
Growing the Community of Community Gardens: Research Contributions

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Abstract

This paper discusses a community-based research project that is a joint initiative between the University of Newcastle and Fig Tree Community Garden, Newcastle (and the project is partly funded by the University of Newcastle and a Newcastle City Council Community Grant). The overarching aim of the project is to contribute to a community garden network in the Newcastle area (and beyond). To do this we have used an interactive workshop-bus trip as the research 'method' and we are currently developing a website based on stories from the two-day bus trip. In this paper we discuss the performative approach to research that underpins the project, and we contrast this research-as-creation approach to the more familiar research-as-understanding approach. We discuss the decisions made about how to conduct the workshop-bus trip so that the research process itself might help create the reality of a community garden network. We also discuss the outcomes, to date, and characterise these as the knowledge creation, material outcomes and connections forged.

Brief Biographies

Associate Professor **Jenny Cameron** is based in the Discipline of Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Newcastle, and is a member of the University's Centre for Urban and Regional Studies. She is a founding member of the Community Economies Collective, an international network of scholars and activists working to build ethical economies that are both people and environment-centred. She has been researching community economies for almost fifteen years, collaborating with community members to develop new initiatives and contribute to strengthening existing ones. She is a keen backyard and community gardener, and is a founding member of Silsoe Street Community Garden in Mayfield and a member of Fig Tree Community Garden in Wickham.

Craig Manhood is a co-founder and former coordinator of the Fig Tree Community Garden. He has recently commenced a federally funded program to engage 5-12 year olds in garden based activities in Raymond Terrace. He is employed three days per week by Lake Macquarie City Council's Sustainability Department as a Community Empowerment Coordinator where he aims to empower residents to prioritise their own set of actions that will achieve a sustainable neighbourhood. He also lives on half an acre in Hinton where he regularly holds gardening workshops for Port Stephens Council.

Jamie Pomfrett is an Honours student under the supervision of Jenny Cameron, and his project is exploring the health impacts of economic diversity through a case study of Forster-Tuncurry community garden. He is a Horticulturist by trade and has also studied and worked in the Permaculture industry. He has been a 'helping hand' in different community gardens. His large backyard garden, 'the acreage', is maintained by and sustains him, his five housemates and their neighbours.

Growing the Community of Community Gardens: Research Contributions

Introduction

There is a wide range of academic material on community gardens. Much of the work highlights the benefits of community gardens. For example, the academic health literature has identified the individual and collective health benefits, both physical and mental, that come from access to fresh food, improved nutrition, physical exercise and from working alongside others (e.g. Armstrong, 2000; McCormack, 2010; Teig et al., 2009). From the community development literature there is work on the contribution of community gardens to building community networks and social supports, particularly in marginalised areas (including public housing estates) (e.g. D'Abundo & Carden, 2008; Glover et al., 2005a; Harris, 2009; Kingsley & Townsend, 2006; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004). From the environmental education literature there is work on the community gardens as educational resources that can promote learning about sustainability, healthy living and even democracy (e.g. Ferris et al., 2001; Glover et al., 2005a; Levkoe, 2006). And from the social movement literature there is work on community gardens as sites of grassroots political organising, particularly when gardens are under threat from development pressures, as occurred in New York City in the mid to late 1990s, and more recently around South Central Farm in South Los Angeles (e.g. Irazábal & Punja, 2009; Schmelzkopf, 2002 & 1995; Smith & Kurtz, 2003; Staeheli et al., 2002).

A second body of academic literature provides a more cautionary tale and warns us that in a context of neoliberalism community gardens have become a disciplining technology to foster characteristics like individual responsibility, self-reliance, self-help and self-improvement, as evidenced through community garden programs in schools, prisons, impoverished neighbourhoods, hospitals, migrant resource centres and so on (see also Allen et al. 2003; Hobson & Hill, 2010, forthcoming). As Mary Beth Pudup writes, community gardens (or organised gardening projects as she calls them), have become “the preferred antidote to a host of contemporary social problems” (2008, p. 1230).

Despite the differences, both sets of literature are underpinned by the same realist epistemology in which research is oriented towards accurately describing and assessing ‘what is really going on?’ Both sets of literature are concerned with addressing questions such as: What are the benefits of community gardening? Why do people community garden? How is community gardening being reshaped in a neoliberal context? Has community gardening lost its radical edge to become an instrument of neoliberal governmentality? To try to accurately answer these questions, researchers use familiar and well-tested research methods, primarily surveys, interviews and participant observation.

Much of this research conducted in a realist—or research-as-understanding—frame is concerned with understanding the world in order to contribute to change in the world. The assumption is that rigorous research produces accurate findings that will “speak to” the world. For research on the benefits of community gardens the aim largely is to produce results that can be used by policy makers, program developers and others to inform the work they do. However, despite best intentions so often research doesn't seem to achieve the effects we would want. Either research findings don't impact on policies and programs, or they impact in perverse ways. Even research that takes a critical governmentality approach aims to contribute to a better world but this research invariably gets stuck in a judging frame and amplifies what's wrong with the world and why progressive possibilities continue to be unattainable. As

Gibson-Graham points out, “our understandings seem to cement an emerging world in place rather than readying it for transformation” (2008, p. 614).

Recently, researchers have begun to talk of research as a performative practice to highlight the way in which all research, in one way or another contributes to shaping the world that we come to live in (e.g. Callon & Caliskan, 2005; Law 2004; Law & Urry, 2004). For example, research on the benefits of community gardens that does make it into policy and program circles can contribute to building more and more community gardens as it helps justify program funds and staff time being spent on community gardening. Research on community garden benefits that does not impact on policies and programs may nevertheless impact by affirming the contribution of community gardening to the community gardeners themselves or the community garden organisation. Research of a more cautionary note contributes to a different sort of future, one where we take a more sceptical or critical stance and focus on the limitations of community gardens thereby dampening and discouraging community garden possibilities.

The idea of research-as-performative is not incompatible with the idea of research-as-understanding. However, if we foreground research-as-performative then it does shift how we think about and conduct research. In place of research being oriented towards understanding ‘what’s really going on?’ the critical question becomes ‘how can our research contribute to shaping the world we will live in?’ These two orientations have implications for research methods. If research is concerned with understanding reality then it has to meet the criteria of being objective and representative, and reliable and valid. However, if research is about creating realities then our “criteria” are about the type of world the research is helping to create. Law and Urry (2004, p. 396) put it this way: “If methods help to make the realities they describe, then we are faced with the question: which realities might we try to enact?”. Along with the issue of the world we are helping to create, we also need to consider how effectively our methods help to do this. In some situations we might decide to use methods that are governed by standards of objectivity and representativeness, and validity and reliability because this is the ‘language’ that resonates for the target research audience. But the research-as-performative frame opens up other possibilities for research practice as we illustrate in this paper.

A Performative Research Project

The project that we report on in this paper is a work-in-progress that was initiated by community gardeners/researchers from the University of Newcastle and Fig Tree Community Garden in Newcastle, and now involves community gardeners from twelve other community gardens in the Newcastle area (nine of these gardens are operational and three are in various stages of development). The project centres on two main research activities—a bus trip to the nine operating community gardens and development of a Newcastle Community Garden website that features short stories of each garden, and stories of the key issues that the community gardens have to contend with. These activities have been funded through a University of Newcastle New Staff Grant and a Newcastle City Council Community Grant. As a project that is underpinned by the research-as-performative framing the intention has been to conduct the research in a way that might help create and craft a particular reality—a network of community gardens that are able to support each other. Therefore, decisions have been made to conduct the research activities in ways that might help bring this reality into being. In this section we discuss some of those research decisions and then in the next section we highlight the realities that the project has been helping to craft (i.e. the outcomes).

The use of the bus trip was one area where key research decisions were made. This trip was partly funded under a Newcastle City Council Community Grant to Fig Tree Community Garden to run a series of garden-based workshops, with a requirement that some of the workshops target new community gardens that have started in Newcastle. Workshops have covered topics such as container gardening, bee-keeping, pizza-making in a pizza oven, and they have been run by people with expertise in the relevant area. The workshops for the new community gardens could easily have been run in this familiar format of an expert-led workshop. Instead, as a result of discussions between two authors of this paper it was decided to use a format where the new community gardens might learn not from a community garden expert but from each other, and to use an interactive workshop process to help build a network of community gardens. Based on experience with previous community-based research (Cameron & Gibson, 2005a & b), we were also confident that visiting each other's community gardens was necessary if we were to learn from each other, and that travelling with each other on one small bus was just as necessary to connect with each other.¹ Thus over two Fridays in May 2010, twenty-two community gardeners piled onto a mini-bus to visit each other's community gardens. At each community garden, there was a tour and presentation by the gardeners from that garden, and then whole group discussion of the issues raised. Before the bus trip the community gardeners were sent questions to help prompt their presentation (see Box 1). As we will discuss in the next section, this workshop and bus trip format has helped perform—helped bring into being—the reality of a Newcastle community garden network (and we contend that this outcome would not have been possible through the more familiar expert-led workshop).

Box 1: Community Garden Presentation Prompts/Questions

- Tell us the story of how you got started. What do you think you did well? What would you do differently if you were starting again? Based on your experiences, what advice would you give a group thinking of starting-up a community garden?
- As the garden developed, what were some of the challenges? * What do you think you did well in dealing with these challenges? On reflection, what do you think you should have done differently? What advice would you give another community garden that faced the same challenges?
- What about the future, where are you heading? Are there things that you want to change about what you're doing? How will you go about making these changes?
- Tell us about how you manage the garden? How do you make decisions about what happens at the garden? Who is involved in making these decisions? What do you think works well about this management approach? What are some issues that this approach raises? What advice would you give a new community garden about management?
- Overall, what have been the highlights of your community garden? Why were these highlights for you? What are you doing to try and make sure you have more highlights like these?
- Overall, what have been the lowlights of your community garden? Why were these lowlights for you? What are you doing to try and avoid lowlights like this?

* Challenges might include: tasks falling to a small group of members; keeping the momentum going; dealing with funding and resourcing; figuring out the best legal structure for your gardens; dealing with drop-off of members; dealing with conflict between members.

¹ Indeed, several community gardeners had to leave early on the first day and asked if they could take their own cars to make it easier for them to leave. Knowing just how critical the shared bus trip would be, we said that the community gardeners could come only if they travelled on the bus. These gardeners arranged to be picked up along the route, and later commented that they could see how important it was to be part of the group on the bus.

The second key activity of developing a Newcastle Community Garden website was again informed by the research-as-performative framing. At each community garden the presentations and discussions were audio-recorded, and hundreds of photos taken. We are using this material for the Newcastle Community Gardens PlaceStories website. PlaceStories is a website technology developed by Feral Arts in Queensland (funded through the Australia Council) and it has been used by groups such as Landcare and Mater Mothers' Hospitals to tell stories (see <http://landcare.placestories.com/>; <http://mater-newborn.placestories.com/>). Each story is comprised of around 300 narrated words and 30 supporting photos/images. To develop the Newcastle Community Garden PlaceStories website we are listening and relistening to the audio-recording from the bus trip to draft short stories about the gardens and short theme-based stories about the issues that the gardens face. For each community garden story there is a storyboard (i.e. a draft script and a list of the photos/images that match each point in the script), and we are in the process of sending the storyboards back to the relevant community gardeners for their input, modifying the storyboards based on their input, audio-recording the community gardeners narrating the script for their garden, taking additional photos where necessary and assembling each website story for final approval by the relevant community garden. For the theme-based stories we came up with an initial set of themes at the end of the bus trip and circulated these to all the community gardeners for their input (see Box 2 for a list of the themes that were circulated). As we have listened and relistened to the audio-recording from the bus trip the themes have been refined. At the moment we are in the process of storyboarding each theme and will be sending these out for comment and asking community gardeners to narrate the stories.

This process of developing the Newcastle Community Garden PlaceStories website has involved a series of research decisions. It would have been entirely possible to build the website using the more familiar research techniques such as individual interviews or focus groups, with the researchers then analysing and writing-up the results (and presenting these through a website format). However, this approach would have been less likely to perform the reality we were interested in bringing into reality—a network of community gardens. By using an interactive workshop-bus trip research format, knowledge has been co-created and connections forged as community gardeners (and researchers) have visited each other's gardens, participated in whole and small group discussions, made brief presentations about their gardens and answered each other's questions. Overall, the interactive workshop-bus trip format provided an opportunity for community gardeners to reflect and comment on their own community gardens in light of visiting other gardens, and for researchers to be simply part of the conversations and discussions that unfolded over the two days. This approach resonates with Michel Callon's work on hybrid research collectives in which academic researchers and other concerned community members come together to contribute their expertise, knowledge and insights to collectively produce new knowledge (for an example, see Callon & Rabeharisoa, 2003).

The process of developing website stories based on the interactive workshop-bus trip could have been more collaborative. For example, colleagues have used a writing retreat format in which academic researchers were paired with economic development activists to co-write material (The Community Economies Collective & Gibson, 2009). However, we did not have the funding for such an intensive process, nor did we think that community gardeners would have the time (and this was quickly confirmed through a few queries to community gardeners). As a result we settled on the iterative approach of having the academic researchers draft material that is discussed with the community gardeners, and modified in light of their comments and ideas. Our intention is that the final product—the Newcastle Community Gardens PlaceStories—is a resource that all those involved identify as representing the

knowledge collectively generated over the course of the two days. It is also our intention that the stories will provide useful insights for other community gardens, and potentially help to connect the Newcastle community gardens with those in other places.

Box 2: Initial List of themes for the PlaceStories Website

- **Building the Member-Base/Getting People Gardening**
 - Strategies to get (and keep) people interested and involved (including the non-gardeners).
- **Building Allies**
 - Ways to build and widen the support base (neighbours, Council etc).
- **Building the Community Garden Community**
 - Strategies for building connections with other community gardens.
- **The Choices – The Trade Offs**
 - The different decisions/choices that have different outcomes and implications e.g., to fence or not to fence; individual or communal beds; with Council or not.
- **Change**
 - The different sorts of change community gardens encounter, and ways of responding to this change.
- **Life and Death in Community Gardens (The Facts of Life in the City)**
 - The different experiences of life and death in community gardens (e.g. plants growing, chooks dying/being killed).
- **Give and Take**
 - The give and take of produce etc in open/unfenced gardens.
- **Conflict**
 - What are some of the conflicts that occur in community gardens—conflict between people; conflict between gardening practices (e.g. using poison spray for cabbage moth); and strategies for handling the conflict.
- **Who’s really in charge?**
 - About learning to go with the flow; about facilitating but not directing.
- **Getting around what you can’t shift**
 - Different strategies for dealing with barriers/issues that seem fixed.
- **Land – what does it mean in a community garden?**
 - The issue of whether it’s the land or the people; and the different sorts of land that gets used for community gardening.
- **Funding**
 - Different sources of funding (including grant, self-funding, donations), and the question of whether funding is always what’s needed.
- **What role for Councils?**
 - The various ways that Council can be a help and a hindrance.
- **Guerilla Gardening**
 - Various examples of guerrilla gardening.
- **Assessing the fruits of our labour**
 - How can we creatively measure ‘social impact’ (especially when reporting back to funders and other agencies); different strategies for documenting and celebrating the successes and ‘wins’.
- **The Personal Journey of Community Gardening**
 - The different stories of things that had changed for people through community gardening.
- **The Politics of Community Gardening**
 - The idea that community gardening is about creating/growing the world that we want to live in: ideas such as Bill’s. that every seed we plant is an act of political insurrection!

Outcomes and Realities Crafted

There were at least three different types of outcomes from the bus trip—knowledge outcomes, material outcomes and connections made. In this section we discuss these outcomes—these worlds that the research has contributed to making—and we do this by drawing from our own reflections on bus trip, written evaluations that community gardeners completed at the end of the bus trip,² observations of what has happened since in community gardens where we are members, observations at events at some of the other gardens and ongoing conversations with the budding community of Newcastle community gardens.

Knowledge I: Appreciation of Differences and Affirmation of Each

One key piece of knowledge generated through the bus trip was an appreciation that there is no single best approach to community gardens, and that community gardens can have very different characteristics. For example, on the bus trip there were community gardens that were only had shared garden plots and others that only had individual allotments. Some were fenced, others were not. Several were auspiced by Newcastle City Council through the Council's Community Greening Centre, others worked in association with other entities (an RSL club, a bowling club, Department of Housing and churches), and one was an independent 'guerrilla garden' occupying 'no man's land'. Some were formed as a legal entity others had no legal formation. As we visited these very different gardens it became obvious that each garden had to respond to its own unique context and so there could be no one community garden 'model'. This appreciation of the differences between each garden and the uniqueness of each was a clear theme in the written evaluation completed at the end of the bus trip. For example, in response to first question about the highlights of the bus trip, comments included:

- Seeing varied approaches that have been taken in developing community gardens. [original emphasis]
- Seeing different garden ideas of what works in Newcastle.
- The diversity of the gardens we visited and the different styles in particular.
- Visiting the various community gardens and experiencing the different approaches/opportunities/issues presented to each group/by each site.
- Learning the various attitudes and methods of the gardens visited.
- Seeing the various adaptations to site and circumstances.
- Seeing different gardens. Sharing stories – history; problem solving; ideas; skills; avenues for assistance.

While appreciating the varied approaches, community gardeners were also affirmed about what they are doing. In response to questions asking what had been learned community gardeners wrote comments that included the following:

² This evaluation comprised nine questions, as follows:

1. What were the highlights of the field trip/workshop for you?
2. What were the lowlights? What didn't work so well?
3. For a similar event in the future, what do you think should be done the same?
4. For a similar event in the future, what do you think should be done differently?
5. Can you tell us a bit about what you've learned or what's been confirmed for you about gardening (things like crops you might grow in your community garden, or the activities you might include in the garden).
6. What about the way your garden is managed and coordinated. What have you learned about this (or what's been confirmed for you)?
7. What about your own role in your garden or your own personal journey. What have you learned about this?
8. Overall, can you tell us a bit about what you've learned or what's been confirmed for you about community gardening in general?
9. Finally out of all the things you've learned through the field trip, what ideas do you plan on putting into practice?

- That we're on the right track.
- I like our laid-back, informal approach. For me it's the most appealing of all the various structures [we] saw.
- Most important for me was the affirmation from others that it is ok to take on a more low key approach

Importantly, very different approaches were affirmed for different gardens. For example, some confirmed that it was best to avoid council:

- Stay away from Council.
- We love no council involvement – and this has been confirmed.

While others affirmed the benefits of working with Council, for example:

- Working with Council means slow starts, but is very rewarding/worthwhile.

These two seemingly different outcomes—appreciation of differences and confirmation of what each is doing—can be seen as interrelated. By finding out about the diversity of community garden possibilities the community gardeners are assured that there is no right or wrong approach to community gardening and no standard by which community gardens are judged, rather what is important is that community gardens develop their own characteristics ('personality', if you like) as they respond to their unique circumstances, as one community gardening commented in their evaluation feedback "I think we are on a journey as a community garden group that is similar to other garden groups".

Knowledge II: Gardening Techniques

Knowledge about the technical aspects of gardeners was also acquired through whole group discussions facilitated at each site, as well as the informal conversations that occurred at each site, on the bus, and over lunches and coffee (see Figure 1). The technical knowledge acquired has been put into practice at each site. For example, at Silsoe Street Community Garden the Committee of Management met immediately after the bus trip to talk about what the representatives on the bus trip had learned. Based on this discussion, four new gardening projects were implemented at the next working bee in June:

- Compost bays were built
- A sweet potato mound was established
- Legumes were planted, and based on different views expressed during the bus trip the group experimented with planting from sprouted and unsprouted lentils.
- Signs for the different parts of the garden were made. (See also Figure 2)

Knowledge III: Approaches to Running a Community Garden

Community gardeners also learned about approaches to running a community garden. From the end of bus trip evaluation two features in particular were highlighted. One was the importance of a 'loose' approach to running community gardens. For example, in response to the question about what had been learned about managing and coordinating a community garden, community gardeners replied with the following types of comments:

- A loose structure is good to facilitate community growth.
- We're definitely on the right track with the loose approach.
- Less is more or is that more is less. To have as few restrictions, rules etc. as is necessary to keep everyone happy.
- Rules should be simple and fluid. Best results seem to be where there is an air of casual participation and sharing.
- Important of setting up a committee and constitution but don't make it too structured.
- Relax and be as 'loose' as possible.



Figure 1: Acquiring Technical Knowledge through Informal Interactions (Photo JC)



Figure 2: Acting on Technical Knowledge (Photos JC)

Clockwise from top left: planting legumes; new signs for experiments with sprouted and unsprouted lentils; completed sweet potato mound and new compost bins; starting the sweet potato mound.

- Keep things simple and friendly.
- It's better to stand back and let things happen.
- Like the informality of the running of most of the gardens.

Earlier we highlighted that the first knowledge outcome was an appreciation of the differences between each garden and the uniqueness of each. Here, however, community gardeners did

identify a common theme to how gardens operated. It seems that the distinctiveness of each garden was the result of an informal and flexible approach rather than a predetermined vision of what a community garden should be. In other words, the gardens developed in an ‘organic’ way.

Associated with this insight, community gardeners also commented on what this meant for how they contributed to their community garden. This was evident in response to the question about what gardeners had learned about their role in their community garden or their personal journey, for example:

- I loved how people talked about letting go – the letting of self – as a way to create space for others.
- Community gardens need ‘drivers’ but must allow for community decisions.
- The community drives the garden they want. I have just facilitated the process.
- To be a little more laid back. Take things easy; go with the flow. Rome wasn’t built in a day – so things take time.
- Relax and be as ‘loose’ as possible.
- ‘Letting go’.
- Letting go a bit more.
- Leave the ‘door’ open for people to be involved.

The second (and not unrelated) aspect of running a community garden that people learnt about was the importance of social events to build connections between members. One garden has a monthly Friday evening ‘cocktails in the garden’ event and another has a monthly Friday evening pizza oven get-together, and this stimulated lively discussion about the importance of events that have a social rather than gardening focus. This was also reflected in responses to the question about what had been learned about managing and coordinating a community garden. Comments included:

- Perhaps the social stuff could grow – I like the regular social event idea. Ways to make gardens more comfy.
- Include a social area where people can gather and talk (seats and bbq area etc)
- More community get-togethers.
- More working bees with things after to keep relationships and community cohesive.
- Adding a Friday night cocktails type relaxed social occasion.
- Regular cocktail hours seem like a great idea.

Material Outcomes

These knowledge outcomes have material effects in the sense that community gardens have acting on the knowledge acquired, but the bus trip also generated immediate and direct material outcomes. During the bus trip people were invited to gather ‘stuff’ from each other’s gardens, primarily seeds, seedlings and produce (see Figure 3). One garden that was on Department of Housing land had to close down so the site could be developed for social housing (and the garden has since reopened at another location). On the bus trip materials from the old community garden site that were no longer needed were offered to the other community gardens. An old metal garden shed was one of the items picked up the day after the field trip (and captured in a community garden blog, see Figure 4).



Figure 3: Gathering produce from each other's gardens

(Photo JC)

Posted by Minimbah at 3:42 AM 0 comments

Labels: *orchards, Waste is Art*

Saturday, May 22, 2010

If you go down to the garden today..

You're sure of a big surprise. If you go down to the garden today, you'd better go in disguise. We should have done so I believe, balaclavas and trenchcoats would have been good. There we were 'asset stripping' I said, although Mr Ideasman said it was called pilfering. So there we were standing in an abandoned community garden dismantling a shed, piling on the timber boards, shade house, fencing and various deserted plants. Another car drew up and the race was on.

Figure 4: An old shed makes the move from one community garden to another

Source: Excerpt from http://tigheshillgarden.blogspot.com/2010_05_01_archive.html

Connections Made

The final outcome was the connections that were forged between the community gardeners, and this was a real highlight for many people as exemplified in many responses to the question about the highlight of the bus-trip, for example:

- Meeting the absolutely wonderful group of gardeners.
- Meeting other people involved in community gardens – like minded people.

- Meeting other community garden members and forming a network of contacts.
- Meeting other people who are sharing the same issues or other issues that might come up.
- Meeting the people – the camaraderie.
- Brilliant to meet people from the different gardens and to see the fantastic things that everyone is up to.
- It was great to come and meet everyone and share stories and wonderful ideas.
- The group – how everyone mixed in together and were so interested in what each other was up to.
- Highlights – people speaking passionately and sharing their dreams and spaces.
- Sense of community and connections.
- Contacts made.
- Developing a network.

Importantly, these connections have been acted on. For example people have attended each other's working bees, open days, workshops, and the network now has two 'technologies' to help keep the connections going—a timetable of the regular events at different gardens and an email list of all community gardeners who participated (which is being used regularly to keep people up-to-date with developments and events at each garden).

At the outset, our intention might have been to foster a community garden network but there were no guarantees that this is what other community gardeners wanted. Like the comments above about an organic approach to running a community garden we took an organic approach to the research, developing a performative research process that we thought would help forge connections but with no expectation that this was a necessary outcome. From what has happened since the bus trip it seems that a network of community gardens in the Newcastle area is a reality that other community gardens are keen to create. How we go about doing this will be a continuing journey. For the moment, our focus is on completing the Newcastle Community Gardens PlaceStories website and to host an opening night function that will bring the community gardens back together.

In terms of what has been achieved to date, it is clear is that the performative research method of a bus trip has been critical. The experience of, as one community gardener described, "being positively entrapped on a bus" meant that gardeners were taken out of their everyday and even comfortable routines and 'forced' to be with an odd assortment of others. A community of sorts was forged over the two days—people chatted, laughed, joked, and generally got to 'hang out' together. Our experience of the power of 'positive entrapment' in the space of a bus to cultivate new connections and new understandings of possibilities is consistent with other projects that have used bus trips for similar purposes (e.g. Cameron & Gibson, 2005a & b; Gibson-Graham 2006, pp. 155-60). Thus the bus trip is a research method particularly well-suited to a performative research project that is concerned with helping bring worlds and realities into being.

Conclusion

Unlike other projects on community gardens that are concerned with establishing 'What's really going on' in terms of research questions like 'What are the benefits of community gardens?' or 'To what extent are community gardens being neoliberalised?', this project is interested in the ways that research on community gardens can contribute to stronger community gardens and a community garden network. In this research frame, community gardens are positioned as experiments, as ongoing works-in-progress, that can be altered and adjusted in response not just to changed circumstances but to changed understandings. In this

overdetermined landscape, research can be one of the contributors to developing and changing understandings and by using research methods such as a bus trip academic researchers can work with others in a hybrid research collective to explore what might be possible and contribute to getting there.

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