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CHAPTER 4

PAR Praxes for Now and Future Change
*The Collective of Researchers on Educational
Disappointment and Desire*

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“CREDD is the place to interrogate the education system that turned its back
on me.”
(Alexis)

“CREDD makes me know that I was sitting down when I should have been
standing.”
(Jodi-Ann)

Our Collective

The Collective of Researchers on Educational Disappointment and Desire (CREDD) came together in early 2006 to be a space for youth participatory action research (YPAR) on education in New York City. We are united by our disappointment in the New York City public school system and our desire to effect political and educational change in school policies and practices. A group of 12 youth aged 16 to 22, CREDD researchers are lower and working class, ethnically diverse, live all over the city, and represent a wide range of educational experiences, although many identify as being *pushed out* from our former schools, and all of us have felt unwelcome at school.



Figure 4.1 The CREDD seal. Created by Sarah Quinter.

We have developed a critique of a school system that was never intended for us in the first place. Our group defines itself against racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, the criminalization of poor people, and push-out practices in New York City public high schools. We are in favor of schooling that is rigorous, accessible, and free.

“CREDD is exactly what it sounds like. Unique, questioning, and a word that makes you ask *what?*” (Melody). CREDD is different from other research spaces because we are not an academic or government space; usually the academy or government has a monopoly on research. We fill different roles based on our interests and talents, where in other research spaces, power is usually only held by those with the most research experience. Finally, we engage in our own process of decision making, whereas other participatory spaces may rely on a one-person, one-vote decision making model that will always muffle the voices of those in numeric minority (Smith, 2000).

CREDD’s approach to PAR holds that those whose backs research has historically been carried on are instead researched *alongside*. In our work, PAR has been a way for young men and women who are marginalized by race and ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality to not only demand access to the conversations, policies, theories, and spaces which we/they have been systematically denied, but better yet, demand that our research informs and inspires these efforts. CREDD’s approach to PAR is concerned with what knowing is and where knowing comes from, believing that it is often those at the bottom of social hierarchies who know the most both about social

oppression and also about the radical possibilities toward redressing domination (Anyon, 2005; Fine et al., 2007).

Further, CREDD understands PAR as *politic*—an embedded and outloud critique of colonization, racism, misogyny, homophobia and heterosexism, classism, and xenophobia in our society, in our research sites, amongst our research collective, and within the larger and historical research community—rather than a fixed set of methods. At the same time, CREDD takes method seriously, crafting each instrument to be interactive and pedagogical, drawing from qualitative and quantitative traditions, and growing our own legacy of hybridized methods utilizing visual arts, theater, and schoolyard-games.

For us, PAR means that:

- There is transparency on all matters of the research;
- The research questions are co-constructed;
- The project design and design of research methods are collaboratively negotiated and co-constructed;
- Analysis is co-constructed; and
- The products of the research are dynamic, interactive, and are prepared and disseminated in collaboration.

Our work stands in opposition to the kinds of research that have been and continue to be used for domination. Everyone is involved in developing research questions, project design, data collection, data analysis, and product development. Everyone is responsible for making our space a participatory space. We do not erase ourselves from our work, and our whole selves are involved because lots of kinds of skills and thinking are needed, not just one. By action, CREDD means demanding justice, starting a conversation, taking a stand in order to build power, and redefining reality. Action happens all throughout the research, not just at the end. By research, we mean looking again in order to make our own interpretations, breaking silences, and reclaiming spaces that have been used against us. Finally, research means refusing to accept analyses that paint us as lazy, crazy, or stupid.

I’ve learned that it can be more helpful for me to look for people asking similar questions than to count on those offering answers. I came across CREDD and saw a group of people who were also searching for answers about education and youth achieving self-determination. I’d never done research before and had never even heard of PAR. I ended up joining a diverse group of young researchers who are trying something that hadn’t been done before.

(Sarah Quinter)

The Long-Short Herstory of CREDD

We co-founded CREDD in February 2006, though the events in our individual lives were bringing us together long before then. For instance, Alexis, Jovanne, Sarah, and Maria (aka Bacha) were suffocating in their former schools; Eve was working with brilliant youth organizers who were desperately dissatisfied with school; Melody and Jamila were seeing loved ones struggle to keep their heads above school waters.

We came together at first to do a research project that attended to the overuse and abuse of the General Educational Development (GED) credential as a disguise for pushing out unwanted students in New York City high schools; this project became our Gate-ways and Get-aways Project. Some of us had met over the years; others we met when we put out a CREDD call for youth researchers throughout various New York City-based listservs. In some ways, it was Eve's idea to come together, but as we worked in our two-week meetings to create our research questions, develop our project design, design our research tools, and to learn together how to do research, any feelings of her ownership of our group and our process disappeared, and we all became co-founders. We collected most of our data over summer 2006, but our data collection spread over nine months and concluded in December.

Also toward the end of 2006, we began consulting on other youth PAR projects, and began our involvement with a larger citywide initiative to replace mayoral-controlled schooling with human rights-based schooling. In early 2007, we facilitated a participatory action research project with another group of local youth, the newly formed Youth Researchers for a New Education System (YRNES). This project seeks to document students' visions for school governance, schooling based on collaboration rather than competition and control, and the purpose(s) of schooling. Concluding in the summer of 2007, YRNES' project will involve over 1,000 surveys and three focus groups.

We're not sure what the future holds for CREDD. We know that it has become an important space for us, and that a space for participatory action research with youth on education is a valuable space for our city and our public school system.

The Gate-ways and Get-aways Project

We call our first research project the Gate-ways and Get-aways Project because we are interested in the GED both as a gateway to higher education and employment, and as a get away from dehumanizing high schools. The GED is a credential of General Educational Development that was never intended for widespread use as an alternative to a high school diploma. In the United States and especially in New York City, both numbers of GED earners and the numbers of youth GED earners have increased in the past

decade. The pre-existing research on the GED often questioned the value of the GED credential in higher education and employment—but never asked youth why they continue to flock to “a depleted credential.”

We believe that the increase in numbers of youth GED earners in New York City, even in the face of a possibly diminished value of the GED, can be linked to what it feels like to be in high school. To really understand this link, we needed to do participatory action research. Our collective, which includes youth GED earners, designed the Gate-ways and Get-aways Project to privilege the experiences of youth GED earners and seekers in order to challenge mainstream attitudes toward the GED as being an empty credential, and to understand the lived rather than perceived value of the GED. Seeking out the lived value helped us see how federal mandates (such as No Child Left Behind) and state-mandated exit exams (like the NY Regents) put pressure on schools to push out students who would not do well on standardized tests: Youth of color and poor youth (many who do not feel like school was made for them anyway) are explicitly and implicitly pushed out and pushed toward the GED. Many youth are misinformed about the GED process and mistakenly think that they will be swapping one set of tests for another without having to attend four years of high school. Our participatory action research has taught us that the value of the GED lies less in it being a gateway to higher education and employment and more in being a get-away from inhospitable high schools.

Research Questions, Areas of Inquiry

Rather than specifically worded research questions, we have designed this project around four interconnected areas of inquiry, so that each one of us can use our own words to describe our work, depending on our audience or the situation. The areas of inquiry in the Gate-ways and Get-aways Project are: the perceived and lived values of the GED; push-out practices in New York City public high schools; educational alternatives to state exit exam-based curricula; and meritocracy and the myth of the American Dream. Each one of these four areas of inquiry is full enough to be the source of many years of research. However, our commitment to interconnectivity, our urgency of critique of the pre-existing literature on the GED, and our genuine curiosity compelled us to craft our research to ask questions in the territories of each of these areas, and in the intersections between them.

Research Methods

We have recently begun using the metaphor of a watercolor box to talk about our methods. We try to use the best color to paint the picture we

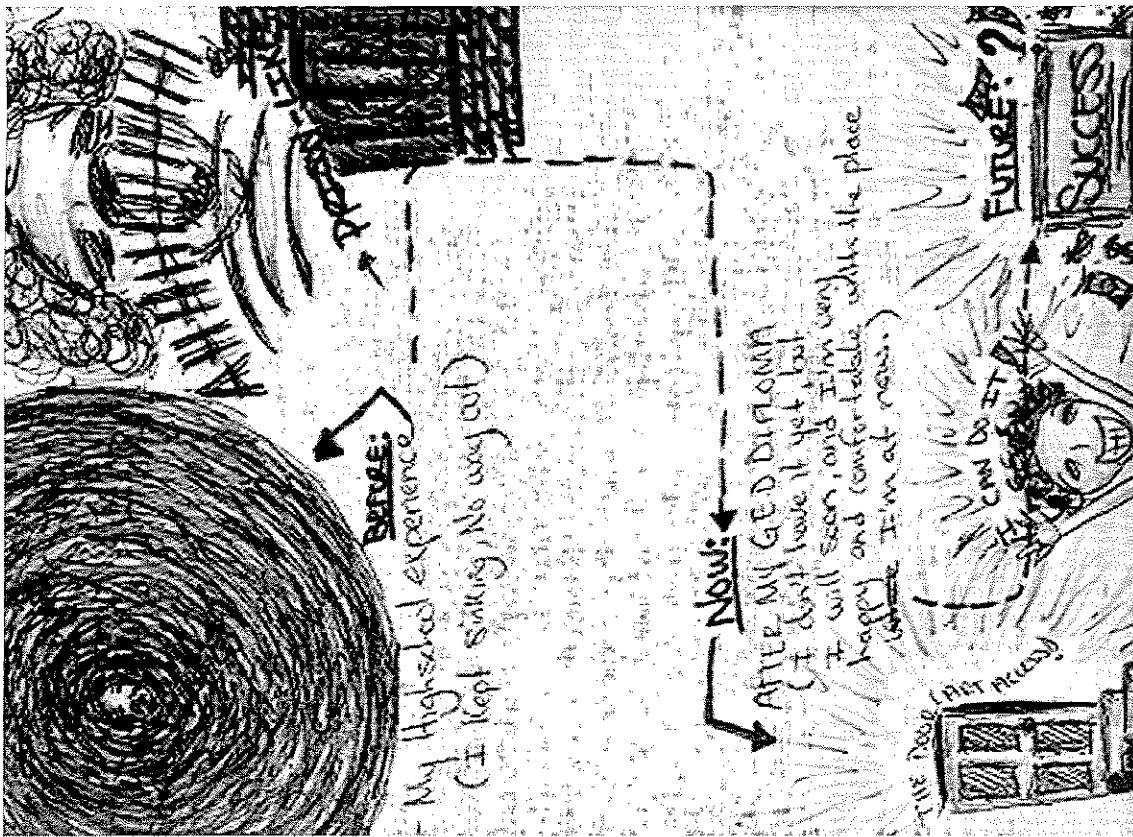


Figure 4.2 Educational map created by focus group participant and GED seeker Dominick Sepulveda.

are trying to see, and use the colors in harmony, rather than muddying the image or weakening the paper by using too many colors at once. In this paint box, our primary colors are individual interviews and group interviews and focus groups. These are the foundations of our research, and our painting would be incomplete without them.

Our secondary colors have been surveys, opinion polls, cold calls, memoirs, archival research, and mapping. These colors can be blended with one another, but especially the primary colors to create light and shadow, depth and complexity in our work.

We have also mixed colors to create new colors, or new methods such as borrowing activities from Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed, popular education's problem tree, and schoolyard games such as the slambook and board games. These hybrid colors come alive in participatory action research and are indeed some of the most radical and compelling examples of the possibilities of participatory action research.

A final extension to the metaphor: water, participation, is the stuff that moves the pigment from box to brush to page, that makes the stroke translucent or opaque.

In the Gate-ways and Get-aways Project, we carefully designed each of our methods to be deeply participatory, interactive, and pedagogical. We approached the project with genuine questions (our areas of inquiry) and with a feeling of genuine urgency. Our counterparts are being pushed out from school, and in many cases the GED is being abused as a cover for it, right now, this minute. In some of our encounters with research participants, especially youth, such as the interviews, survey, and focus groups, we made sure that they would feel like experts and collaborators in our analysis and theorizing on the GED and push-out experiences. In our over 40 hour-long interviews with youth GED earners and seekers, and with adults who earned GEDs in their youths but are now in their thirties, we began each discussion by asking the interviewee to tell us what they wanted us to be sure to carry with us. The interviews invited participants to recollect and rethink, to try ideas on and set forth new ideas, to imagine, and to advise.

In one of our three distinct focus groups (which we did three times each with youth GED earners and seekers), we used an individual educational journey mapping exercise as a platform for participants to discuss the crossroads of the lived and perceived value of the GED. In another focus group on push-out practices in NYC public high schools, we used a problem tree exercise (Ferreira and Ferreira, 1996) and an exercise from Boal's (2002) Theater of the Oppressed in order to co-theorize with our participants the connections between being and feeling unwelcome in school and attitudes and beliefs about young people and schooling and systematic and ideological supports of pushing out unwanted students.

mapping
exercise

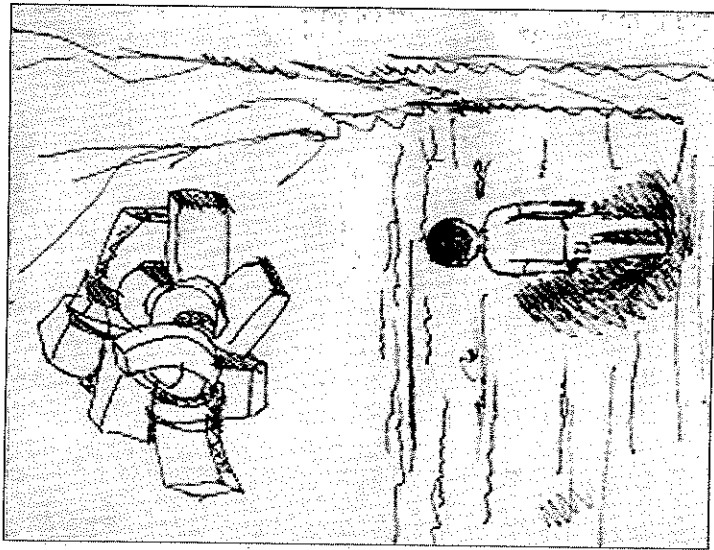


Figure 4.3 Educational map created by focus group participant and GED seeker Zhi Huang.

Our third focus group utilized group mapping of now and future life satisfaction, and a conversation-starting a CREDD-revamped version of pop-o-matic trouble in order to together think through the limits of the meritocracy and American Dream narratives.

Even our survey was designed to be interactive and made use of a range of survey instruments that were decidedly unlike school tests. We created two versions, a full-length, 45-minute version that included many short answer questions, which was completed by 100 youth, mostly GED earners and seekers; and an abridged 10-minute version that contained fewer short answer questions, completed by 400 youth, in-school and out-of-school alike.

Some of our methods, such as the cold calls to college admissions officers and employers, our archival research, and our slambooks, were created in order to expose biases against the GED. We have completed over 200 cold calls to representatives of higher education and employers to interrogate the equivalency of the GED to a high school diploma, but more, to call attention in these offices to their unequal treatment of GED earners, despite professed equal regard.

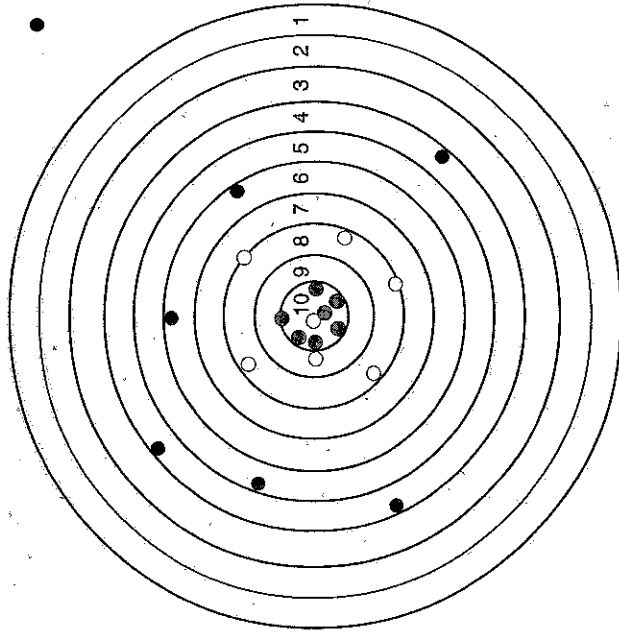


Figure 4.4. Reproduction of one of our "Satisfaction in Your Life" group maps. Focus group participants place green stickers (shown here in black) to mark their current experiences of satisfaction in their lives. As the participants place the stickers, they explain why they chose the location. In the next round, participants place yellow stickers (shown here in white) to mark their anticipated satisfaction in life at the age of 25. Again, participants share their reasoning with the group. In the final round, participants use orange stickers (shown here in gray) to mark their anticipated satisfaction in life at the age of 45, sharing their logic for why with the group. The mapping exercise is completed after the CREDD researchers facilitate a group discussion to answer the question, "What is a satisfied life?" in order for the group to theorize together what the scale of 1–10 on the map means.

Our archival research meant reading everything we could get our hands on, including legal documents, policy documents, academic articles, newspaper clippings, theory, and fiction, in order to make an informed critique of the current framing of the value of the GED and the invisibility of the push-out experience, slipping in and out of power discourses to fulfill our own needs.

We produced and slid 30 slambooks into asking questions about young people's views and their schools and politics schools and youth circles. These notebooks covered in youth ideas were meant to be found and read, to be inviting to youth and provocative to adults. As we anticipated, many of the slambooks were confiscated, but we received 15 of them back.

Finally, some of our methods we created for ourselves. Over six months, all of us created educational memoirs, and as a closing to our data collection period, we shared them with one another in an evening of food and

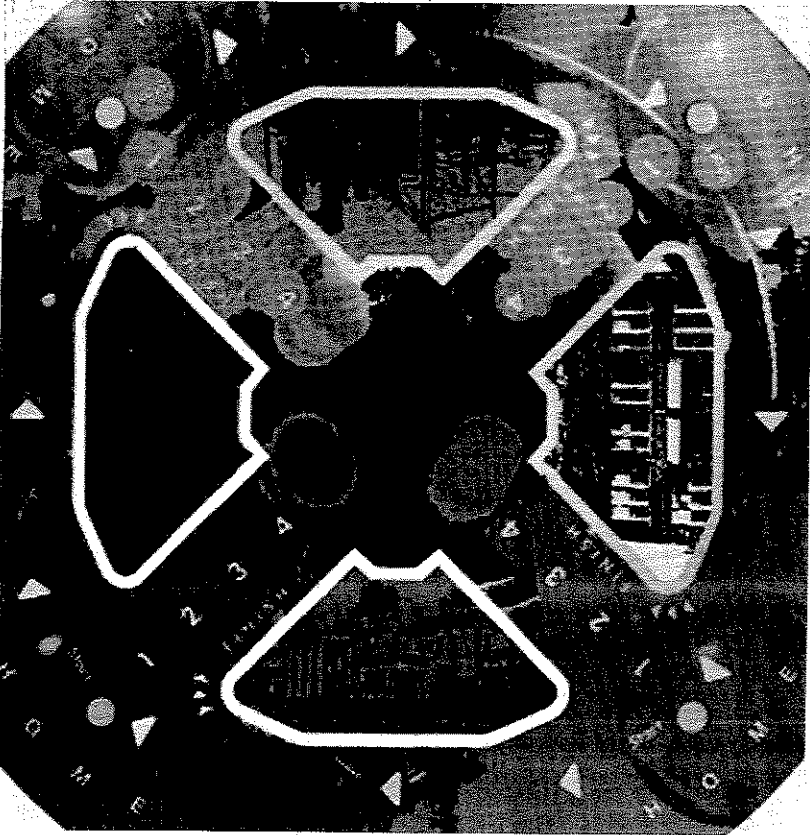


Figure 4.5 CRED's meritocracy board game. Players are divided into four differently resourced teams represented by game board colors. Red (left) = large one-family home on Long Island, owned for generations; Yellow (bottom) = rented apartment in a two-family home in Jamaica, Queens; Green (right) = new urban-feeling suburb outside of Newark, NJ; Blue (top) = a project in the South Bronx. Players try to reach all the way around the board to their "American Dreams" without getting tripped up by health, housing, education, policing, or social issues or without getting squeezed out or gentrified by opponents. This game is followed by a facilitated discussion on the fantasies of meritocracy and implications on schooling. Artwork by Sarah Quinter.

sharing. One of our researchers has developed a spin-off q-sort project which she describes as a q-sorta. We have also engaged in a self-reflection process in order to research our own dynamics in working together.

Communicating Our Findings

The products of this research will include a youth-to-youth guide to the GED, a youth-gear website that shares our work, and an extensive community talking tour. We have appeared on radio shows, on numerous panels,

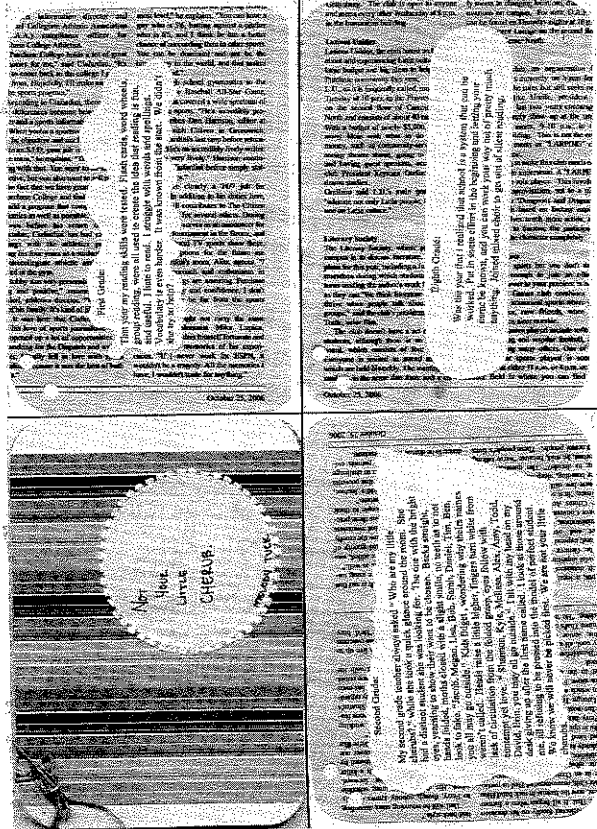


Figure 4.6 Excerpts of an educational memoir by Meloy Tuck. Handmade book (4" x 6") using decorative paper, newsprint, text, and twine.

and have joined a coalition with other organizations on issues pertaining to out-of-school youth, a coalition whose work is informed by our findings.²

Common threads

Gate-ways and Get-aways was an ambitious research project, and knowing that our own experiences of disenchantment with schooling are felt exponentially by many other youth in New York City, we sometimes think of it as com/passionate ambition. Our process matters. Sondra Perl writes about the "felt sense" in writing as being, "the feelings or non-verbalized perceptions that surround the words, or what the words already present evoke" (Perl, 1980: 367). The notion of the felt sense really resonates with us, not only in writing, but especially in our research design, and now in our data analysis. "The felt sense is always there, within us. It is unifying, and yet, when we bring words to it, it can break apart, shift, unravel, and become something else . . . What is elicited then is not solely the product of a mind, but of a mind alive in a living, sensing body" (Perl, 1980: 367).

Through everything, whether we are getting surveys done, doing a focus group, or interviewing youth, our felt senses come into play. My

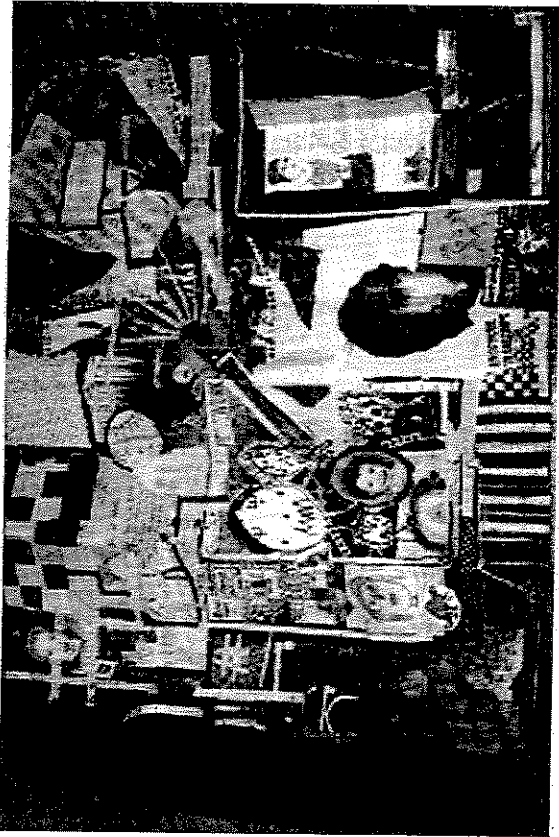


Figure 4.7 Educational memoir by Sarah Quinter. Handmade map (2 x 1.5), using a map, paint, chalk, pencil, text, found objects, journal cuttings, childhood drawings, and school assignments, and other bits of life collected over many years.

felt sense is very important in my work, and I am aware of it when doing interviews with other youth who have been pushed out. I can relate: When I was in school I don't remember actually meeting with my counselor but I remember the late letters coming home. My counselors and teachers couldn't care less about what was going on for me at home and the reasons why I was late or absent, and that is a memory that is alive in me while I am doing research. The emotion, the frustration, and anger that came out in my interviews were electric.

(Alexis Morales)

We have come to our project by attending to our felt senses, by listening to our hunches, by being unafraid to ask each other to say more at the point where our felt senses may be just about to break apart, to care about words and ideas, to try things on, to say what feel like small things out loud and listen to the echoes. In this way, we engage collectively in reconstructing our own realities. We engage together in/toward self-determination and re-cognition. We are constantly switching between inhabiting this current world and the world we want to inhabit, struggling to clarify our vision, like shaking a TV antenna to get a clear picture.

As CREDD researchers, each of us has an intimate, nuanced understand-

ing of what it means to work for social justice, and what each of us means by social change. Broadly, CREDD operates on the premise that our educational system is set up to maintain the status quo, including race, class, and gender divisions. We realize that reforming the school system and challenging these various forms of oppression are linked struggles, so our approach to social justice focuses on challenging the status quo through PAR, and at the same time modeling the kinds of interactions we want to have.

Many times throughout this work, each of us has said that *we have been waiting our whole lives be a part of a space like this*. We have wondered aloud what an amazing difference it would have made for our schools to be sites of collective inquiry and meaning making, as CREDD has become for us. Our schooling has marked us, but this experience as CREDD has marked us too.

The Roles of Theory

The Gate-ways and Get-aways Project and all of our works are influenced by indigenous theories of sovereignty and interconnectivity (Deloria, 1988; Grande, 2004), by critical theories (Anzaldúa, 2002; Crenshaw, 2000; Matsuda, 2002; Moraga, 1993; Morrison, 1970), and by theories of the rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) and third-space (Soja, 1996). We think of CREDD itself as a third-space to graduation and the streets. These theories help us understand how our work negotiates pre-existing systems of domination and exclusion and also experiences of disillusionment and degradation at the behest of hegemonic schooling. These experiences of educational disappointment and desire become our data along with the data our methods have yielded. Most importantly, we use these theories as a jump-off point to do our own theorizing, to research and theorize back (Tuck, in preparation).

PAR Praxes for Now and Future Change

Though throughout our work we have been writing our own feature articles and memoirs, this chapter, written over four months, is the first piece we have written collaboratively. We began by deciding that we would use the space of this chapter to collaboratively explore (by writing together, by employing writing as a method) some of the important moments in our work together; this chapter focuses on our collective rather than our work with those who participated in our data gathering. We identified teaching moments that shifted our understanding of our work. Each author wrote about one or two of these moments from her perspective. Next, one or two of us wrote back to the author and our readers in order to contextualize these moments in CREDD's work.

Then, together, we decided to organize the moments and the chapter around three discussions, three praxes: (1) tailoring research to be ours; (2) reclaiming, recovering, carving out personal/political space; and (3) cultivating and sustaining our commitments to our research. We understand praxis as the clasped hands of reflection/theory and action/practice “directed at the structures to be transformed” (Freire, 1997: 107). The three praxes we describe in this chapter reveal some of the difficult, inspiring, and teaching inner workings of our group, how we thought together and apart about them, how we continue to think about them, and how they have shaped our continued work together.

The three praxes can also be described as praxes toward sovereignty (see also Tuck, 2007). Still too new an idea for us to fully explicate here, we are challenged and inspired by Sandy Grande’s (2004) charge of indigenous sovereignty as a prerequisite to democracy. Recognizing that democratic practice is widely understood as a tenant in/of PAR, but also aware of the ways in which “democracy” has been wielded in the United States and across the globe as a weapon of mass occupation and assimilation (see also Fine et al., 2007), we have strived to use our collective space as a space to engage in what exactly we mean by democratic practice, and what a democratic practice that honors and supports self-determination might look like. This work is in service to larger theoretical conversations concerning sovereignty and US foreign and domestic policy, sovereignty and federal and state educational mandates, and sovereignty and school and social control (Tuck, 2007).

There are parts of this chapter that are in a “we” voice—parts that one person had to be brave enough to write in a we voice and submit to the group to use as a jump-off point, truly a first draft. There are also parts written in an “I” voice—parts in which each of us tells the story of CREDD from our own viewpoint with the encouragement of our co-researchers behind us. We have listed the names of the authors of the first-person pieces to honor their point of view, but also want to recognize that these pieces were written and workshoped in our group, that we have supported each other in arriving at these voices.

We know that when we or any group writes in a we voice it can make the words seem smoother, easier than they really are. Writing as “we” linguistically stubs the toe on the process it has taken for us to speak of ourselves as a we. Further, if you would map any “we” in this chapter, where each of us is in relationship to the we voice—curled up in the lap, emptying the dishwasher, unhappy upstairs under the bed—would make the we more feather-shaped than brick-wall-shaped.

But finally, we also know that our work is vulnerable. So as a group of youth (except for Eve), as mostly young women of color, as PAR researchers,

as big-mouths, as “trouble makers,” we are not always entirely sure how much of ourselves we want to reveal in our writing, how much of ourselves we are willing to serve up.

This can compound the we voice’s likelihood to come across as peachy-keen and even sappy: all of those things that are lobbed at women and youth to undermine their ideas and realities. We are a hopeful bunch, a committed-to-each-other bunch, a strong and sometimes sappy bunch. We are a proud bunch, an intentional bunch, a watchful bunch.

Some of us identify as writers and have for many years, while others of us are just beginning to come into our identities as writers. Others of us hate writing; have been taught to hate our own writing and to be quiet. All of us have taken on this chapter anyway, knowing that it would be a loss to leave out the voices of those who are ambivalent about what a book chapter can do.

We have a similar relationship to research, and at some or many points throughout our work have turned to each other and asked, “What can this do anyway?” For many of us, what we have known about research through the experiences of our families and communities has taught us that research can too easily be employed as a tool of colonization and domination, used, as in the eugenics movement, to forward racist agendas and to reaffirm the status quo. We would not be researchers without an inherent commitment to action toward the relief of social injustice, especially in education. We would not be researchers without an inherent commitment to participation, dissolving the traditional researcher-subject hierarchy toward the refusal to use the power of the language of research to speak against our people and ourselves.

Our relationship to writing and research is important to us as expatriate and exiled students. Michelle Fine and Pearl Rosenberg write, “Critical perspectives on social institutions are often best obtained from exiles, that is, persons who leave those institutions. This is perhaps why exiles’ views are frequently disparaged as deviant and in some cases, conspicuously silenced” (Fine and Rosenberg, 1983: 257). Many of us exiled students, others of us marooned, we in creating CREDD but also in creating our Gate-ways and Get-aways Project, make ourselves *present exiles*. As present exiles, our still-here bodies prove the disarray of the dumping grounds, our still-here voices prove the illogic of the erasure, and our still-here drives for justice prove the betrayal of a school system that aims to stamp and sort us according to our race and ethnicity, our gender, our class, our ability, and our language in order to contribute to a wider disparity of wealth, the further disenfranchisement and political isolation of poor communities and communities of color, and the consolidation of white supremacy. Further, our approach to participatory action research, which aims to document the presence and experiences of the

NYC public school system's present exiles, amplifies the disarray, illogic, and betrayal in order to demand change in policy and practice.

I locate research in the realm of education and learner. At this moment, I feel like the skins of researcher and learner are synonymous for me.

There is some dominant thought in the US that in order to create change, one must launch a campaign around a specific issue, target, demand, or winnable victory. Furthermore, it is assumed that we should demand our victory from the state, corporation, or someone with power (cause we don't have any, except that power that we gain through following this method). Who came up with this and how does it get continually imposed?

Knowledge is power. Our identities, the options available to us and our education are extremely powerful. Education can determine our lives. Education can create change.

We need a diversity of research, strategies, tactics, options, and types of power.

(Maria Bacha)

In this vein, and before we turn to the three discussions below, we want to say something about the how-to-ness of this chapter. At our presentations, many people come up to us and ask us about the steps involved in making a research collective, or somewhat creepily, how to get "buy-in" from young people. What we know is this: a big part of "how to" do this work depends on how the group has constructed themselves and the work—thus, we will offer how we have constructed ourselves and the work. For us, how we do this work has in its sights big, full, round goals of social justice, not only as a lofty end-of-the-road goal, but also in everyday practice. It is really hard, and we have messed up lots of times. We trust each other and the validity and importance of our work enough to not be deterred by messing up and continue working for now and future change.

Praxis One/How We Have Tailored Research to Be Ours

This section involves the telling of CREDD's first retreat/training weekend and the process that yielded CREDD's research design and a telling of how we approach sharing the work of our research in order to describe how we have made research, an activity we would have never anticipated for ourselves, our own. How did we get the guts to call ourselves researchers and call the work we do research?

One part of the answer lies in our critique of how research has historically, in the United States and abroad, been waged on oppressed people.

Informed by indigenous critiques of this (ongoing) history and buttressed by our own experiences in communities where outsider, often white, research types come in for a hot minute and then, having extracted whatever they need, take off for the next community "in need," we are wary of the practices of research and of researchers.

It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations.

(Smith, 1999: 1)

The other part of the answer has to do with our own desires for "no action without research; no research without action" (K. Lewin, as quoted by Adelman, 1997). From our own experiences under the treads of the uniformed policies that have rolled through our schools, it only makes sense for us to take the matters of informing ourselves and others into our own hands. There is a lot of valuable knowledge in those treads.

From time to time over the course of this project we have looked at one another with a twinkle in our eyes and asked, "Does it feel like *science* yet?" Elbow-deep in slightly damp surveys (see below); hung up on for the fortieth time; dragging a big pad of paper on the subway to a focus group; balancing a stack of slambooks; searching on our hands and knees for the missing yellow piece of our nothing-but-trouble game; we have to look at each other with a laugh and say "yes."

Deciding upon and developing our methods—Eve Tuck

I remember that I was really nervous the day that we were going to begin selecting our research methods. I had a full itinerary of research methods to present to our group, and being practically famous for my absentmindedness on time when in the heat of discussion, I was worried that I had planned to talk about way too much in way too little time. Also, even though I had known many in the group for years, I felt shy about talking with them about research methods—while used to talking with them about writing or organizing or scary movies (hate them) or reality TV shows (love them), talking about research methods felt like pulling on my Dad's shoes over my own when I was a girl: clunky, awkward, pretend-like.

Also, I had a lot of nagging worries about how all of this was supposed to happen . . . How was I supposed to smooosh all of the methods that it had taken me four years to learn into a two-day retreat? How was I supposed to

really support the group in choosing which methods to use when all I could offer was what I knew? There were a lot of methods that I didn't plan to share with the group—was I being too limiting? There were also a lot of methods that I was really curious about but had no experience in; was it okay that I planned to offer up research methods that I couldn't personally vouch for? There were also a few ideas I had about some “new” research methods, five-finger discounted from popular education and organizing, and others modified from school games. How was I to present these methods alongside the tried and true pillars of qualitative research such as the interview and the focus group?

I was encouraged by friends' reminders that it hadn't taken me all that long to get the gist of these methods; that we can only offer what we know; that I could be open about what I did and didn't know; but also what I was tempted to try out; that I could share my own hunches around “new” research methods, as long as we made room for ourselves to be critical and curious about all of the research methods. I entered CREDD's methods retreat armed with an agenda detailed to the minute, and a gift from my partner: the biggest, loudest kitchen timer he could buy.

I developed a series of activities or encounters for the whole group, with strict time limits on my own talking. Each method got ten minutes, of which I was only allowed to present for two minutes. The gigantic kitchen timer was very helpful in keeping me from going over two minutes of presentation on each method, and I had photos, copies, film footage and mock up examples for the group to see and explore. The remaining eight minutes consisted of almost rapid-fire questions and clarifications, and importantly, the group shared what they already knew of each method. After the ten minutes, we took five minutes to write in our researcher journals, listing notes and first impressions of the method, further questions, and ideas for implementation in our design.

We spent much of this day in this way—intense bouillon cube discussions around possible methods broken up by quiet moments of reflection through writing—fueled by pizza and salad, curious about what was going on in one another's notebooks.

Taking a deep collective breath and diving in to choosing our methods proved to be a great way to try out our newly established decision-making process (see Praxis Two, this chapter). There was no magical moment where our methods became evident; we just felt our way through, sharing with each other which methods seemed compelling, which seemed to speak to one of our four areas of inquiry, which methods would generate some intrigue from the youth we wanted to talk to. At one point in the conversation, we wanted to do all of the methods! At another point, we wanted to do all of the methods and also seek out more!

We used this conversation to decide for ourselves what methods actually are, that is, what role they would have in our research. Rather than choosing methods that would corroborate our data, we were interested in selecting a range of methods that would yield data from multiple perspectives and positions. Being familiar with the ways in which research on the GED had been conducted in the past, we also wanted to select methods that attend to the gaps in existing research, especially research that has excluded youth voices.

In the end, we chose to use over 18 different tools (see our list at the beginning of this chapter) and did so knowing that it would be ambitious and nearly impossible to accomplish on our timeframe and our budget. Our big dreams were in part due to being big dreamers, but also in part as a response to the complexity of our research interests, a killer combination.

Sharing the work—Alexis Morales

When I took a step back and saw all of the work that CREDD decided to take on, I admit I felt confused. I thought the workload ahead was going to be overwhelming because we had so much to do and so little time in which to do it. I thought the goal was unrealistic, but as time went on and I saw the methods and division of work within the group, I began to feel relieved.

Over time, when something has felt heavy and overwhelming, I have had the support of my group members, and the feeling of being flustered seemed to fade away. CREDD began to feel like a safety net.

The roles of CREDD are not exactly assigned to each individual because we have our own way of getting things done. When we have certain tasks to do or deadlines to meet, we use our meeting times to generate and go through a to-do list and everyone speaks up on what task they would like to take on.

Dividing the roles is usually pretty easy. When someone feels strongly about an assignment they volunteer to take that particular task on. Then we go from there. With all the different interests and talents in the group, things can at times get lopsided for a week or two, but we all have the CREDD agenda in mind so we try to divide things as evenly as possible.

We try our best to balance things so that no one's worth, dedication, or desire goes unnoticed, there is always a way for someone to bring their talent to the table. For example, for one of our focus groups, we created a board game that portrays the unfairness of meritocracy, and it was a perfect opportunity for Sarah to express her artistic talents.

It's important in my collective that everyone is satisfied with the work. We don't like to assign tasks that seem like a chore. We all make decisions together as a team, no researcher knows more than another, and no one is

any more or less valuable than another. We are a unit that works together. As the saying goes, "there is no I in team" and there certainly isn't an "I" in CREDD.

One of the fantasies that people might have about PAR, especially among youth, is that we all have to be the same and do everything the same way. PAR isn't synchronized swimming! CREDD has become a space for us to put into practice our theories and politics that are committed to addressing one another as a whole person. We appreciate and *go there* with each other as thinkers, as people with souls and histories, as people who are conflicted and complicated, and brimming with desire to be seen in this way. We often take the time to write together and read our words to each other as a way to ensure that the time for really hearing and seeing one another is built into our everyday work.

Hearing and seeing one another as whole people also often happens in unplanned ways when we are trying to do something else. A decision to use a "female, male, or other" multiple choice question, or blank answer question to capture gender on our survey gave way to a revealing, unforgettable discussion on the politics of gender and race and sexuality, a discussion that we return to frequently. In another example, when during a major summer heatwave we anticipated that like us, many other youth in the city would need to have some fun in the Astoria pool to beat the heat, we went on a CREDD family outing and brought a stack of our surveys to conduct with the hundreds of youth waiting in line to get in. Working alongside one another, seeing each other in action, and then a celebratory dip in the pool helped us meet many of our needs at once.

Praxis Two: Reclaiming, Recovering, Carving Out Personal/Political Space *Hand 5 p. 68*

This section is crafted around two moments, the first depicting the session in which CREDD solidified our decision-making process, the second depicting what will go down in the CREDD history books as "our first fight," told from the perspectives of the women at the center of the argument. We have identified both of these moments as pivotal crossroads in our attempts to carve out a political and personal space for our collective. Much of the carving work has actually been work of reclaiming and recovering. Our understanding of this has been informed by the work of Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Her concept of "researching back," in the legacies of "writing back" and "talking back," involves, "a 'knowingness of the colonizer' and a recovery of ourselves, an analysis of colonialism, and a struggle for self-determination" (Smith, 1999: 7).

Part of the reclaiming has to do with taking back words and languages

that have been used against us, for example, (un)intelligence, (limited) capacity, and discourses of (trickle down) power and democracy. Part of the recovery has to do with tapping into parts of us that have been discouraged in our schooling, such as asking questions, being curious about the underbelly or behind-the-scenes dynamics of everyday life, writing in order to discover what we really believe about something, relying on someone else when overwhelmed or unsure, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, and being motivated by a shared goal rather than competition. These thoughtful, reflective parts of ourselves, often otherwise silenced or swept away by the hustle and bustle of city life, are nurtured in our collective work.

In addition, indeed because we have created CREDD as a space and practice of reclamation and recovery, CREDD operates as a thirdspace (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996) to many of the binaries in our own lives such as work/home, teaching/learning, talking/listening, but also as a thirdspace to ideas such as reproduction/resistance, success/failure, and reality/hope. The verb or activity of *thirding* "is the first and most important step in transforming the categorical and closed logic of either/or to the dialectically open of both/and also . . ." (Soja, 1996: 60). Linked to our always circling back wistfulness for our schooling to have looked, or more importantly felt, like CREDD, it is our very work together that underlines our critique of schooling, while simultaneously showing that such an educational space is possible. "Every-thing comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency; mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the trans-disciplinary, everyday life and unending history" (Soja, 1996: 56).

The work of reclaiming and recovering and thirding is difficult, messy. It is especially so when it becomes the work itself, detached from the project of researching back. There have been moments when our confidence has been shaken by someone outside our collective who devalues our work or underestimates the validity of research by urban youth. By our very naming of ourselves as researchers, we sometimes cause a stir. "Dialectical thinking is difficult, for it challenges all conventional modes of thought and taken for granted epistemologies. It is disorderly, unruly, constantly evolving, unfixed, never presentable in permanent constructions" (Soja, 1996: 70). It is because we are engaging in research that has grown from our own experiences that we can speak to the everyday meaning of these ideas and have been able to resist spiraling off too far into the abstract: we always remind ourselves that there is work to do.

This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we forever

recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonizer/colonized. Marginality is the space of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators.

(hooks, 1990: 152 as quoted in Soja, 1996: 98)

Deciding how we would decide—Melody Tuck

One of the things we noticed early on in CREDD was that everyone in the group had a different take on democracy and how it is put into practice. Some of us who are indigenous or immigrant to the United States see democracy as a code word for something that has been used against us and our families to limit access to power, land, resources, and sustainability. Others of us who are readers of critical theory or critical pedagogy employ those discourses' use of "democracy" to signal a "for the people, by the people" approach to knowledge building and learning. Still others had little time to think about democracy (these groups are not mutually exclusive). The most prevalent experience with democratic process for all of us has followed a scenario where at a given time in a group everyone stops and votes, with or without a prior discussion and with or without a discussion after, the votes are counted, and the results lived with.

When during one of our first CREDD meetings Eve urged us to spend some time together "deciding how we want to make decisions," it's probable that all of us felt under-prepared for such a discussion. All of us had been burned by the one-person, one-vote model, from family decisions to classroom voting to the presidential election. Some of us had been in situations where voting had been redone and redone until finally the facilitator's wishes had been granted. This is an abuse of power that CREDD would not tolerate in our group.

Eve's friend Kym took notes as we listed ideal elements of decision making: Having a time limit; dealing with a real issue not an abstracted issue; working as a group from proposals or first drafts rather than starting from scratch; being able to decide something without coercing everyone to agree; getting to a place in decisions where everyone feels okay, even if it's not their first choice.

We then used these elements to both be the basis of our decision-making process and as a guide to our process in deciding our decision-making process. We set a 45-minute time limit and used the list we had brainstormed as our first draft. We paid attention to people's disagreements and prodded silences and used these views to modify the first draft. Knowing that we had a limited amount of time to complete the discussion meant people didn't talk too much or too little.

This is the document that all of CREDD has signed . . .

Our decision-making process works because we believe in sharing responsibility for this space and work.

- We begin by opening the floor and setting a time limit for discussion.
- We bring forth issues, collectively brainstorming—each of us taking notes and reflecting on how strongly we agree or object to ideas.
- Then, people take on the responsibility of making suggestions/proposals/first drafts which synthesize multiple ideas from the brainstorm.
- After questions and modifications, the facilitator can check in with the group using red, yellow, green or throwing Cs.³
- We strive to get a place where all of CREDD is okay with moving forward with all of our decisions, even if the final choice is not their first choice.

It certainly was not an easy process. If we did not all trust that it was worth it then it could have fallen apart into a frustrating mess. To decide how to decide, everyone in the room must believe that it is worth figuring out how to listen to each other, how to treat each other and our ideas fairly, and put a critique of society into practice.

It's hard to step away from a method that has "seemed" to work in the past. The one-person, one-vote model, or single-voiced model of democracy is the way our government works, how workplaces are run. One voice is elected/heard and that is the only voice that is followed. We didn't want that. We wanted a method that let everyone be heard, and that allows an open space for people to express their thoughts and concerns without someone being stepped on. We wanted even the smallest voice heard, both because we have a critique of how voices are steamrollered over in society, but also because it is these small voices, outliers, counter-stories, that help ensure the fullest design and analysis.

Creating a decision-making process is hard to do when you are just meeting people for the first time, because you don't know how others think, work, how they will respond to your ideas, how you will respond to their ideas. The brainstorming process allowed us the opportunity to open ourselves up, granted everyone a chance to see who we are as people, working together to build the foundation of CREDD.

CREDD's first argument—Jovanne Allen

CREDD has had its first argument; it sure won't be the last. With a mix of ethnic identities, including African-American, Latina, Jewish, Native American, White and biracial, a range of gender identities, and a variety of identities of

sexuality, bringing together such a diverse group of opinionated youth almost guarantees disputes. However, just because we have had a fight doesn't mean that we don't all have an overall respect for one another.

I worked with Sarah and Jamila on the design of a focus group that would try to understand the lived value of the GED from the point of view of GED earners and GED seekers aged 16–22. At the previous meeting, Jamila had promised to revise the questions we had drafted in time for us to pilot the focus group with the rest of CREDD.

When the day of our pilot came, I came to the meeting to find that neither of my group members had arrived early as we planned in order to index cards for our questions. Soon after, Sarah arrived and apologized, but Jamila didn't arrive until moments before we were set to begin. I was hurt. Jamila hadn't called to say she would be late and I took it personally, because I have a GED, and I felt that I was taking our project more seriously than she, a person with a high school diploma and not a GED.

Though I was aggravated, we tried to go forward with the focus group anyway, when I soon became even more frustrated with Jamila for asking what felt like too many follow-up questions and not paying attention to our time limit. I felt disrespected by her disregard for the plan we had made, and decided to speak up.

We ended up totally abandoning the pilot and had it out in front of the whole group. It was a very heated argument, and at one point I told her and the group that I felt that I would never be able to work with her.

For a few minutes the entire group tried to see if there was a way that Jamila or I could work on another focus group planning team, but the other teams had already done a lot of work too and were happy with the way things were. Seeing that, I announced that I did not have to like her as a person to work with her as a partner in our project, but that still wasn't a satisfying situation for anyone.

The group was quiet for a long time. Actually, Eve made us take a ten-minute quiet together break, and afterwards asked everyone if they had "arrived at anything." Everyone else shared that they cared for and respected both of us, and that it was hurtful to see us disrespect one another. In the moment, I took it in, but still shared that I was angry.

Eve next said that we should maybe use one of Augusto Boal's games in which we had to attack one another with imaginary swords. Everyone played, but it ended up being that when it was my turn, I had to attack Jamila with my sword, making her jump up and crouch down and leap from side to side. (At the time I was still so mad it would have been heaven if I really could have attacked her with a sword—smile.) She got to make me jump around too, and we both were cracking up. The whole group was laughing.

It has been several months since the "fight," and though I couldn't guess

that I would then, I have fully gotten over it. I know now that it was really unrealistic to think that we all work so close together and not fight. However, it also was unrealistic for me to think that I would not work with her ever again. It's not about the fight, it's about what happens after—

Communities of resistance—Jamila Thompson

Communities of resistance should be places where people can return to themselves more easily, where the conditions are such that they can heal themselves and recover their wholeness.

(Thich Nhat Hanh)

My best friend's mother is a woman of color and has a prestigious position at a Fortune 500 company and she revealed to me her regret of once complaining to her boss about the "work ethic" of her former colleague who is also a woman of color, especially since she understood the difficulties that her former friend was having outside of the office. My best friend's mother understood the implications of such a complaint in the corporate world, but she explained to me that she also learned from that incident her obligation to a fellow Black woman in a work environment that was potentially treacherous to them both.

My first conflict in CREDD was with Jovanne, the only other biracial/part Black woman in our group, though I was only able to appreciate the significance of this later. For the past two years I have been attempting to help build community with sisters because there are many obstacles in the way of us loving, caring for and respecting one another. This is especially the case in workspaces. But CREDD is not corporate America; it is not of the mainstream. We are a collective whose purpose is to transform and remold our society, but after my conflict with Jovanne I feared that we were adopting the individualistic values of the very institutions we are struggling against.

My lateness and incompleteness of my part of the pilot preparations sparked Jovanne's annoyance with me, but when Jovanne asked me, "Do you need to ask so many follow-up questions?" I was insulted. I retorted that the key to rich data was follow-up questions and that I did not appreciate her attitude. We went off. When Jovanne questioned my dedication to CREDD I was infuriated. In any other situation I would probably have explained my situation, apologized, and kept it moving, but the stress of my outside life in conjunction with my self-righteousness—I just knew that I was giving everything I possibly could and this was challenged and not acknowledged—amplified things.

At that moment, I had been taking three summer courses and CREDD

was one of my two jobs. My rent had been increased and, struggling financially, I had walked to CREDD from my job that day to save enough train fare to get back to Brooklyn after the meeting, and so arrived late for the pilot. Still, I was hurt and disappointed with myself for allowing the situation to escalate. What I needed at that moment was understanding and what Jovanne needed, I think, was context.

We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both.

(hooks, 1984: ix, as quoted in Soja, 1996: 100)

Jovanne: We overcame our argument because we realized that CREDD's work is made better by our continued collaboration, and because we know that disagreements do important work in collectives to share, negotiate, and solidify ideas. All of us have come to see that people do have other things going on in their lives, and there needs to be a balance between our lives and CREDD.

Alexis: One thing that is important to say is that this argument is different than what would be expected from young women of color. Many people would expect us to always be involved in "cat fights," all crying and emotions. I can assure you we are all very professional women, and for us that means that we take the work personally. We love, care for and have a deep respect for this project and so we do show emotion. We are not robots who come to work every day with the same expressions on our faces; sometimes we are happy and excited and sometimes we can be a little frustrated.

Jovanne: When you work in a collective where there is no one in the "boss" role, and no one in the "employee" role, the only thing that keeps the work going is that each of us follows through on our promises. Trying to do PAR without everyone following through is like trying to build a room with four walls but no floor. Ideally, all the researchers in the collective would need to bring 100 percent to the table, but in our society we can't. The New York life is fast and expensive. Sometimes you have to let go of your promises, even if they are your dreams and life-love, just to make sure ends meet.

Jamila: Viewing ourselves and each other as inhuman objects whose purpose and meaning is to achieve an end result or a product (research data and findings), is not acceptable in PAR/social activist groups. First, this disables us from creating the group dynamics that are vital to PAR research. Second, if our goal is to radically restructure our society then we cannot reproduce the

detrimental attitudes of mainstream institutions. If we are to stand in opposition to disregard for human worth we must be conscious of our attitudes and perceptions of one another.

Jovanne: It feels like a long time since CREDD's first fight, and other arguments have happened along the way. We know that these haven't been damaging, but part of our process and growth.

Jamila: I am a complex individual who strives to contribute to the communities that I inhabit as best as I can. I have learned to remember that about all of CREDD's researchers. We try to be conscious of each other and what is going on in our lives. We have had conversations where we've expressed and explored the experiences and ideas that make us who we are individually and collectively. We appreciate differences and we consciously nurture one another. Recently, Jovanne and I led a CREDD meeting together. We had two hours between the two of us as facilitators to complete a number of tasks, and ended up finishing early. After we finished, Jovanne said "Now do you see how fast Jamila and I can get our work done and get you all out of here at a decent time?" I blushed. To me, that statement was a demonstration of how far we have come.

Praxis Three: Cultivating and Sustaining Our Commitments to Our Research

In this section, we describe two events: one an impromptu ceremony created by CREDD that solidified our commitment to our project and social justice, the other, an exercise that helped establish CREDD's commitments to one another as researchers, and to our larger community. In our experience, commitment is the element of PAR that most determines a collective's possibilities and challenges. We are asked about it all the time and talk about it among ourselves all the time: what we can say is that it is really difficult to keep in balance.

To be painfully obvious, commitment cannot be forced or faked, it has to be grown. Further, it can feel illusive and it always feels like you need it before it's really able to be there. In many ways, our commitment to this project springs from our own experiences and linking our work on this issue to our own personal well-being. However, this has also been true for others of our researchers who have fallen out—so we know that this, in the face of financial, emotional, and family hardships, is not enough to sustain a researcher's participation.

Further, linking the success of a research project to our own personal projects of justice and well-being can generate a lot of pressure on us. Internally, we also know that commitment is something that youth "drop-outs"

are thought to be void of, so proving this attitude wrong with our own staying power ups the stakes for us. It's difficult to be thoughtful and creative and curious when under so much self-pressure.

All we can do is remind ourselves that in PAR, doing the work is doing the work.

The two moments in this section both happened during a sleep-away retreat in June 2006. In the last hour of our retreat, Sarah facilitated a closing that has taught us a lot about CREDD as a (third) space of disappointment and desire.

It had been a full two days, crammed with workshops and writing and decision making, but also with swimming and volleyball and air hockey and quesadillas. We entered that closing with the electricity of our time together, with the new knowledge of who was afraid of ladybugs, who swims with his glasses over his goggles, who is suspicious of deer, who only eats with a spoon because "forks make food taste bad," and who knows all of the words to "Peanut Butter Jelly Time."

Eve had brought along a coconut wrapped in plastic wrap with the fantasy that someone would make good use of it, and it was present in all of our talks, in the corners of photos, passed around and shaken for the melody of its juice, made unofficial mascot of CREDD by the simple fact that it was there. Sarah made the connection more clear in her closing, leading us in an exercise that could be likened to Patricia Carini's (2001) method of close description: we passed around the coconut, freeing it from the plastic wrap, and described it, naming everything we ever knew about coconuts, claimed it. Coconuts can float, unlike other seeds. Coconuts can live for a long time after leaving the tree. Coconuts are thrives, are savory, are sustaining. The coconut has a rough, covered shell, protecting its water and air and flesh.

In our final go around, Sarah asked us to each hold the coconut again, and speak aloud our commitments to CREDD/the coconut. I will plant it to grow new knowledge, new understanding, new awareness; doing my share, doing my part in it; preserving this knowledge for years until I can find a nice place to plant it; love it, support it, baby it; break bread/break coconut with others over it because it is so good; live with it even when it is tough; know it for the long haul; not knowing what's inside, not knowing the immediate outcome, I'll trust it anyway; give it everything I know, all of my trust; protect it from what wants to eat it; being always down for its cause, never leaving it; making sure that I am its safety net (CREDD log 06.24.06).

CREDD and the coconut—Sarah Quinter

At the beginning of our data collection, we went on a retreat to plan our work and get to know each other. Eve had brought along a coconut that

rolled around with us throughout the trip. A sort of spontaneous home-made ritual occurred during the closing I facilitated—we passed around the coconut, a symbol of CREDD's collective hopes, and each shared how we would be committed to it. We talked about how we would each do our part, preserving CREDD's knowledge like a rough shell protecting tender fruit. It seemed like a small historical moment.

At the same time that CREDD is coming up with our own symbols such as the coconut, and our own research methods such as the slambooks and the board game, I am trying to figure out my own ways of doing things in my life. I'm asking myself: What happens to people when they are forced to adapt to pre-made structures and conventions and expectations? Can someone become who he or she really is through this path? Are the structures of school and work scaffolding for our dreams or cages to contain us? Does that depend on your position in society? What if I can't grow up to be myself within these preexisting structures? What would it take to make my own? How can I build something strong and flexible enough to support and accommodate my needs? How do I avoid alienating others? When I tried to answer these questions honestly, I came to the conclusion that I couldn't be the person I wanted to be without rebuilding a lot of these structures from scratch with tools like art making, lists, charts, books, writing, the internet, intuition, advice from mentors, and solidarity with my peers.

There have been several times when CREDD has made its own ceremonies. This is a part of what makes our work special, beautiful, and unique. Making our own ceremonies is possible because we feel free to be creative and to not just have to do the usual. This is not because we do PAR, but, through our PAR.

Someone took the coconut home, and a few days later, when we met again, we teased ourselves for having a magical moment with a coconut and letting it get away. Eve looked at several different stores for a replacement, and not finding one and in a pinch to make it in time for our next meeting, she bought some coconut milk in a can. The can took a place of honor at our meetings for a while, then, as the weeks passed, we began leaving it in the locker.

Still, when having a hard conversation in our meetings, someone usually goes to the locker and brings out the coconut in a can. It is a silent reminder of our overall goals, an inside joke on how we can be flexible and work under any conditions (in plastic wrap, in our shell, in a can) and a way to show our solidarity, even in the heat of frustration and disagreement.

Since the coconut ritual, we've made a lot of progress, but we've also had to deal with lateness, absence, missing deadlines, interpersonal conflicts, and everything else you'd expect when a group of people is struggling to attain ambitious goals together. But like a coconut that floats in the sea for

understanding of a system of oppression that later was critical to our data analysis process.

Our work as researchers is like that of urban gardeners. Within the streetscape of the empire, our communities and souls are abandoned like trashed lots. We have come together to reclaim space, plant and grow our desires, and create a space for the health and happiness of the community.

Doing the power flower helped us recognize that we didn't want to "serve" or "empower" youth. In my eyes, these terms undermine those youths' and our own humanities. To serve implies that a person cannot do it for themselves, and to me is represented by the image of someone lying on the ground and someone reaching over them to pick them up. We are not serving or empowering youth because as youth we can do this work ourselves. We can work with allies but only on common ground.

(**Maria Bacha**)

Being a self-determined "people-centered space" means that we can only grow and be complex people if we allow our perceptions of others to grow and be complex as well. This is a lifelong process of challenging assumptions and of having your own assumptions challenged, of breaking stereotypes by outgrowing them, and of being humble enough to see that everyone has something to teach you.

That's why we spend so much time in CREDD having intellectual and political conversations around these issues. It's part of our work. Because CREDD is a "people-centered space," we need to stay conscious of how society's power structures play out in our interactions, so that we can challenge them and thus allow each other more room to grow. No matter how advanced CREDD gets in its work, we will always place a high priority on genuine, honest interpersonal relationships. Without these bonds and this striving to understand and respect one another, no strong foundation for change can exist.

We have a lot of work to do. We need to keep a list inside our brains of all things we have left to finish, right beside where it says commitment.

(**Jovanne**)

Concluding Statement

This chapter has described some of the powerful moments so far in our collective. It is our hope that by sharing these moments, the dynamics and

praxes of PAR might be better understood, and that some of our readers might be encouraged to engage in participatory research.

We have been marked by our schooling—we have been told explicitly and implicitly that we are stupid, that we are wasted space, that we can't handle complex ideas. We have been oversimplified by small aspects of ourselves, caricatured as a bully, a troublemaker, as indecisive, scatterbrained. The moments we have described here all have been opportunities to remake our own names, to be seen in the ways we desire to be seen. The stumbles and scuffles that have happened along the way have stung like those old categories. In a heated debate, one of us might call another a bully, or intimate that another is scatterbrained. In the moment that old hurt comes back, and it makes it hard to see one another. It is sometimes what the rest of us do, or maybe a night to reflect and the apology that comes, that has taught us that the old hurts have less power here. We wouldn't take advantage of our intimate knowledge of one another. This too is a part of our work as researchers.

We think of PAR as being like Double Dutch, to do it you just have to jump right in, but we hope that by sharing some of the arcs of our ropes, those doing PAR might be comforted instead of bewildered when the rope makes a surprising turn.

We want to close this piece with an everyday moment because CREDD's work is both in the "ah hah!" moments and in the mundane: our nomadic workspace, our can of coconut milk, our jokes, our distractions, our photocopying, all to the hum of fluorescent lighting.

Deadline day—Melody Tuck

Today is a CREDD deadline for our survey and interview tapes and consent forms. It's not a meeting day, just a drop-off day and I am sitting here waiting for my sister to get out of her meeting, while one by one CREDD researchers are stopping off to turn in their surveys and interviews. Each one hands me a stack of papers, each filled with the stories of people on the streets who have gone through, broken away from, or are trying to survive the public school system. The researchers who hand me these fragments of life on ink-filled pages smile and wish me a good weekend.

I'm lucky to get to do this work because I get to research how education has failed its children, to reflect with my co-researchers, and to just think for once. Each chance I get to come be a part of CREDD makes my soul strong.

Dedication

This chapter is dedicated to students who have been pushed out and exiled, who are disappointed by schooling. We dedicate this chapter to all of those

who have worked beside us to document the lived value of a “depleted credential,” and the fantasies of the American Dream. Finally, we dedicate this chapter to our desires for public schools that are accessible, rigorous, honorable, and free.

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Notes

- 1 For the purposes of this project, youth participants lived in New York City and were current or former New York City public school students aged 16 to 22. The age cap coincided with those youth who were the oldest cohort (2003) affected by the New York state decision (2000) to make the Regent's exam the primary exit task in order to earn a high school diploma.
- 2 An additional product will be Eve's dissertation.
- 3 Red, yellow, green is a go-around tool that can be used in the middle or at the end of a discussion to check in with one another. Like a traffic light, each person says if they are green, or good to go, yellow, meaning they still have some questions or thinking to do, or red, meaning the conversation needs to stop and address a specific concern. By throwing Cs, we mean that to get a sense of the support of an idea, a researcher makes a “C” (for CREDD) symbol with her hands. Seeing this symbol, other researchers around the table show/throw their own Cs, or don't, signaling disagreement or confusion.

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