

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 #2: Designing to Dream: One Design Team Member Perspective
By Mindy Huang

Who I Am

I am second-generation Chinese American. My parents emigrated from Guangzhou a little over thirty years ago. I was born and raised in Beacon Hill. I grew up in a multigenerational household where no English was spoken; I taught myself by watching cable TV. I translated for my parents at parent-teacher conferences and school events when they could find the time to make it while working multiple jobs. In second grade, I left Beacon Hill Elementary for the Spectrum Program at Lawton Elementary in Magnolia (30-min without traffic or additional stops). I was one of two students from my neighborhood on the school bus going to Lawton each day.

As a twenty-four year old daughter of Chinese immigrants who grew up in Seattle, these design sessions have been an experience for me, forcing me to reflect not just on my experience in Seattle Public Schools, but my parents'. I have the unique position of being closer in age to the parents at CISC than to their children, but still young enough to remember and relate to the experiences that their kids are going through and see my parents' struggles in the stories of the families at CISC.

Holding Multiple Identities, Visibility, and Honoring Culture

TaeTae: 我未这里是想自己的小孩同本地的小朋友得到平等的权利，他应该有的资源应该大家共享，不能因为我们的语言障碍，导致他们在学习上，在某方面丧失很多些机会，而对大人来讲亦都是一样。[I want my child to have an equal foundation as an American child. Our language should not be a barrier that puts them at a disadvantage in comparison to other children.]

I have never seen so many Chinese people in one room cry.

Growing up, I often heard that (East) Asian cultures didn't know how to express emotion or that we were "emotionless" people. When the parents were asked to articulate their feelings, it was not surprising that there was confusion and uncertainty over what exactly that entailed—despite Peggy's efforts prior to the meetings to explain feelings and emotions in American culture.

Thinking back to my own family, we don't often explicitly say, "I am angry. I feel sad. I am happy." We tell stories and in our stories and in our body language, our feelings are present. The parents expressed a wide range of emotions, such as frustration, hopelessness, isolation and joy through their stories. Yet, when asked outright to identify specific "feelings," they were stumped. It's easy to dismiss this type of response as a cultural inability, but that is simply not true. We just live by a different cultural script.

During the first design session, Jondou asked the parents about their dreams. Like feelings, this seemed to make them pause. One of the first responses was:

Hsiensun: 我都不知道我的梦想。 [I don't even know my own dreams.]

Hsiensun: 因为不敢梦想，现你提示我，我开始有梦想。 [Because I don't dare to dream. Now that you've prompted me, I've begun to dream.]

This notion was echoed by other parents. Talking about feelings and dreaming almost seemed to be an “American” thing to do, but some parents didn't even know how to talk about dreams or find the time to dream when they struggled to navigate the simplest of misunderstandings on a daily basis with school staff, teachers or principals. Dreams and feelings are a luxury. Are their dreams and feelings valued?

It's an interesting juxtaposition: to be told to acculturate in a system so dominated by the idea of individualism, extroverted leadership, using your voice to speak up, and following your dreams, but when you're an immigrant in America, you're supposed to follow “the American dream”—one prescribed for you within a system that tells you anything is possible as long as you work hard. Never mind the unique circumstances and struggles that you have brought with you in search of a better life for your family. The system has given you all you need—all it thinks you deserve. This is the “American” way.

I'll never forget when, at the end of our second session after we had settled on the specific asks these parents had for their schools, the district, the city, and other policymakers, one of the parents quietly said, “Are we asking for too much?” I was personally waiting for it. My parents would ask the same thing. I would've asked the same thing. Should they just settle? Will they be reprimanded for using their voices? Will it negatively impact their children? How do they continue to hold their own culture and teach their children to value something when everything around them says that survival and belonging means suppressing those identities?

This process sought to reframe that narrative: our families *can* dream, their hopes deserve to be heard, and these shifts in power can happen without assimilation.

Jondou: ...I think one of the ways that...racial inequality happens is when people can't even dream anymore. We're so busy looking for a translator that we can't think our own thoughts. And so to come together in this space is to hopefully give you time to dream.

It's time to reframe the conversation to acknowledge that different communities mean different approaches. It is not the communities' jobs to bend for the system, but for the system to bend for communities if we truly value equity. This is what the design sessions sought to do: shift the perception of who holds the power and knowledge in our schools among those impacted.

This process wasn't just about teaching them how to navigate the dominant systems. It was about co-designing solutions in a way that helps them realize their own power through storytelling in the language they know and in a culturally-guided way—in a space that sought to intentionally foster their voices and draw from their expertise rather than teach them how to integrate on dominant terms.

Design Session Three: Power through Storytelling

My parents have never told their stories and probably never will. It can be difficult at times to explain why this work is important and relevant to our community, because we got through the system. If they could do it using me as an interpreter and I could figure out how to navigate Seattle Public Schools, why can't other families? But as I stood in the back of the room at CISC, watching other parents in the room sob as the three parents shared their stories, I wondered if my parents would've felt moved.

I wondered if my parents had gone through this experience or even sat in on this third session and had been in a space where people wanted to give them power, if they would've continued to put their heads and push through instead of share their struggles and ask for more. If, for once, someone held a meeting where Cantonese was the primary language and the burden of finding an interpreter and getting others to understand was no longer on them, because the intention was for us to understand them. This space is for them, because of them, and power lied with them.

DahJieh: 好像觉得之前好像是一味只是别人给你东西，但通过这个会议，原来让我们知道可以通过你们，麻烦你们可能会讲到我们的心声，就会想到这方面，因为最初我以为，即然你是只能给我们这么多，我觉得就是这么多了。但现在可能，我会去想一想，我想要什么？真的是有梦想了。[Before coming to this group, I just settled for what was given to me. But after this meeting—after troubling you all to teach us how to use our voices—I know that I can now think about what I want and what I need. I can really dream.]

Blogpost #2 一位策劃隊員的觀點 Mindy Huang

我是第二代的華裔美國人。三十多年前我的父母從廣州移民來美國。我生在Beacon Hill，長在不講英語的多代家庭裡。我是看電視自學的英語。我的父母做幾個工作，當我的學校有什麼活動或家長與老師會談，如我的父母有辦法來，我就充當他們的翻譯。二年級時，我從Beacon Hill小學轉到Lawton小學的Spectrum program(較晉級的課程)，在那附近，只有我和另一個學生每天坐至少30分的校車去Lawton上學。

身為華裔移民的女兒，24歲，參加策劃會議不僅逼我反思當年我在西雅圖公立學校的經歷，也使我反思我父母那時的情況。我的位子相當獨特：我的年歲比較接近CISC家長，但因年輕還能記得和感受那些孩子正在經歷的事，也在CISC家長的真實故事裏，看見我父母當年經歷的奮鬥。

持守你的多種身分，勿隱藏自己，以文化為榮

TaeTae: 我來这里是希望自己的小孩同本地的小朋友得到平等的权利，他应该有的资源应该大家共享，不能因为我们的语言障碍，导致他们在学习上，在某方面丧失很多些机会，对大人来讲亦如此。

我未曾看過這麼多的華人在一個房間裡哭。

在成長過程中，我常聽說亞洲人的文化就是不知如何表達情緒，或說我們是無情感的人。當主持人要求與會的家長清楚地說出他們的感覺/情感時，不出乎意料地，家長們都顯得

困惑不安，不知道這意味着什麼，即使在開會前Peggy已努力地解釋在美國文化裏「感覺/情感」和「情緒」是什麼。

回想我自己的家庭，我們不常直率地說：「我生氣...」「我感覺悲哀...」「我高興...」。

我們會像說故事般地敘述一件事，用這件事和我們的肢體語言，來表現我們的感受。來開會的家長藉著說他們的故事來表達各種的情緒，例如挫敗、無奈、孤獨和歡喜。但是，當主持人要求他們識別特別的感受，他們就很為難了。這種反應很容易被誤解為文化上的無能，但那是錯誤的。我們只是生活在不同的文化背景（劇本）。

第一次策劃會議上，Jondou請家長們談他們的夢想。如同談情感，他們不知要講什麼。

先開口的人中，一人說：「我都不知道我的梦想。因为不敢梦想，現经你提示，我开始有梦想。」其他家長也复合（回應）他的觀點。談論情感和夢想似乎是「美國人」做的事，（但）有些家長每天必須努力和學校的員工、老師或校長溝通處理最明顯的誤解：（事情，）他們甚至不知如何談夢想，或找時間來夢想。夢想和情感是奢侈的，他們的夢想和情感值得嗎？

那是有趣的並排但對比的事實：他們說：同化在有強勢的個人主義和領導擅長唱高調、搞活動的系統裡，你就必須讓人聽到你的聲音，追求你的夢想。但是當你移民來到美國，你就應該跟隨「美國夢」——就是在一個系統裡規定給你（的那種，）、告訴你只要努力，沒有不可能的事；不要在意你為了給家人更好的生活而帶來的那些獨特的經歷和面臨的挑戰。這系統已提供你所需要的一切，就是它認為你該得到的那些。這就是「美國」的方式。

我永遠記得一件事：第二次會議結束時，我們已經解決了家長們對學校、學區、市政府和決策者所提出的要求，一位家長悄悄地問：「我們是否要求太多？」在我心底，我預期有人會這樣問。我的父母會這樣問，我也會。他們是否應該妥協？他們會因提出要求而遭懲誠嗎？家長這樣做對孩子會有不好的影響嗎？當周圍的事提示他們：若要求生存和歸屬某群體，就當壓抑自己的身分和特性，他們該如何繼續保持他們自己的文化，並且教導兒女尊重有價值的事物？

這程序試圖重新定義：我們的家人能憧憬、能夢想，他們的期望應該被聽見，這種能力的轉移是不需要經過同化的。

Jondou: 我認為可能發生種族不平等的情況之一，就是當人們甚至不能夢想之時。當我們忙著找人翻譯時，我們就不能思考自己真正想表達的。所以，我們一起來到這裡，就是希望給你們時間去夢想。

現在我們需要重新認知：在不同的社區，就需要採取不同的處理方式。不是社區必須改變來適應系統，若我們真的重視平等，系統就必須為社區來改變。策劃會議嘗試做的是：改變學校里有能力和知識影響他人的那些人的看法。

這程序不僅是教導移民家庭如何駕馭強勢的系統，也是共同策劃解決問題的方法，讓他們以熟悉的語言和文化引導方式講述自己的故事，來幫助認知自己的能力，也就是在一個有意培養他們用聲音去爭取平等的空間裡，以他們的經驗去發揮專長，而不是教他們如何聽從強勢的系統而隨波逐流。

第三次策劃會議：從講故事得到力量

我的父母從來沒有告訴人他們的故事，也許永遠不會。有時可能很難解釋為什麼訴說他們的故事這項工作對我們的社區是重要的和相關的，因為我們在這個系統下生存下來了。如果他們可以用我為他們翻譯，我也有辦法在西雅圖公立學校裡做得得心應手，為什麼其他家庭不能？但當我站在CISC的房間後面，看著三位父母分享他們的故事之時，房間裡的其他父母在哭泣，此時我想知道我的父母是否會被感動。

我想知道我的父母是否經歷過這些，甚至是坐在這第三次會議会场，也曾經在人們想要賦予他們能力的空間裡，那麼，他們是否還會繼續拚老命排除萬難，卻不告訴別人自己的奮鬥史，也不要求更多？假設，有一回，有人召開一個以粵語為主要語言的會議，來開會的人不必擔心必須找翻譯和讓別人理解他們，因為這會議的目的是讓別人理解他們。這個空間是為了他們，有了他們，就有了能力。

DahJieh: 好像觉得之前是一味只是别人给你东西，但通过这个会议，让我们知道原来可以通过你们（，麻烦你们可能会）讲出我们的心声，（就会想到这方面，因为）最初我以为，既然你只能给我们这么多，我觉得就是这么多了。但现在可能我会去想一想，我想要什么？真的是有梦想了。