

Theory of Change

I used to argue *'food had a magical capacity for fostering community, authentic connection and joy. That food was capable of much more than providing us with sustenance.'* While I still hold parts of that to be true — I do believe that food is more than the sum of its parts, the magical capacity I referred to was far more complicated and required much more intention than I realized. Throughout my life, food has always been closely tied to community and the joyful bringing together of people, exhibited through the SOMA Six discussed above. I believe that cooking for others and commensality are universal expressions of appreciation that are “fundamentally intertwined with the deepening of social ties among people eating together” (Kniffin, 2015, p. 282). When I cook and share a meal with someone I am indirectly expressing that I value this person, that I am grateful for the time being spent together, and that I cherish the relationship to such an extent that I am willing to devote my energy and resources towards nourishing us both. My food theory solidified itself through conversations with a close friend about how sharing food, whether it be a full meal or just a bowl of popcorn can communicate these emotions.

When trying to promote a meaningful and convivial community around food, how we conceptualise food and the social practices around it will emerge in the design and structure of those initiatives. Before we can develop a community around food and eating, we need to understand how and why we assign it that meaning, “the materialization of consciousness is reflected in Western languages” (Illich, 1973, p. 104). I now see a difference between ideological change and material change; before either can occur we have to know what the nuanced meanings are of this change, and that takes time and intention. Overall, in order to mitigate the impacts of the industrial food system, we need to build a community around how we conceptualize food and its interconnected social practices, arguably *before* trying to enact any kind of community initiatives around food. A community where students are at the center

of its design and structure, their agency and autonomy are focal; Illich (1973) would constitute this as a 'convivial society'. It is only through the guidelines of this type of community can food actually enact its 'magical properties' and build a meaningful sense of community.

References

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- Illich, I. (1973). *Tools for conviviality* (1st ed.). Harper & Row.