globalization. The parameters for evaluation asked them to demonstrate mastery of the course readings, define and discuss the theme of choice, link the readings to the theme of choice, explain the role of adult education in the theme of choice, and include their vision of the role that food could play in the search for a more sustainable world.

Teaching *The Pedagogy of Food*

Developing a new course is always a gamble – it is sometimes difficult to really know if students will actually sign up for it. But students were genuinely interested, and on the first day of the semester I faced a class of 21 students – one more than the quota for a Masters-level course at OISE. What was clear from the outset was that food was an exciting topic for them. From the moment they walked in the door until the end of class three hours later, they could not stop talking about food and food issues.

Class discussion was enlivened by the fact that OISE students themselves are a product of globalization. To begin with, they come from a wide variety of backgrounds, reflecting the multicultural mix that makes Toronto such an exciting city. Many students are immigrants, or children of immigrants, and they brought their global food stories to the classroom. They also brought all kinds of food – spontaneously and joyfully – and shared it with everyone, along with stories about the food. For example, one woman was a Russian emigrée and brought Russian bread to class one day, to show us what she grew up eating. In addition, many OISE students have travelled to various parts of the world for work or pleasure – cheap travel being one of the

by-products of the hitherto cheap oil that has fueled globalization. They brought their travel experiences, and their food adventures, to the classroom.

In the participatory atmosphere of the Masters-level classroom at OISE, where we build on each other's knowledge and life experiences, I seldom lecture. But for this class I did give some guidelines around key issues. In particular, I explained neoliberalism, as it provides the theoretical underpinnings for globalization, as it currently exists. In addition, I discussed political economy as a useful framework for analyzing the global food system and modeling more sustainable alternatives. Political economy can help graduate students to develop a critical attitude and learn to take into account the environmental, social, cultural, economic, and political forces that have shaped all the steps in bringing food from around the world to their plates. To illustrate the importance of such analysis and modeling, I also carried out an exercise in commodity fetishism. I held up an orange in front of the class – an iconic product of the global food system – and asked, "If this orange could speak, what would it tell you?" After a pause, the students began to offer answers – how it was grown, whether it was sprayed with pesticides, who picked it, what they were paid, how many people had handled it, how long it had been travelling. Such an exercise helps to broaden and deepen their thinking about food, and other global commodities, and start to ask questions and lay the groundwork for social change.

I invited a number of speakers to class, who had firsthand knowledge of both local and global food issues. The first speaker was Mike Schreiner, the leader of the Green Party of Ontario, who had been on the ground floor of some of the progressive changes in the food system both in Toronto and in the province of Ontario. A PhD student, Charles Levkoe, who had written a seminal article on learning democracy through food justice movements, led the students in a wide-ranging discussion regarding structural issues associated with food and globalization. Sarah Elton, who wrote a book about her travels across Canada in search of local food, made links for the students between the personal and the global. And Wayne Roberts talked about the global food system, punctuated by stories of his research trips to examine food issues in other countries.

One day, a student led the class in a mindful eating exercise. She had participated in such an exercise at a recent Buddhist retreat, and wanted to share the experience with the rest of us. First, she handed out small squares of Wonder Bread, and asked everyone to relax and just observe the square. Then she told us to pick it up, feel it, weigh it in our hand, smell it and listen to it. Finally, she instructed us to put it in our mouths and chew it slowly, considering the flavour and texture. She then handed out small squares of whole wheat bread that I had made at home, and took us through the same exercise. We then discussed the differences between an industrial product like Wonder Bread – what Pollan (2008) would label "an edible food-like substance" (p. 1) – and the homemade bread with its six wholesome ingredients.

On the last day of class, everyone brought a snack with a story, whether it was a comfort food, a dish their grandmother used to make, a cultural specialty, or something they had learned to cook when travelling. We shared the food and the stories as we engaged with the last round of posters.

Reflections on Teaching *The Pedagogy of Food*

Food provides a platform to think, to teach, and to learn. It is a vehicle for inquiry and an entrée into larger issues, such as globalization. In this way, food is the perfect focus for a course at any level. Developing and teaching a Masters course in this subject area has allowed me to share what I know about food while learning new ideas, practices, and critiques from students who bring a rich set of experiences to the classroom. Their learning, in turn, was reflected in the assignments they carried out.

The first assignment produced thoughtful personal reflections about food in their life and in the world, including heartfelt stories about food memories and food fears. Some wrote of struggles with food and weight, and the social pressure for thinness that made their relationship to food ambivalent at best. Others wrote about how their grandparents grew vegetables in the back yard, remembering the simple pleasure of eating food fresh from the garden. Everyone bemoaned the global food system, and the hunger and obesity problems it creates.

The group projects represented a range of scales. Two groups presented on local food justice centres (The Stop and FoodShare) and one group chose a regional food-coordinating organization (Sustain Ontario). A fourth group looked to the United States and taught us about the sustainable urban agriculture project, Farm to Family, and a fifth group took on Coca-Cola – a potent symbol of globalization. Discussions during and after each presentation went well beyond the allotted time, and linked the projects with larger issues connected to the globalization of food.

The posters were more successful than I thought possible. We set up the classroom like an art gallery, so we could walk from poster to poster and listen while each person gave their ten-minute presentation. On their appointed day, students unfurled their creations and hung them on the walls. Although just a snapshot of their final paper, the posters became an opportunity to share their research with fellow students. Many posters dealt with issues associated with globalization: food in a cultural context, power in the global food system, the collapse of the global fishery, the global implications of local microfinancing initiatives, and urban agriculture in the global South and the global North. Others chose themes with global implications: gender and food, women and sustainable food production, food and indigenous sovereignty movements, cancer and the food system, food literacy, and food and climate change. The posters became a multifaceted learning experience for everyone, especially in ways that I had not expected. When I asked each person what they had learned about themselves when making the poster, the responses were wide ranging. Some found that they could not make the poster without first completing their final paper, while others discovered that the poster became an essential organizing tool that helped them to write their paper. Some learned how much they enjoyed working in a different medium, while one or two realized they hated making posters. Some appreciated the chance to shine as visual learners, and others struggled to find their creative side.

The final papers, in turn, were as exciting as the posters, and a pleasure to read. The students had worked with relish and outdone themselves in their fields of inquiry. From Nunavut to India and from urban centres to the depths of the ocean, they had researched and assembled a wealth of knowledge. The course evaluations reflected their engagement – full of enthusiastic comments, thoughtful suggestions, and positive feedback for what I hope will become a permanent course.

Teaching *The Pedagogy of Food* has helped me to honour the three main and enduring

traditions of adult education (Nesbit, 2006) – traditions I respect and believe in. It incorporated a set of unyielding social purposes, informed by passion and outrage with respect to the global food system, and many readings and discussions were rooted in a concern for the less privileged. The theorizing about neoliberalism and political economy helped students to develop the abilities to connect immediate, individual experiences with underlying societal structures. And the ongoing dialectic between the local and the global, and the personal and the social, made these purposes and analyses real in the lives of the students. Connecting *The Pedagogy of Food* with the three traditions confirms Merriam's (2008b) observation that "adult learning is at the heart of all adult education practice" (p. 1). Such learning can be achieved through several strategies: "encouraging reflection and dialogue," "connecting new learning with learners' previous experience," and "expanding our repertoire of instruction to include creative and artistic modes of inquiry" (Merriam, 2008a, p. 98). All of these strategies are enhanced by food – it is, in essence, a lubricant for the learning process.

Teaching *The Pedagogy of Food* also highlighted some of the primary themes that run through adult education. First, it connected to social movements and social movement learning by making links to food-related social movements and what people inside and outside the movements can learn (see Hall, 2006). Second, it bolstered the subfield of environmental adult education through discussions of organics, pesticide use, and land stewardship. Third, it introduced the concept of food literacy, which fits strategically within the larger study of literacy in the field of adult education. Fourth, it made links to community development by exploring community food programs. Fifth, it provided new insights about the dynamism of adult education by linking it to the emerging interdisciplinary field of food studies. And sixth, it opened opportunities for many kinds of adult learning, such as transformative learning, spiritual learning, somatic learning and narrative learning.

And finally, teaching *The Pedagogy of Food* illustrates the importance of Merriam's (2011) focus on lifelong learning in the age of globalization. For Merriam, such learning is now life-long and life-wide and occurs, not only in educational institutions, but in the workplace, cyberspace, the community, and one's family. Food can be a powerful catalyst for lifelong learning, not only as a portal to other vital issues, but also in its own right. In many ways, the global food system has lead us down an unsustainable path and we have to learn our way out of our current environmentally, socially, and economically destructive practices and learn our way in to more sustainable ways of life.

Conclusion

Over the years, the global food system has distanced us from our food, and it is time to get reacquainted with it. Designing and teaching a course about food has strengthened my relationship with the food I eat – it is, after all, *The Intimate Commodity* (Winson, 1993). The course has also profoundly affected my practice of teaching adult education within global contexts: it has rekindled my commitment to adult education, helped me forge productive alliances with other disciplines and social movements, and projected the three main and enduring traditions of adult education (Nesbit, 2006) into the future. It has also been recognized as a pioneering effort in the field of food pedagogies (Flowers & Swan, 2012).

Teaching this course has made me realize that to continue to be relevant within a global context, adult education must engage with issues that capture the hearts and minds – and, in this

case, stomachs – of learners. This does not mean jumping on every passing fad, but it does entail a deep engagement with the phenomena of globalization.

Globalization – whether we agree with it or not – is here to stay. While we may not like its present form, we can work to improve it. Adult education can be one of the means to facilitate this change, with food as the spark that kindles the lifelong learning to make us thoughtful and reflective practitioners, and eaters.

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