

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 #3: Building Bridges and Brokering Culture

Racial equity takes work and takes time. Even as our design circle process was yet another iteration of folks working together who'd worked together before, and even as our design circle was within the "Asian American" community, our process revealed the need for both time and intentional effort as we sought to move toward community wellbeing and racial and educational justice. Our facilitation team included members of four different Asian ethnic groups: Erin is Japanese-Okinawan American (from Hawaii), Peggy is Cantonese American, Mindy is Toishanese American, and Jondou is Taiwanese American. Each design session involved four different languages (Toisanese, Cantonese, Mandarin, and English) as well as translation and interpretation of body language, tone, and culture. We posit here that these lessons learned are still lessons in process for us as well as lessons applicable to the broader work of building solidarity in racial justice.

Educational equity efforts have tended to focus on equalizing outcomes without first acknowledging historic oppression and trauma. At the same time, professional development around such systemic oppression often lectures without providing enactable directions for substantive change. Individual actions then are just that: actions taken in order to present individuals as "good" or "nice" people, even as they do little to shift community or systems-level practices. Bringing people together to enact social justice must move beyond these limitations. Building the politicized trust necessary to effect change requires critically acknowledging past histories and engaging in equitable and ongoing relationship building in order to cultivate future possibilities and solidarities.

When FLDC team member Jondou Chen first met with SESEC executive director Erin Okuno three years ago to discuss UW partnerships with the community and a certificate program, Erin immediately said, "Don't do it." When Jondou asked why, Erin continued, "Because we don't need more people trying to save or fix or learn from us at our expense. That isn't equity, it's fakequity (fake equity)." Upon acknowledging the risk and even likelihood of this, Jondou then asked Erin, what (admittedly arbitrary) success rate would be necessary for it to be worth it to have UW partner with SESEC and its community partners? Erin responded, "90%." Jondou committed to not moving forward with community work until he could ensure this success rate and their meeting ended without any additional contracts or commitments. Several months later, Erin invited Jondou to join a SESEC planning group for SESEC's first annual summit, when then was followed by the initial co-design process facilitated by Erin and Jondou and joined by Peggy Kwok and CISC.

Similarly, when this FLDC design circle process began, even as we had already met a number of family members before this design circle process, we began as facilitators by acknowledging our positionality as facilitators who didn't speak the primary dialects of the family members in the room. We all had to consider when it was appropriate to use different dialects, when to translate, with whom and when to make eye contact, and when it simply listen, when to affirm, and when to push back on statements that we considered problematic. For

several of us, we needed to acknowledge that our role not only as facilitators but as professionals in particular roles meant that we had class privilege relative to the families in the group. Additionally that Erin is read as Japanese because of her name and that Jondou sometimes used Mandarin to communicate brought colonizing dynamics into the space given the history of Japanese-Chinese tensions as well as the use of Mandarin as the imperializing dialect of power in the Chinese diaspora. Even Mindy, who grew up in the Toisanese community faced power dynamics as an in-group member because of her age and because she is not a parent. Implicitly and explicitly acknowledging these ethnic differences and dynamics was critical to building our racialized identity and the possibility of solidarity. From the beginning, facilitators worked to acknowledge that we were gathered to co-design around the experience of Toishanese families. Again, three of us had to acknowledge that three of our facilitators base our work outside of Asian American communities, and this was a move we sought to make throughout each session.

Having done this, we could more authentically offer our own experiences of being racialized as Asian Americans. In doing this we could name that we were moving toward solidarity not out of cultural sameness but politicized resistance. We were able share in stories of perpetually being treated as foreigners, of wanting to pass on our cultural heritage, of struggling to be heard for our concerns and dreams for our young people. In moving toward a more earnest solidarity, we were able to strategize around the strengths of the Toishanese community.

Perhaps most powerfully, we recognized that despite Toishanese communities being in the plurality of only one or two Seattle public schools, that there were Toishanese families associated with CISC at least a dozen schools. As Toishanese families sought policy and practice changes at these dozen schools, they could use their CISC network as a place to share stories of strategies and successes. Once success had been achieved at one school - perhaps a principal agreeing to commit funds for additional family-teacher conferences - families at other school would report these successes to their school, leveraging this news for change at their own children's schools. And as principals became aware of Toishanese families incorporating this strategy, they became more likely to either check in with one another on new strategies or to preemptively adopt the policies that the CISC families sought for.

Building authentic and equitable solidarity also required us to look beyond our pan-Asian design circle. Several times during our sessions, design team members would jealously reference the success of another cultural or racial group in effecting change. This was about perceptions of other groups "always complaining" or receiving dietary accommodations for religious beliefs. These were the moments where we as facilitators weighed and spent down the capital we built with our group members to interrupt the lateral violence that our members were committing against other peoples of color. Speaking candidly, I'm not sure that we actually changed people's minds with these interruptions, for we sought to redirect focus to our stated goals, and only time will tell whether our design group folks will revert to openly participating in oppressive systems.

All told, the work described here spanned two years and countless hours of relationship building for the sake of political change. We offer here accounts of what it meant to build pan-Asian solidarity for the Toishanese community in Seattle, including the need for a commitment to translation and the corrective intention of advancing solidarity without bringing down other folks of color. These efforts have results in a range of changes from CISC families going to train as community organizers with One America and testifying in Olympia to, most important, Toishanese families advocating for themselves, their culture, and their children in schools.

Blogpost #3 : 建立橋樑，調解文化

種族平等需要有人努力去推行，需要花時間。即使我們的策劃團隊以前就曾攜手合作過，即使我們都是在「亞裔美國人」社區中，我們工作的過程顯示：當我們嘗試尋求社區的福祉和種族與教育的公義，時間、心、力都是絕對必要的。我們的主持團隊包括四個不同族裔的成員：Erin是日本—夏威夷裔的美國人，Peggy是廣東裔的美國人，Mindy是廣東—台山裔的美國人，而Jondou是台灣裔的美國人。每個策劃會議都涉及四種不同的語言（台山話，廣東話，普通話和英語），以及對肢體語言、語氣、文化的翻譯和解釋。我們認為這些學習的過程是我們必須持續的，也適用於建立團結和種族公義的各種工作。

努力使教育平等的人往往側重於使結果平等，而不首先承認歷史上曾發生過的壓迫和創傷。與此同時，圍繞這種系統性壓迫的專業發展往往只教課，卻沒有提供改變實質的可行方針。於是個人的行動就是這樣：採取的行動為了呈現個體為「好」或「很好」的人，儘管它們對於改變社區或改變系統以應社區需求沒有什麼作用。把人們聚集在一起來制定社會公義必須超越這些限制。建立實現變革所需的政治化的信任，需要審慎地承認過去的歷史，建立公平和持續的關係，以培育未來的可能性和團結。

三年前當FLDC的Jondou第一次與SESEC的執行主任Erin Okuno會面，討論UW和社區合作及成立一個證書課程時，Erin立即說：「不要做！」崇道問為什麼，Erin說：「因為我們不需要更多人試圖利用我方的資源去挽救、改正或學習他想做的。這不是公平，而是假公平。」在承認這個風險甚至其可能性之後，Jondou問Erin：「使UW和SESEC及它的社區成為合作夥伴，需要什麼成功率才算值得的？」Erin回應說：「90%」。崇道承諾不開始社區工作，直到他能確保這個成功率。他們的面談沒有得到任何額外的合同或承諾就結束了。幾個月之後，Erin邀請崇道參加SESEC首屆年度首腦會議的SESEC計劃小組，隨後初步共同策劃過程由Erin和Jondou主持，Peggy和CISC也加入。

同樣，當這個FLDC策劃過程開始時，即使我們在這之前已經會見了一些家長，我們以主持人/協調人開始，認知這角色就是我們不會說在會議房間裏的家長的主要方言。我們都必須考慮什麼時候適合使用不同的方言，什麼時候翻譯，什麼時候和誰眼光接觸，及什麼時候只是傾聽，什麼時候去肯定，什麼時候撤回我們認為有問題的說法。對於我們中間的一些人，我們需要認知我們的角色不僅是主持人/協調者，而且是擔任特定角色的專業人員，這意味著相對於小組中的家庭，我們有課堂特權。此外，Erin被認為是日本人，因為她的名字，而Jondou有時用普通話交談，帶來了殖民化的互動，由於日中的緊張關係，而且普通話在中國僑民是較有影響（權）力的語言。即使是在中國—台山混合的社區中長大的Mindy，作為一個組內成員也會面對權力的互動，因為她的年齡和她不是學生家長。含蓄地和明確地認知這些民族差異和互動，對於建立我們的種族身份和團結的可能性至關重要。從一開始，協調/主持人就努力去認知：我們在一起策劃的，就是圍繞著台山族家庭所經歷的事。再一次，我們之中的三人也必須謙虛地承認：我們之中的三位主持人平時做的是亞裔美國人的社區以外的工作，是不同於台山社區的工作。

這樣做後，我們可以更真實地提供自己被種族化為亞裔美國人的經驗，我們可以說，我們正在走向團結一致，不是出於文化同一性，而是我們有相同的目標—擁護公義。我們能分享的故事包括：總是被視為外國人，想要傳承我們的文化遺產，努力使我們對年輕人的關注和夢想被聽到。在走向更誠懇的團結之時，我們可以從對台山社區有利的優點來製訂策略。

也許最有力的是，我們得知台山社區在多數的西雅圖公立學校中只是一兩個，但與CISC有聯繫的台山家庭分散在至少十幾所學校裡。當台山家庭在這十幾所學校企圖改變學校的政策和做法，他們可以利用他們CISC的聯絡網來分享策略和成功的故事。一旦在一個學校獲得成功（或許是一個校長承諾為額外的家長—教師會談提供資金），其他學校的家庭可將把這些成功的例子報告給他們的學校，並利用這個消息在自己孩子的學校尋求改變。

而且當校長們得知台山家庭納入這一策略，他們更可能互相查看新的策略，或先發制人地採取CISC家庭所要求的政策。

建設真實而平等的團結需要我們超越汎亞策劃圈子。幾次在我們的會議裡，策劃隊員羨慕地引用另一文化或種族群體成功的實現改革例子。這是關於其他群體「總是抱怨」或因為宗教信仰而受到膳食住宿優待的看法。這些時候，我們作為主持人的必須衡量和利用組員和我們建立的信任關係，去勸阻他們攻擊其他有色人種。坦白地說，我不確定我們這樣勸阻是否真能改變他們的想法，因為我們試圖將注意力轉移到我們所說的目標上，我們只能從時間看出他們是否會再犯少數民族彼此攻

擊的錯誤。

總而言之，本文所描述的工作跨越了兩年，我們也用數不清的時數在建立關係，為了政治性的改變。我們報告了為西雅圖台山社區建立汎亞團結意味著什麼，包括需要提供翻譯的承諾，以及糾正促進團結的意向而不攻擊其他有色人種。這些努力導致了一系列的變化，從數位CISC家長去參與「一個美國」的訓練班，成為社區組織者，並且在Olympia作證，到最重要的，台山家庭在學校中能為自己、他們的文化和他們的孩子站起來說話了。