

Circling to Move Ahead:
Building Asian American Community Power for Educational Justice
Chinese Information Service Center (CISC), Southeast Seattle Education Coalition (SESEC),
and University of Washington College of Education (CoE)

Blogpost #1: Overview

Despite being in the US for over a century-and-a-half history and being the fastest growing racial group at present, Asian-American communities have largely remained an afterthought for education policy-makers especially with regards to racial equity. While certain Asian American groups (i.e. middle upper and upper class Chinese, Korean, Japanese, etc.) are attaining measures of success, these feed into the ‘model-minority myth’ that Asians do not need academic support or are immune to racism in the educational system. Seeking to counter this trend and the narratives used to legitimize it, a group of Asian American families, community organizers, and education researchers came together to co-design a strategy by which to change school policies and practices to address the needs of Seattle’s Toishanese (a rural ethnic community in southeast China outside of Hong Kong and Canton) community. Key steps to the process involved reframing community strengths and dreams, desettling cross-cultural interactions, and strategically interweaving immediate needs with longer term goals.

History

The co-design process reported here is the most recent iteration of an ongoing collaboration between the Chinese Information Service Center (CISC), the Southeast Seattle Education Coalition (SESEC), and the University of Washington. Following a SESEC community summit in the spring of 2015 where school-family engagement was identified as a priority for SESEC members, SESEC and UW convened a design team of educators, community orgs including CISC, and families that met over six months beginning in the fall of 2015 to design and implement a survey of family engagement. At the conclusion of this design process, findings from the survey were presented in a broader community meeting with follow-up meetings with individual organizations and schools to make sense of the data.

Throughout this process, CISC staff and family members, who are primarily Toishanese , were actively involved. Survey translations that had previously favored Mandarin Chinese speakers were adjusted to match Toishanese and Cantonese syntax. Toishanese families advocated for translation services for other East Asian languages including Japanese, which is powerful considering the history of Japanese-Chinese tensions both in Asia and the US. CISC staff and families were active in disseminating the surveys, with approximately one third of the over 600 surveys coming from CISC families. It was no surprise at the follow-up meeting with CISC families, family members indicated they wished to continue partnering with SESEC and the UW to use the survey data to move schools to engage in more equitable practices with CISC-serving families. The opportunity to continue building momentum presented itself with the formation of the Family Leadership Design Collaborative (FLDC).

Process

As one of ten FLDC design circles, CISC/SESEC convened two design sessions for CISC families and staff along with SESEC and UW team members and then two additional design

sessions adding educators, school and government officials. All sessions were held at the CISC offices located in the Chinatown/International District of Seattle, which is a majority Toishanese neighborhood facing emerging gentrification. Design sessions were facilitated by Peggy Kwok, a CISC youth and family worker, and Erin Okuno, SESEC executive director, with Jondou Chen, FLDC project director, as a cofacilitator at the first two sessions and as a process observer at the second two sessions. One additional SESEC staff member, Mindy Huang, who also grew up in Seattle's Toishanese community, attended all design sessions.

Our initial session focused on co-constructing our vision for our time together. In a go-around of the twenty design team members, folks shared either about why they came back to the design process or why they were joining us. We then spent time asking community members what their dreams for the community were. This allowed for us to surface community struggles from a strengths-based perspective and then to begin unpacking data from the previous design process.

Our second session took up the power of storytelling to both humanize research data and to call people to action. Participants were asked which data points were most important to them to discuss with the school and government folks joining our third and fourth sessions, and then they were asked to communicate not only about the data but their reasons why through storytelling.

The third and fourth sessions followed similar formats with four to six school and government officials attending each session. In addition to the CISC family members at each of the first two design sessions, an additional 15-20 family members joined each of these subsequent sessions. Originally only a third session was planned, but more officials wanted to participate and family members wanted more time with the officials. Erin and Peggy opened up each session as a learning opportunity for the officials and not for the family members, and then groups of family members meeting with each government official with a key ask around family-teacher conferences, translation services, and cultural representation in schools.

More specifically, Toishanese families asked for three parent-teacher conferences a year instead of the district-mandated one conference per year in the fall. Secondly, district allocations and staffing for translators are based on schools' perceptions of students' needs rather than families' needs. That is, schools provided for students in the classroom but not for families to communicate with the school, and support is not provided to families that need translation support but whose students do not. Finally, families wished to remove the political barrier between schools and home by bringing more Toishanese culture into schools so that students could appreciate their family's culture in the context of school.

In between all sessions, Erin, Peggy, and Jondou were in communication around next steps. Peggy met with family members as often as they wanted to better understand the data as well as to further develop their stories. Erin served as our primary liaison with school and government officials, utilizing her political capital from SESEC to ask school and government officials to attend. All sessions included a mix of Toishanese, Cantonese, Mandarin, and English with at least one official translator and often multiple people who were multilingual to varying extents. Additionally the first two sessions were video recorded and then transcribed in order to help facilitators reflect on the sessions in preparation for the next sessions. Because of the number of people in the room for the third and fourth sessions, as well as the official capacity that school and government officials carried entering the space, these sessions were not recorded but FLDC team members took field notes to share with facilitators.

Blogpost #1: 概況

亞裔在美國已超過一百五十年的歷史，現在已是增長最快的族群，但是在有關種族平等的问题上，亞裔仍然不是教育決策者會優先考慮的社區。每當有些亞裔族群 (例如中等或高階層的華裔、韓裔、日裔等等) (正) 獲得了成功之道，常常 (就) 會被人誤解為亞裔在學術上不需要輔助，或在教育系統裡不會介意種族的不平等待遇。為了改變這種趨勢，不讓人錯誤地以為這樣對待亞裔是合理的，一群亞裔美國人家庭、社區組織者和教育學者聚集一起，設計了一個可以改變學校政策和做法的策略，來解決西雅圖台山社區的需要。主要的步驟包括：重新定義這社區已有的優勢和他們所憧憬的夢想，改變跨文化的互動，策略性地把緊急的需要和遠程的目標互相關聯。

來歷

在這份報告裡提到的共同策劃程序，是CISC、SESEC、WU正在進行之方案的最新版本。2015年春天，SESEC高階層會議確定學校和學生家庭的互動是必須優先處理的要項，於是SESEC和WU召集了策劃團隊，包括教育界人士、社區組織CISC和學生家長，從2015年秋天開始兩週一次的會議持續6個月之久，設計和執行了一項家長和學校互動的問卷調查。調查的結果和數據除了在更廣的社區會議報告，也在個別機構和學校的會議中研討商議。在這個過程中，CISC工作人員和學生家長 (主要是廣東人和台山人) 都積極參與。該調查原來的翻譯是講普通話的人，後來改變為可以講廣東話和台山話的人。台山家庭也倡議為包括日本的其他東亞的家庭提供翻譯，考慮到中日歷史上在亞洲和美國的曾有的緊張關係，這是非常有价值的。CISC的員工和家庭都積極發傳該問卷調查，在收回的600份問卷中，有1/3來自CISC家庭。因此，在接下來與CISC家長舉行的會議上，家長們都希望繼續與SESEC和UW合作，用調查結果推動學校以較公正合理的做法與CISC家庭互動。於是，在持續構建這正能量的趨勢中，FLDC(研究家長如何引領子女教育的策畫團隊)的加入就給了策劃團隊再一次合作的機會。

程序

在全美國有十個參與FLDC研究團隊的夥伴，西雅圖團隊是其中之一。CISC/SESEC曾兩次召集CISC家長和員工，與SESEC和WU團隊一起舉行策劃會議，第三和第四次會議則加入教育人員、學校和政府要職人員。所有的會議都在西雅圖中國城CISC的辦公室舉行，中國城是台山人的主要社區，面臨新興的高檔化改建。這些策劃會議有幾位主持/協調人：Peggy Kwok，是CISC負責少年和家庭部門的經理；Erin Okuno，SESEC的執行主任；Jondou Chen，FLDC的主任，是第一和第二次會議的主持人，第三和第四次會議的觀察和研究員。還有SESEC的員工Mindy Huang，她在西雅圖的廣東台山社區長大，參加了所有策劃會議。

我們的第一次會議集中在開誠布公的溝通，先由二十位策劃團隊組員輪流分享他們為何又來參與策劃，或為何來與我們一同工作。然後用更多的時間請社區的家長分享他們對社區的夢想。在這一過程中家長不再一味責怪自己 (例如不懂英文等)，而是積極面對挑戰，陳述問題，使我們得以解讀以前問卷調查所收集的那些數據資料，根據這樣的溝通，我們可以決定以後的會議要如何進行。

第二次會議我們成功地运用真實故事的說服力，真人實例的研究數據，推動人們採取行動。我們問與會者：「我們做調查所得來的數據中，你認為哪一項是最重要的，是你要在第三和第四次會議中和學校、政府要職人士討論的？」然後請他們不只溝通相關數據，還要他們講述經歷的真實故事，以此為依据來提出要求。

第三和第四次會議也採用相似的形式，(但)每次有四至六位學校和政府人士來參加。CISC的家屬來參加第一和第二次策劃會議，從第三次會議開始就有15至20甚至更多位家長來參加。本來我們計畫第三會議是開大會，但因較多學校和政府人士來參加，家長需要用更多時間與這些人士交談，於是Erin和Peggy在全体會議的開場白中強調，會議是為了給政府人士而不是家庭一個學習的機會。為此，將家長分成幾組，分別與每位政府人士討論一個議題：或是家長和老師的會談，或是提供翻譯的服務，或是在學校設文化代表等。

具體地說，對於家長和老師的會談，學區原來的規定是一年一次在秋季，但台山家長要求一年三次。對於翻譯人員的分派和排班，學區是根據學校所視學生需要來評估，而不是根據家庭的需要。換句話說，學校提供翻譯是為了學生在課堂學習，不是為了幫助家長與學校溝通；這項輔助不是為了需要翻譯的家長，而是為了不需要翻譯的學生。家長們希望能把更多的台山文化帶入學校，以去除學校和家庭的隔閡，這樣，學生就能在學校的氛圍裡理解、讚賞自己家庭的文化。

在會議之間的空檔，Erin, Peggy和Jondou就忙著為下一個步驟交流協商。Peggy常與家長會談，以便更多地了解他們填寫在問卷上的數據，同時也幫助他們把在學校所經歷的不平等事件講得更完整。Erin是我們學校和政府人士的聯絡人，利用她在SESEC工作的人脈，她可以要求那些要職人士來參加會議。所有會議同時使用多種語言：台山話、廣東話、普通話和英語，至少有一名正式的翻譯員在場，還有一些人多多少少懂幾種語言。為了幫助主持人思考和準備下一次的會議，第一和第二次會議有錄影與記錄。第三和第四次會議沒錄影，因為參加的人很多，又有學校和政府要職人士在場，但FLDC隊員為主持人做了現場記錄。