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Teaching Solidarity: Popular Education in Grassroots U.S. Social Movements

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TEACHING SOLIDARITY: POPULAR EDUCATION IN GRASSROOTS U.S. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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Dissertation Abstract

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Grassroots U.S. Social Movements

Fifty years after he wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's work is as relevant as ever. But while many of Freire's ideas are well known in the United States, there is limited research on their application in social movement settings, a practice commonly known as *popular education*. This comparative case study draws on Freire's theory of popular education to analyze two U.S.-based grassroots education programs, one with low-income residents in the Tenderloin neighborhood of San Francisco and one with front-line hospital and public school employees on the East Coast. Through six months of participant observation and over 50 interviews with facilitators and participants, the study finds that the two programs carved out spaces that were relatively independent from union and non-profit hierarchies, which enabled them to apply popular education's radically democratic principles within their organizing work and larger social struggles. These findings point to the possibility that popular education can offer participants not only knowledge and skills but also–and perhaps more importantly–strengthened *connections* across divisions, *confidence* that they can make change, and the *courage* to organize. The dissertation also expands on commonly understood meanings of "critical consciousness," arguing that what moves people to action may be not only their intellectual understanding of power, but also an increased solidarity that gives them an awareness of their collective historical agency. Finally, the study identifies tensions in the programs, for example related to funding constraints, that at times interfered with facilitators' abilities to apply the radical principles of popular education. These findings speak to the value of a reflective practice on the part of practitioners, and highlight the ongoing significance of Freirean popular education in U.S. social movement contexts.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Mike Parker, one of my organizing mentors and co-author of *Democracy Is Power: Rebuilding Unions From the Bottom Up,* which was foundational for this study. Thank you, Mike. Rest in Power, January 16, 2022.

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And to all those, in the long chain from our ancestors to our descendents, who don't give up. Power to the people.

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- Hafez, 14th century Persian poet

PART I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The focus of this research study is a unique kind of education used within social movements known throughout the world as *popular education* (Jara, 2010; Kane, 2010). Often associated with Latin American social movements beginning in the 1960s *(educación popular)*, and linked to the late Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, popular education is rooted in radical theories of adult education that see learning as social, and knowledge as something oppressed people can construct together for their own liberation (Worthen, 2014). The Highlander Research and Education Center, the oldest popular education center in the United States, describes popular education as "the process of bringing people together to share their lived experience and build collective knowledge. Popular Education learning informs action for liberation" (Highlander, n.d.). In 2009, the UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education recognized popular education as a "model to develop adult education as a means of social and political transformation" (Torres, 2013, p. 42). Popular education has a *goal* of transforming unequal social relations in society (the larger political orientation), and uses an approach that *prefigures* these goals by using a democratic, participatory and dialogical learning method (the teaching practice) within social movement settings (Wiggins, 2011).[1]

Paulo Freire developed a particular approach to popular education while carrying out an adult literacy program in Brazil, which he saw as "an educational tactic designed to produce a necessary result: the politicizing of the Brazilian people" (Macedo and Araújo Freire, 2005, p. xiv). In working with rural agricultural workers, who according to Freire saw their situation as unchangeable, Freire believed that if they could "become critical, enter reality, increase their capacity to make choices," they could liberate themselves and change society (2005, p. 16). His goal in supporting this *critical consciousness* was therefore not an end in and of itself but a way

[1] The term *popular* can be misleading in modern U.S. usage. Originating from Portuguese and Spanish, "popular" translates to "of the people" (Kane, 2010, p. 277), and Kane (2010) argues that it therefore carries "imprecise but strong class connotations," referring to "'poor' or 'ordinary' people as opposed to the well-off" (p. 277). From this perspective, the "popular" sectors include poor and working class people of color and poor and working class white people, because white supremacy and capitalism are interlocking systems based in relationships of domination, exploitation and marginalization (Goldberg and Alzaga, 2020).

to "facilitate their intervention in the historical process" (p. 40).[2] In a critique of dominant education systems that reinforce passivity, Freire rejected what he called a "banking concept of education" in favor of "problem-posing education" (p. 72). Whereas banking education "attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness" and acceptance of the status quo, problem-posing education "strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality" (p. 81; emphasis in original).

Since the 1960s, Freire's approach to popular education has played an important role in grassroots social movements around the world, in part through the publication and dissemination of his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* worldwide (Acevedo, 1992; von Kotze et al., 2016; Payne, 1998). In contrast to more traditional political education programs that have sought to instruct people in a particular political program (see, for example, Perlstein, 2008), popular education has served as a democratizing force in social movements through developing people's own collective analysis and action. Popular education is therefore a necessarily political education in that it *sides* with the oppressed and is committed "to their interests" (Acevedo, 1992, p. 8):

> Popular Education is political education committed to subordinated sectors of the society. Such a commitment is reflected not only in the fact that it is directed towards them, but also in its endeavor to participate in an alternative political project of the popular classes for transforming society (p. 16-17).

In relation to other forms of education, popular education can therefore be defined both by its pedagogy and by its role in supporting an "alternative political project" of people at the grassroots level. More often than not, popular education programs are also geared towards adults, but as Freire argues it is not the age of the participant that distinguishes popular education but the "political practice" (as quoted in Torres, 1985, p. 124).

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[2] Critical consciousness is the English translation of the Portuguese term *conscientização* in Portuguese that Freire discussed extensively in *A Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1974). In the translator's note to *A Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000), conscientização is described in this way: "The term conscientização refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 2000, p. 37).

This dissertation focuses on two U.S.-based popular education programs, one with low-income residents in the Tenderloin neighborhood of San Francisco and one with front-line hospital and public school employees on the East Coast. In Part I, I introduce the study by providing an overview of the research problem, exploring historical and contemporary literature on popular education both internationally and in the United States, and describing the research methods. In Part II, I share the findings from the data collection conducted between June and December 2020. There are four findings chapters: Chapter IV describes how facilitators of both programs worked to carve out autonomous spaces, free from many of the structural constraints imposed by traditional non-profits (the GEL program) and top-down labor union bureaucracies (the Workers' Dialogue). Chapter V and VI focus on what the programs were able to *do* with the free spaces they had created, in particular how each program supported participants' *praxis* and *democratic participation* through their organizing strategies and pedagogical practices, as well as the tensions that arose. And finally Chapter VII describes how the programs impacted the development of participants' *critical consciousness*. Chapter VIII is a closing discussion chapter that compares the findings of each program, arguing that both programs contributed to *changed social relations*, where participants were able to "enter the historical process as responsible Subjects" (Freire, 2000, p. 36).

CHAPTER I: THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction to the Problem

It has been 50 years since Freire wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and the need for social movements that are built from the grassroots and capable of changing our fundamental social and economic structures has never been greater. In the United States, as in the rest of the globe, neoliberal policies aggressively extract wealth from the poorest while enriching those at the very top (Lipman, 2011). In 2015, the twenty richest Americans controlled as much wealth as the poorer *half* of the U.S. population, and by 2017, that same wealth was concentrated into the hands of just three American billionaires (Collins & Hoxie, 2015; 2017).[3] The widespread Black Lives Matter uprisings have forced the country to reckon with the ways structural racism functions overtly and covertly within U.S. institutions as a "conjoined twin" of capitalism (Democracy Now, 2019; Taylor, 2020). At the same time, the climate crisis goes largely unaddressed by national governments, while Indigenous sovereignty and worldviews continue to be denied within mainstream discourse despite offering a sustainable vision for the survival of our planet (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019). Klein (2019) argues for emphasizing the interconnectedness of these crises, and for the building of grassroots social movements that confront "the myriad ways that our current economic systems grinds up people's lives and landscapes in the ruthless pursuit of profit" (p. 32). Now, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for movements that connect the dots is clearer than ever, as public health and human survival are dependent on social, political and economic systems that prioritize people and the planet over profit and power (Roy, 2020).

These types of social movements have been increasingly visible over the last two decades throughout the world, including the popular uprisings in the Arab Spring; the national "horizontalist" movement in Argentina that toppled four consecutive governments in less than

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[3] As of 2017, the combined wealth of Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos and Warren Buffett was more than that of the poorest 63 million households–about $250 billion (Collins and Hoxie, 2017).

two weeks in 2011; the landless workers movement in Brazil; organizing by Indigenous groups organizing against privatization and environmental destruction in Guatemala, Ecuador and Bolivia; the autonomous movement of the Zapatistas in Mexico; and efforts by poor people in South Africa's shantytowns to take back housing, water and electricity from corporations and the government (Sitrin, 2006; Engler & Engler, 2016). These movements have also been visible in the United States through the Occupy movement (Engler & Engler, 2016); the Standing Rock movement of "water protectors" opposing the Dakota Access Pipeline and its violation of Indigenous sovereignty (Estes & Dillon, 2019); the wave of militant–and often illegal–teachers' strikes that swept the country in 2018-2019 (Blanc, 2020); and during the pandemic, the explosion of the grassroots "leader-ful" Black Lives Matter movement, the largest U.S. uprising since the civil rights movement (Belton, 2015; Brucato, 2017; Morris, 2021).

Sitrin (2006) calls these types of movements "prefigurative revolutionary movements" because they "create the future in the present" (p. 2). They seek to "create and sustain within the live practice of the movement, relationships and political forms that 'prefigure' and embody the desired society" (Gamson, 1991, p. 48). Campbell (2010) argues that these kinds of prefigurative movements are what is most needed now:

> Revolutions of the twenty-first century should focus on processes of social transformation that are not merely mimicking those from the existing systems of oppression… we are not reflecting on revolution in the traditional sense of simply seizing state power; we are talking about fundamental transformation. These are transformations at the level of consciousness, transformations at the level of material organisations, transformations in the matter of political organisation, transformations at the level of gender relations, new conceptions of leadership and transformations at the level of our relations with the planet Earth and the Universe. (p. 37, as quoted in Nangwaya, 2017, p. 154)

Many 20th century revolutions and independence movements replaced governments without successfully changing the underlying structures and logic of capitalism, white supremacy, and colonialism, and are thus increasingly viewed as not fulfilling their purpose of reorganizing resources and power in societies in a fundamental way (Nangwaya, 2017; Truscello & Nangwaya, 2017).

In the context described above, radical adult educational approaches like popular education can play an important role (Acevedo, 1992; von Kotze et al., 2016).[4] Because popular education seeks to develop critical consciousness among people at the grassroots level and support their capacity for direct participation in decisions that affect their lives, it is in a position to support the building of these types of prefigurative grassroots movements. But within the United States, Freire's ideas have in many cases become depoliticized and used outside of grassroots organizing, the context in which his revolutionary ideas were born.

Education Without Organizing

Freire's ideas have been increasingly taken up in United States academic spaces through an educational theory and practice known as *critical pedagogy*. As a theory, critical pedagogy emphasizes a critique of dominant education systems and a commitment to a liberating rather than domesticating education (Solórzano, 2013). As a teaching practice, critical pedagogy has developed into a humanizing alternative to traditional classroom teaching, particularly with high school and college students of color. Teachers are increasingly using Freire's ideas to create curriculum and pedagogy that value students' knowledge, culture and experience, supporting them in developing a deeper understanding of the connection between their experiences and larger structures of power in order to have more agency to make meaningful change (for example, see Noguera, 2007; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Solórzano, 2013). As Solórzano (2013) argues, critical pedagogy helps students to develop "the capacity to name and analyze the

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[4] Adult education, while not the focus of this dissertation, is an important field to understand as foundational to the role of popular education in the United States; popular education builds on a long tradition of radical adult education for social change. In this country, adult education is rooted in the militant labor movements of the 19th and early 20th century. Immigrant groups brought radical labor organizing traditions with them to the United States and built adult education institutions to support working class education, including night schools, union education programs, and labor colleges. The adult education programs of the Black freedom movement like the Citizenship Schools were also part of this legacy. Without these working class adult education institutions, many working class people would not have been able to access higher and continuing education. But adult education as a field is contested: while some adult education programs are designed to give workers better skills to adapt to the current system, more radical programs are designed to give workers tools to change the system. Like the more radical interpretation of adult education, popular education is more explicitly political: "Most of the methodology and techniques of popular education are also those of adult education. But while many adult education programs are designed to maintain social systems, even when unjust and oppressive, popular education's intent is to build an alternative educational approach that is more consistent with social justice" (Arnold and Burke, 1983, p. 7).

causes… of the social conditions that they face; the ability to look at other possibilities or alternatives to their problems; and a disposition to act in order to change a problematic situation" (p. 55).

While critical pedagogy provides tools for students to reflect on oppression and take action, its practice within schools is not always part of organizing efforts or social movements that might have more power to transform the conditions that students hope to address (Cho, 2010; Tarlau, 2014). Choules (2018) argues that although critical pedagogy has a "well-developed social justice vision and sociological critique," it places less emphasis on how this social vision can be implemented (p. 160). As Tarlau (2014) writes,

> In the U.S. context, critical pedagogy has largely been disconnected from its organizing roots… Although critical pedagogy is a field of education dedicated to theorizing how education can be a progressive force for social change, social movements are rarely the center of discussion. (p. 371)

Part of the reason for this disconnect may be that critical pedagogy was primarily developed in academia and has mainly focused on a critique of formal education systems and how they can be transformed (Choules, 2018). Perhaps because of this origin, critical pedagogy is most often used with young people in schools or other educational spaces that are not tied to broader organizing struggles (e.g. Noguera, 2007; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Solórzano, 2013; Davis-McElligant, 2018). Where it is connected to organizing struggles, these struggles are often focused on addressing inequities and injustice only within schools (for example, see Nguyen & Quinn, 2016). Though critical pedagogy continues to evolve in new ways, there is often a missing link between its use and larger social struggles–for example, around housing, immigration, policing, low wages and poor working conditions of students' family members–that could support its transformative goals.

Organizing Without Education

At the same time that Freire's ideas are growing inside academic spaces, they are harder to find within grassroots organizations–the original context for his work. While community and

labor organizations in the United States may seek transformative change, they do not always make space for intentional educational programs in their work that could help to empower people at the grassroots level (Delp et al., 2002; Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008; Choudry & Bleakney, 2013; Worthen, 2014). For example, the AFL-CIO, the largest coordinating body of unions in the United States, closed its national education program in 2002 in part due to its "prioritization on external organizing," and many local unions have followed the same trend (Tarlau, 2011).

When organizations do include educational programs, they are often limited to training on specific skills that the organization has already prioritized, such as canvassing to elect particular politicians or training on legal rights (Choudry & Bleakney, 2013; for example, see California Federation of Teachers, n.d.; Training for Change, n.d.). As Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) argue, "Too many unions see membership education, if they think of it at all, as a means of communicating the message of the leadership to the membership" (p. 207). Sometimes this training includes political education, but frequently it comes from the top down and lacks space for participants to engage in critical analysis related to their own experiences (see for example, School of Unity and Liberation, n.d.).

These top-down approaches can fall into Freire's concept of "banking" education, where knowledge becomes a "gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (p. 58). Nunes (2021) argues that,

> Freire rejects [banking] because, even if well intentioned, it slips into the paternalistic division between those who know and those who do not and treats liberation as a transfer of knowledge from one group to the other. "Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved," and thus also "masses which can be manipulated." (para. 5)

As von Kotze et al. (2016) discuss, "Social movements/campaigns in pursuit of the solution of immediate problems often take 'short-cuts' and transmit information deemed to be necessary for members' engagement in public struggle–without leaving much space for critical

engagement" (p. 105).[5] This kind of political education can give way to propaganda or what Bernard (2002) calls teaching "the line," where participants are treated as "empty heads that need to be given the proper view of the world or manipulated to see things 'our way'" (p. 7).

Popular Education as a Hidden Link

Popular education in the United States can provide a hidden link between critical pedagogy and organizing by offering tools to create democratic learning spaces within grassroots social movements. Popular education brings together social movement building with the "liberating educational processes" in critical pedagogy: dialogue, respect for student knowledge, and equality of teacher and students (Tarlau, 2014, p. 71). Like critical pedagogy, popular education acknowledges the inherent political nature of all education, begins with student experience and uses a dialogical approach to learning in order to strengthen students' agency. But unlike critical pedagogy, most popular education work happens outside of formal public education (Wiggins, 2011), which makes it free of many of the limitations imposed on formal education institutions, like state-defined learning standards, institutional policies, and grades.

Despite this potential, in contrast to critical pedagogy, popular education is rarely the focus of critical empirical research studies that could help to highlight the benefits of its approach:

> Part of the reason that popular education is relatively unknown in mainstream educational circles in the industrialised world is the relative paucity of academically credible research and peer-reviewed publications concerning the methodology, although that body of research is growing (Wiggins, 2011, p. 45).

As Heidemann (2019) argues, that there is not more research on popular education in social movement literature is surprising given "the unambiguously strong historical role played by

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[5] The pressures of highly stressful oppositional campaigns against employers or government officials can create environments where organizers do not often feel there is the time or space for critical reflection by rank and file members. Creating these spaces can also mean risk for organizations as critical reflection by people at the grassroots level may be directed at the organizations themselves (Bernard, 2002; Choudry & Bleakney, 2013). Other reasons may include the decline in working class power in the United States over the past few decades (Cho, 2015), the increase in government and foundation-funded non-profits which can mean that resources are put into educational spaces that are less threatening to the status quo (INCITE, 2007), the power of neoliberalism to influence the "common sense" of human agency in social change (Rickford, 2016), or most likely a combination of these factors that interact to produce an emphasis on pragmatic "training" and top-down control instead of the strength of the grassroots.

'radical' forms of community-based adult education in progressive social movement campaigns across so many parts of the world" (p. 310). Freire's conceptions of dialogue, praxis, and critical consciousness are frequently written about in the educational literature, but there is limited research that analyzes what these concepts look like on the ground in the context of organizing and social movement building. The lack of research may be due to popular education's radically democratic orientation and low-profile, day-to-day base-building work that does not gain attention the way large-scale mobilizations do (Boyd, 2012). As Boyd (2012) has found, popular educators and popular education programs function "under the radar," doing their work "tirelessly and without much reward or notice" (para. 3).

The research that does exist on popular education in the United States rarely interrogates its tensions; the handful of empirical research studies on popular education in the United States in the last decade that I have found mostly focus on its strengths without looking closely at the challenges to applying it in practice (e.g. Dziembowska, 2010; Chang, 2012; Theodore, 2015, Tomaneng, 2017).[6] This sharply contrasts with the international literature which examines multiple tensions, including the relationship of popular education programs to the state (Kane, 2010; von Kotze et al.), power relations between facilitators and participants (von Kotze et al., 2016); whether Freire's framework undermines indigenous self-determination (Kee and Carr-Chellman, 2019); and the challenge of neither valorizing nor dismissing popular knowledge (Kapoor, 2004; Bartlett, 2005). The lack of critical research in the U.S. setting means that the real and complex experiences of facilitators and participants are rarely documented and analyzed, preventing the sharing of lessons about how to effectively implement popular education principles.

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[6] One factor in the lack of critical research may be that non-profits (and researchers who work closely with them) perceive that they need to publicize only their successes as a result of the need to compete with other non-profits for funding. In a critique of the non-profit industrial complex, INCITE (2007) argues that "This culture [of promoting their own work] prevents activists from having collaborative dialogues where we can honestly share our failures as well as our successes. In addition, after being forced to frame everything we do as a 'success,' we become stuck in having to repeat the same strategies because we insisted to funders they were successful, even if they were not. Consequently, we become inflexible rather than fluid and ever changing in our strategies, which is what a movement for social transformation really requires" (p. 10).

Statement of the Problem

In the United States, though Freire's ideas are increasingly part of K-12 and higher educational spaces via critical pedagogy, these spaces are not often connected to larger social struggles. At the same time, people at the grassroots level of social-movement organizations in the United States, where social struggle is being waged, rarely have the opportunity to engage in democratic dialogue and critical analysis about the problems they face and their potential solutions. There is often a missing link between reflection and action–between critical pedagogy in intentional learning spaces and social movement organizing that happens outside of these spaces.

Despite its value in making this link, popular education in the United States is not frequently studied. Most of the research that does exist emphasizes the strengths of popular education practices without also critically interrogating the tensions, which could help practitioners better navigate the challenges that arise in popular education work. As a result of this absence of critical empirical research, organizers and educators who want to develop a popular education approach to their work have few concrete examples in the literature of what it can look like in practice.

Background and Need

Within the historical literature on Freire's ideas and work, there is a strong link between popular education and social struggles. As Leher and Vittoria (2015) describe, Freire's ideas about democracy and education developed within a broad social movement in Brazil in the 1960s to help rural workers to build collective power. This movement included the organization of 50,000 peasants into Peasant Leagues, the work of the Brazilian Communist Party, and mass literacy campaigns including the one Freire organized in Angicos, Brazil, in 1962-63. Literacy education was thus one part of this movement, as many radical and progressive organizations at the time believed that "the fight against illiteracy should raise awareness of and be engaged in a social understanding of the economic and political reality" (p. 148).

In his literacy work with rural workers, Freire (1974, 2000) found that by helping people to consider taken-for-granted assumptions about the structures that affected their lives, they could begin to see themselves as not just passive recipients of historical forces but as potential agents of change and agents of history. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire (2000) called this process "conscientizaçao" or consciousness-raising, to help students move from naive consciousness to critical social consciousness. Leher and Vittoria (2015) argue that Freire's method promoted "an epistemological revolution" because it was rooted in helping workers to examine their own reality critically, "linking the subjective condition of illiteracy to the social conditions that determine this condition" (p. 150).

Freire's approach spread throughout Brazil, Latin America and worldwide in the years that followed; many of these efforts have been documented in the literature (e.g. Hammond, 1996; Kane, 2000, and Leher & Vittoria, 2015). As Heidemann (2019) argues about literature on popular education in Latin America, "Such work has shown that community-based sites of 'radical' adult education from Argentina and Brazil to El Salvador and Mexico frequently serve as a hub of social movement activities for historically marginalized people in both urban and rural settings" (p. 310). Outside Latin America, examples include the independence movement in Timor-Leste (Boughton & Durnan, 2014) and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa (Cubajevaite, 2015; Luckett et al., 2017). In the United States, popular education has been documented historically within African American freedom struggles of the 1960s (Payne, 1989; Payne & Strickland, 2008; Davis, 2011) and the labor movement of the 1930s (Adams, 1980; Altenbaugh, 1983; Horton & Freire, 1990).

However, very little empirical scholarly research on popular education has appeared in the United States in the past 20 years. A handful of prominent exceptions all focus on the role of popular education with immigrants, which makes sense given popular education's strong ties to Latin America and internationally: they include studies on its role in community organizing with Filipina migrant workers in Long Beach (Tomaneng, 2017), labor organizing with restaurant

workers in San Francisco's Chinatown (Chang et al., 2012), education organizing with Latino immigrant parents in Watsonville and Los Angeles (Beckett et al., 2012), and day labor organizing in Los Angeles (Theodore, 2015) and nationally (Dziembowska, 2010). These studies show the potential for critical consciousness and a shift in power relations when immigrants and immigrant workers have supportive spaces to engage in Freirean praxis in the context of larger struggles. There are no empirical studies on popular education in the last 20 years within unions or with community-based organizations that work with mixed-race populations.

At the same time, as discussed above, there is a growing body of research on critical pedagogy with young people, mainly in formal education settings (e.g. Noguera, 2007; Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 2008; Hantzopoulos, 2016), as well as the related youth participatory action research (YPAR) (e.g. Camarrota & Fine, 2008; Wright, 2015).[7] For example, Noguera (2007) describes the challenges and breakthroughs he experienced using critical pedagogy with incarcerated youth at Riker's Island schools; Cammarota and Fine's (2008) edited volume on youth participatory action research (YPAR) contains multiple studies on how YPAR has supported student-centered research; and Davis-McElligant (2018) details her creation of a class on Black Lives Matter using critical pedagogy at a Louisiana university after the murder of Alton Sterling by police in 2016. Each of these examples shows how critical pedagogy is being used to develop creative, humanizing, empowering curriculum, but often outside the context of social movement struggles.

At the other end of the spectrum, studies on U.S. social movements rarely look at the role of intentional learning spaces (Heidemann, 2019). Much social movement literature tends to focus on high-profile events (for example, Nichols, Miller & Beaumont, 2011; Engler & Engler, 2016) and pay less attention to the "low profile, day-to-day efforts that are community-based yet

[7] Participatory action research, or PAR, is often considered to be the "research arm" of popular education (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 4). While I could find no recent literature on its use with adults in the United States, there is research on how it is being practiced in a number of different settings with youth through YPAR (e.g. Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Wright, 2015).

also seek long-term transformation" (Voss & Williams, 2012, p. 356).[8] There are also studies that focus on the day-to-day community and labor organizing work on the grassroots level, but often without an explicit educational component (e.g. Tait, 2005; Su, 2007; Hogan, 2019). Studies that do analyze education in social movements often emphasize the informal "social movement learning" that happens in organizing spaces; for example in the Occupy movement (Hall, 2012); climate justice organizing (Kluttz & Walter, 2018); and the indigenous-led #NoDAPL movement (Estes & Dillon, 2019).

While research on both the critical pedagogy happening in school settings and the informal learning that happens in social movements is important, as Heidemann (2019) argues there is also a need to "understand how, under certain conditions, formalized[9] educational settings can act as vehicles of social movement activity" (p. 311). Research on popular education programs that create intentional spaces for reflection and analysis in the context of social struggle–the origin of Freire's work–can help to fill the gap in understanding how the "internal dynamics of learning and knowledge-making" in popular education can support the democratic potential of organizing efforts and social movements (Heidemann, 2019, p. 312).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand how two U.S.-based popular education programs contributed to the building of democratic grassroots social movements through the creation of *intentional spaces for reflection and analysis that are linked to organizing*. Both programs were run by longtime grassroots U.S. social movement organizations working in labor and community organizing: the Grassroots Empowerment and Leadership (GEL) Program worked with residents in the Tenderloin and South of Market

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[8] For example, Engler and Engler (2016) examine lessons from the Occupy movement, student organizing at Harvard University, and the DREAMers immigrant rights movement (in addition to international and historical U.S. examples of social movements) to identify what combination of factors produce successful mobilizations.

[9] Heidemann's use of the term "formalized" should not be confused with "formal" in the sense of formal K-12 and higher education. In this context, she means intentional spaces for education that are not simply the learning that happens organically in social movements.

neighborhoods in San Francisco to develop resident-led community change. The Workers' Dialogue supported autonomous bottom-up worker action inside educators' unions[10] and healthcare unions on the East Coast. Using a comparative case study methodology, this study aimed to highlight the role that popular education played within these two programs, the challenges and tensions that arose in the work, and how the two programs addressed these challenges and tensions. As data collection took place during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, this study also paid attention to how the two programs were impacted by and responded to the historic conditions created by COVID-19.

Theoretical Framework: Freirean Popular Education

The theoretical framework for this study is Freire's theory of popular education. As discussed in the literature review, while there are different interpretations of popular education as a theory, there are core tenets. For this dissertation, the theoretical framework focuses on three of these: 1) collective *praxis;* 2) *democracy;* and 3) *critical consciousness*. In most of the empirical literature on popular education, there is rarely an explicit and critical analysis of how the spaces created by popular education programs contribute to the building of grassroots democratic social movements, or the tensions that arise in this process. As Heidemann (2019) writes, "The link between popular education and social movements is simply presumed from the get go" (p. 312). By focusing on praxis, democracy and critical consciousness in social movement-building, which are all processes and goals frequently emphasized in popular education work, this study sought to identify some of the micro-to-macro links between education and democratic forms of broader social movement-building. By making these links, this study sought to clarify "how the internal dynamics of learning and knowledge-making

[10] Facilitators and participants often used the term "teachers' unions" but because many of these unions included para-educators, bus drivers, and other school employees this is a misleading term that makes the often lower-paid and lower status jobs invisible. In the Educators United caucus the group talked about how they were "all educators," so this is the term I will use.

within sites of popular education have external bearing on the strategic capacities of social movements in the broader society" (Heidemann, 2019, p. 312).

Praxis

Freire's theory of praxis was the first lens used for this study because it emphasizes the relationship between the learning that comes through reflection, and political action. Praxis, which comes from Latin and literally means "doing" was used by Freire (2000) to describe a process of "reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed" (p. 126). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* he writes,

> It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis. (p. 65)

In popular education, praxis is the linking of educational spaces for dialogue and reflection with collective action by people through organizing and social struggle, so that their engagement in struggle is informed by their own analysis of what is needed–this is what Freire argued could make education and social movements democratic.

Praxis was central for Freire because, borrowing from Marx, he viewed it as a response to the dehumanization within capitalism and colonialism (1974, 2000). Writing about Brazil's history of feudalism, Freire (1974) argued that:

> Men [sic] were crushed by the power of the landlords, the governors, the captains, the viceroys. Introjecting this external authority, the people developed a consciousness which "housed" oppression, rather than the free and creative consciousness indispens-able to authentically democratic regimes. (p. 22)

In modern systems of oppression as well, Freire (1998) argued that severe imbalances of power undermine people's collective capacity to change the future. For example, he spoke of the "scourge of neoliberalism, with its cynical fatalism and its inflexible negation of the right to dream differently" (p. 22). As Cowley (2008) writes, "Advocates of human praxis, whether it be artistic, social, productive, political or revolutionary, recognize that the traditional… dualisms, which split mind/body and theory/practice while elevating the mind (theory), prevent humans

from realizing full humanity" (p. 1). Freire saw praxis as a means for oppressed people to re-connect reflection/analysis with action, so that they could practice their true "vocation" of humanization and become "Subjects" with agency to act and transform systems of oppression (Freire, 2000). He called theory without action "verbalism" and action without theory "activism" (2000). On the one hand, he believed that "all men and women are intellectuals" (Giroux, 1985, p. xxiii). At the same time, intellectual work is not enough. As Freire (1985) writes, "Human beings do not get beyond the concrete situation, the condition in which they find themselves, only by their consciousness or their intentions" (p. 154). In this statement, he was following Marx, who famously said, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (1845, para. 11).

Freire's concept of praxis is also collective–both the reflection and action. As Aronowitz (2012) argues, Freire's goal was "collective self-transformation," not "individual mobility chances" (p. 259). Freire emphasized *dialogue* as a way for people to reflect on and analyze their experiences and create new knowledge together; Freire (1974) writes that "dialogue as a fundamental part of the structure of knowledge needs to be opened to other Subjects in the knowing process" (p. 133). Action, also, is collective in Freire's conception of praxis: he writes that "the breakthrough of a new form of awareness in understanding the world is not the privilege of one person. The experience that makes possible the 'breakthrough' is a 'collective' experience'" (Freire, 1998, p. 77).

Looking at popular education from this perspective emphasizes its potential to contribute to oppressed people's capacity to transform reality (Cadena, 1984). According to Cole (2009), Freire "discovered that when the people began to talk about their problems in a community, and began to *plan some action about these problems,* they began to free themselves from their fatalism, their internal oppression" (p. 3, emphasis added). If popular education is only an intellectual exercise, people do not develop their confidence or lose their fatalism because they have no evidence of their power. This is because it is not the oppressive situations

people face that "create a climate of hopelessness, but rather how they are perceived by women and men at a given historical moment" (Freire, 2000, p. 99). From the perspective of praxis, when educators support the conditions for participants' collective action based on the participants' own collective reflection and analysis, educators can contribute to the possibility of "collective responses aimed at transforming oppressive power and asserting local aspirations" (Kapoor, 2019, p. 44).

Democracy

Democracy was the second lens used for this theoretical framework because Freire's intention was for people to develop the capacity to collectively make decisions about how to address problems they faced in their lives (Freire, 1974). As Aronowitz (2008) writes of Freire, "...his disdain for change from above regardless from what end of the political spectrum is crystal clear. Freire insists on the ineluctable connection between democracy from below–radical democracy–and human liberation" (p. 10). Democracy within popular education implies that participants will have agency in both the educational process and their organizing work. However, democracy is a contested term; Polletta (2002) writes that,

> *Democracy* has always been a concept at once radical and ambiguous. Ambiguous because *demos* could mean either the citizens of a city-state or the lower orders–"the rabble"–and *kratos* could mean either "power" or "rule." *Government by the people* could mean decision-making by elites in the name of the citizenry or direct deliberation by the masses themselves. (p. viii; emphasis in the original)

In the United States, the concept of democracy is most often associated with liberal or representative democracy, where some percentage of the population chooses among a limited number of choices for representatives, usually from dominant racial, class and gender groups, to make decisions for the rest of society (Brucato, 2017). This form of democracy assumes that the members of the society have equal access to voting, and that the representatives will in fact represent the interests of the people, but as Grande (2004) reminds us, liberal models of democracy were founded on practices of structural exclusion.

While representative democracy is the dominant understanding of democracy in the United States, an alternative understanding that follows from the historical practice of popular education is the "direct deliberation by the masses themselves" (Polletta, 2002, p. viii). This alternative definition is the one used in this framework. Often called *direct democracy* or participatory democracy, where people "do not look to one leader, but make space for all to be leaders" (Sitrin, 2006, p. 2), democracy from this perspective is both a vision for how society can be organized as well as a way for communities to structure their internal decision-making and relationships. [11]

From this perspective, modern social movements can be both prefigurative[12] of a future egalitarian society and also returning to decision-making models from pre-colonial indigenous societies. Ovide Mercredi, a member of the Canadian First Nations, refers to modern representative democracy as a

> 10-second model of democracy, since it gives us input at the ballot box for a total of about 10 seconds every few years. We have gotten used to a style of government that does not reflect our tradition of fully involving the people. (As quoted in Poucette, 2019, para. 8)

In a model "fully involving the people", the question is not whether people's interests are *represented* (as possibly defined by someone else) but whether they have a direct and collective say in decisions that affect them.

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[11] This form of democracy is often associated with the anarchist tradition originating in Europe and Russia in the 1800s, where opposition to all forms of hierarchy and inequality led to a vision of a society that would be "nothing less than the most complete realisation of *democracy*–democracy in the fields, factories, and neighborhoods" (Schmidt & van der Walt, 2009, p. 70). As Schmidt & van der Walt (2009) write, "By stressing antiauthoritarian values, maximising democracy, and valorising self-management, the broad anarchist tradition sought to prevent the emergence, from within popular struggles, of new ruling elites (p. 25)." Anarchism broke with the dominant view within Marxism, which saw the taking of state control through a revolutionary party as necessary to end capitalism. While anarchists also viewed capitalism as a system of oppression, they viewed all forms of hierarchy as oppressive, and saw direct democracy by the working class in economic and political decisions as necessary to create a society based in equality and solidarity (Schmidt & van der Walt, 2009). But while the practice of direct democracy is often linked to anarchist philosophy, it originated much earlier in indigenous societies. As Poucette (2019) explains: "Democracy was not a Western invention. First Nations practised democracy long before the arrival of Europeans to North America. The difference was that in traditional First Nations governance, democracy was direct rather than representative (para. 2)."

[12] The term prefigurative was coined by Boggs (1979) who describes it as "the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal" (p. 7). Prefigurative political forms stand in contrast to vanguardism, where a more "advanced" section of the population leads the people through hierarchical political structures like revolutionary parties (Boggs, 1979).

From this perspective, using democracy as a lens to study popular education makes possible an analysis of how popular education programs develop participants' relationships, knowledge, and collective decision-making capacity. As a pedagogical intervention in organizing, popular education prioritizes the intentional learning that can support effective political participation at the grassroots level. As Payne (2008) describes what he calls "organizer-teachers" like Septima Clark and Ella Baker, "Organizer-teachers… are focused on what people can become and the developmental steps they need to get there…Their deepest commitment isn't just to what people are, but to what they can become" (p. 62). For this development to be possible, intentional spaces have to be created: As von Kotze et al., (2016) write, "In popular education, space has to be 'curated'–that is, the space for dialogue is deliberately designed so that all those present can begin to engage (with) each other as different, but equal" (p. 7). Instead of assuming equality, as liberal democracy does, popular education viewed through the lens of direct democracy emphasizes the creation of intentional spaces and pedagogical opportunities that can make equality possible.

Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness was the third lens used for this study, because popular education attempts to develop an "ability by which people can distinguish the liberating forces of their culture from the oppressive ones, in order to promote cooperation and solidarity" (Acevedo, 1992, p. 18).[13] Freire (1974) distinguished critical consciousness from both magical and naive consciousness: in magical consciousness, a person "simply apprehends facts and attrib-utes to them a superior power by which it is controlled and to which it must therefore submit." This form of consciousness "is characterized by fatalism, which leads men to fold their arms, resigned to the impossibility of resisting the power of facts" (p. 39). Naive consciousness has a stronger

[13] An important concept in this dissertation, solidarity can be defined as: "A collective stand against structural injustice, an emerging political relation with/to others in opposition to powerful authorities that oppress and exploit" (Luckett et al., 2017, p. 6). The term's origin is the French *solidarité* (1829): "communion of interests and responsibilities, mutual responsibility" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.)

relationship with reality but, "for the naive thinker, the important thing is accommodation to this normalized 'today'" (Freire, 2000, p. 92). In both of these types of awareness, people do not recognize their ability to intervene in the broad shaping of their lives.

Critical consciousness, by contrast, is the capacity to understand reality in order to be able to intervene and change that reality; conscientização (which in English translates most directly to "consciousness-raising) is described as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 2000, p. 37; translator's note). The term "critical" has Marxist origins and comes from critical theory, which focuses on social relations of domination. Leonardo (2004) writes that in critical social theory, Criticism is not valued for its own sake "but as part of an overall project that aims at *material or institutional changes* (p. 13; emphasis added). Freire (2000) writes that, "For the critic, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality" on behalf of people's "continuing humanization" (p. 92).

The concept of *hegemony*, popularized by Antonio Gramsci, the Italian socialist and intellectual writing in the 1930s, is useful to understand the role critical consciousness plays in popular education. For Gramsci, hegemony meant the saturation of "an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations" (Burke, 2005, para. 9). Mansbridge and Morris (2001) explain that:

> Inequalities in power have their most insidious effect when the dominant group has so much control over the ideas available to other members of the society that the conceptual categories required to challenge the status quo hardly exist. Ideological hegemony of this sort pervades every human society in ways that are, by definition, hard to bring to conscious awareness. (2001, p. 3-4)

Hegemonic beliefs, which are made to seem universal but actually serve the dominant group, were the key to capitalist rule for Gramsci because they led to non-dominant groups consenting to their own subordination. Gramsci (1988) called these beliefs the "common sense" that the working class has uncritically absorbed, and contrasted them with a "critical conception" where the working class develops political consciousness (p. 273).

Critical consciousness is often interpreted as a psychological state that individuals attain solely through critical analysis of reality, but this is not what Freire meant by the concept (Freire, 1974; Torres, 1993; Aronowitz, 2012). Freire (1974) writes that, "The transformation of perception is not brought about at a purely intellectual level, but *with the aid of a genuine praxis* which requires a constant action on reality, and a reflection on this action." (p. 116; emphasis added). hooks (1994) argued that, "Again and again Freire had to remind readers that he never spoke of conscientization as an end itself, but always as it is joined by meaningful praxis" (p. 47). Similarly, Aronowitz (2012) argues that Freire's pedagogy was not intended to improve a student's cognitive learning or self-esteem in an individualistic way. Instead, it is based in solidarity and designed to support the collective liberation of the oppressed through their own knowledge linked to collective "self-directed action" (Aronowitz, 2012, p. 261).

The lens of critical consciousness makes it possible to focus on how participation in popular education classes and related organizing work contributes (or doesn't) to a shift in participants' understanding and analysis of their experiences, their sense of solidarity with others facing similar oppression, and their view of and willingness to participate in collective action.

Implications for Popular Education

When popular education is looked at through the three lenses above, it is possible to analyze the unique way that popular education programs can support the building of democratic grassroots social movements. While learning takes place informally in organizing and social movement work, popular education also prioritizes *intentional* spaces for learning that can give participants more agency. Conway (2013) writes that Freire

> clearly considers the larger movements [in Latin America] as themselves sites of praxis (including pedagogical praxis), which were producing new knowledges, consciousness and identities, which in turn yield new forms of action and new practices. But in Freire's view, the… more narrowly 'educational' moment is not one that can be dispensed with or collapsed into more generic and diffused movement-based organizing processes. (p. 35)

Recognition of the need for intentional learning spaces is the reason places like Highlander, which Morris (1986) called "movement half-way houses," have been important in supporting democratic social movements. By cultivating an environment that practices the principles of direct democracy while also creating space and time for conscious reflection and analysis, movement half-way houses and other intentional educational spaces provide both a model for a more egalitarian society and support for people's agency at the grassroots level. Allen (1970), Evans and Boyte (1992) and others called these types of spaces *free space* because they are characterized by a level of autonomy from dominant groups which can "allow people to collectively cultivate counter-hegemonic agendas and projects" (Heidemann, 2019, p. 314).

Heidemann (2019) argues that under certain conditions popular education can act as a free space, when the "practitioners and participants are able to link the tangible concerns and realities of community-members to the building of counter-hegemonic educational projects that tie up with the emancipatory agendas of broader-level social movements" (p. 315). From this perspective, popular education can be seen as part of the project for a developmental democracy, where both the "political intervention" by the educator as well as the students' "coming into their own subjectivity" are forms of praxis. From this perspective, knowledge created in popular education is intended to be *co-constructed* instead of imposed, and the new knowledge is used to develop "conscientisation and action for radical transformation" (von Kotze et al., 2016, p. 110).

At the same time, within this framework questions arise about the potential tensions and challenges in creating these intentional "free" spaces. Heidemann (2019) for example argues that when popular education programs are "pre-packaged, standardised and persistently require the approval of external actors with close links to established authorities, then the potential for such a site to act as an effective vehicle for social movements is highly questionable" (p. 315). From this perspective, popular education programs have the potential to contribute to the building of social movements when they support autonomous, democratic,

educational activities rooted in participants' life experiences. On the other hand, if popular education programs do not cultivate democratic participation or their activities do not support participant praxis and critical consciousness, their potential to contribute to the building of grassroots social movements may be limited.

Similarly, Similarly, von Kotze et al. (2016) note that in popular education practice, co-construction of knowledge can give way to banking education:

> While all popular education arguably begins with a notion of collective knowledge construction through dialogue, this does not always translate into the reality of practice… social movements/campaigns in pursuit of the solution of immediate problems often take 'short-cuts' and transmit information deemed to be necessary for members' engagement in public struggle–without leaving much space for critical engagement. (p. 105)

This tension about what knowledge will determine what action is significant in popular education work, where the pressure on organizations within broader struggles, as well as often greater social power of organizers compared to participants, can be at odds with the commitment to internal praxis and democracy.

Using the framework of praxis, direct democracy and critical consciousness enables a focus on the intentional spaces created in popular education for reflection and analysis, in order to identify how these spaces support (or don't support) democratic grassroots social movements. This framework also allows for a focus on the tensions and challenges that may interfere with the liberatory goals of popular education, and how organizations navigate these tensions.

Research Questions

The guiding question that this study sought to answer was: *How does popular education contribute to the building of democratic social movements?* Within this guiding question, I had two specific questions to focus the study:

1) What role, if any, do popular education programs play in supporting participants' *praxis* (reflection and action), *democratic participation* in classes and organizing work, and *critical consciousness*?

2) What challenges and tensions arise in these three areas, and how do organizations navigate these challenges and tensions?

Significance of the Study

Popular education is an important missing link in discussions about and research on education for social change. This study aims to contribute to the literature by highlighting and analyzing the role of Freirean popular education within grassroots social movements in the United States that is currently happening "under the radar" (Boyd, 2012, para. 3). For educators and organizers committed to grassroots empowerment, research on the role of popular education in democratic social movement building can provide important lessons on how to effectively carry out this form of radically democratic educational practice.

Personal Relationship to the Research

For many years, I have observed both the need for and the potential of the transformative power of popular education firsthand as a union and community organizer. I was introduced to union organizing in college when I volunteered on a campaign to unionize student food service workers on campus. The philosophy of organizing was a significant and life-changing shift for me. As a Jewish/white woman from a Northern California upper-middle class background, I had been raised with the values of protest and critical thinking by my feminist mom and anti-authoritarian, iconoclast dad. But like other kids from upper-middle class white liberal families in Marin County, I was also taught not to fundamentally question the power structure that maintained our class and race position.

During the union campaign, as I walked through deep snow to students' apartments and sat in their living rooms hearing about their experiences working for the university, I began to understand organizing as a way for those who had been structurally disempowered to take back their power through collective action. For the following two decades, I worked on organizing campaigns around the country; as a paid organizer I worked with day laborers in San Francisco; factory workers in Chicago, Vermont and Los Angeles; hospital workers and public employees in

Vermont; and graduate students at UC Berkeley. For five years I also worked as a rank-and-file cocktail and food server, organizing alongside my co-workers in San Francisco hotels and restaurants.[14]

Through these experiences I learned directly how powerful unions could be to support human dignity and well-being, and saw how workers who had strong unions were able to challenge the corporate power structure. As a cocktail server in a non-union hotel (Le Meridien in the financial district) and then a union hotel (the Hilton on Union Square), I saw and felt the stark contrast between having a union, where we regularly stood up to the managers to defend fair treatment, and not having a union, where we worked in fear of management.

At the same time, I found out that the culture and structure of many unions mimic that of the hierarchical structure of the larger society. For example, in the hotel workers' union, I sat through many organizing meetings where the workers, mostly immigrant women and workers of color with more life experience than the organizers, were given top-down plans and scripts for how to talk to their co-workers with little space for their input, ideas, or reflection. This resulted in strategy that was often out of sync with their experiences and wishes, and reinforced their belief as well as the reality that they were the recipients, not agents, of change. As a hotel worker said to me about union staff, "They only want us from the neck down."

In the early part of my organizing career, when I was beginning to question the top-down nature of unions I worked for, I read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which validated my experiences of how oppression can be reinforced within supposedly radical spaces and the necessity of the oppressed being agents of their own liberation. I was also exposed to the work of veteran labor and immigrant rights movement leaders who carried the lessons of popular

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[14] After many years on staff for unions, I decided to get a job as a rank-and-file worker, first at the Cheesecake Factory where the workers' center Young Workers' United was organizing, and then in two San Francisco hotels organized by the Hotel workers' union (HERE). Partly because of the values of popular education that I learned as an organizer, I took these jobs so that I could organize as a peer to other workers. This practice is called "salting." For an overview of salting, as well as an in-depth description of my experience and critiques of the top-down unionism associated with it, see Chapter 12, "Salting to the Rescue?" by Steve Early in his book *Save Our Unions* (2013).

education from Latin America and the U.S. labor and Black freedom movements. While a popular education approach was the exception and not the rule in my organizing experience, I was lucky to participate in organizing workshops run by popular educators, and had the opportunity to work with popular education-minded organizers on union organizing campaigns. These veteran educators and organizers shared with me in their actions and words some of the fundamental principles of popular education, including the importance of education as a practice of freedom, respect for participant knowledge and experience, and the participatory learning modes of popular education that can build group cohesion, trust, and solidarity.

Because of this exposure, I began to use popular education principles and methods in my own organizing, developing classes and education programs for the different unions I worked for. Whereas day-to-day union business was often bureaucratic and oriented to the needs of individual workers, and union campaigns focused almost primarily on mobilizing rank-and-file members to action, these educational spaces allowed workers to talk to each other and develop more knowledge and agency in their unions. I found that these open educational spaces could build an environment of solidarity among people with many differences (particularly based on race and immigration, but also job classification and other types of social status), but also many commonalities. The classes also gave people new tools to develop their goals, strategies, and tactics, and helped people to find a renewed faith and commitment to the struggle.

Throughout those years, I also began to see how rare educational spaces like these were. Most trainings offered by unions focused mainly on the technical skills that the unions had already decided the membership needed. When organizations did regularly create spaces for reflection, analysis, and strategy development, it was more likely to be for the leaders or staff of the organization, or leftists who are already politicized, not those at the grassroots rank-and-file level (for more on this see Parker & Gruelle, 1999 and Early, 2014). A number of left-led labor and community organizations I worked with used some of the participatory methods of popular education, but did not include members in decision-making in a meaningful way, nor support

their capacity to make decisions in the future. This was why Freire's (2000) words resonated for me:

> Unfortunately, those who espouse the cause of liberation are themselves surrounded and influenced by the climate which gener-ates the banking concept, and often do not perceive its true signifi-cance or its dehumanizing power. Paradoxically, then, they utilize this same instrument of alienation in what they consider an effort to liberate. Indeed, some "revolutionaries" brand as "innocents," "dreamers," or even "reactionaries" those who would challenge this educational practice. (p. 79)

These experiences reinforced my belief that truly democratic empowering educational spaces cannot be assumed by calling them "Freirean," but have to be consciously built, cultivated and reflected on. The power dynamic between facilitators and students, epistemological questions about whose knowledge counts and who determines what action will be taken, and structural tensions around funding, all make popular education easier to describe or understand theoretically than to carry out in practice. My interest in seeing the narrowing of the gap between a liberatory theory and a liberatory practice was what motivated me to study its use by democratically-minded veteran organizers and educators, so that I could highlight its continuing role as well as the tensions and challenges in carrying it out. Because I have also personally experienced how difficult it can be to enact popular education principles, I wanted to learn from veteran movement organizers who have carried this work forward how they do it–the magic of this approach.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Popular Education History, Theory and Practice

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the broad tradition of popular education by identifying its unique contributions as both a pedagogical practice and political project within social movements. Section one will provide a **historical basis** for the development of popular education as central to Freire's work; section two will explore the **theory** behind popular education as both a political project and a pedagogical practice; and section three and four will give contemporary examples of **popular education practice** internationally as well as in the United States, based on both empirical studies and reflections from popular educators. Questions that guided the development of this literature review were: How is popular education unique as a broader organizing approach and concrete pedagogical tool? How is it understood in international contexts as compared to the United States and how is it constructed and applied in these different contexts? What approaches to popular education appear to be the most effective in helping people from subordinated social groups to build collective power, and what tensions arise within these approaches? And finally, what important analysis is missing from the literature about popular education that could help educators and organizers who want to apply this approach in their work?

Popular Education History: Freire's Roots

This section of the literature review explores the history of the development of popular education. While Freire's ideas have been *theorized* extensively in the U.S. literature, the history of Freirean popular education in the context of social struggles is not as well known in the United States, particularly in academic contexts. As bell hooks (1994) articulates:

> Often when university students and professors read Freire, they approach his work from a voyeuristic standpoint, where as they read they see two locations in the work, the subject position of Freire the educator (whom they are often more interested in than the ideas or subjects he speaks about) and the oppressed/marginalized groups he speaks about. In relation to these two subject positions, they position themselves as observers—as outsiders. (p. 147-8)

The purpose of this section of the literature review is to demonstrate through the literature how the legacy of popular education, while based in theoretical principles, is also practical and concrete in its commitment to social change and building the collective power of oppressed people.

Popular education developed independently in different parts of the world, including China, Tanzania, England, Brazil, as well as the United States (Qinjun, 1994; Shaffer, 2017; Delp et al., 2002; Thayer-Bacon, 2004). For example, Shaffer (1982) and Qinjun (1994) describe what is possibly the earliest use of the term "popular education" in China. Shaffer (1982) describes how in Beijing, the "Hunan Popular Education Journal" was created by students in 1915 to develop mass materials to support literacy and democratic participation of the Chinese population. Mao participated in this project early in his career, and helped to set up night schools for factory workers to "overcome the great educational, social, political and ideological gap that separated the radical students from the rest of the citizenry" (p. 25; Qinjun, 1994). He later helped to set up night schools for peasants that were run by the peasants themselves, as well as the Hunan Open University, set up with no grades or entrance requirements "to break the monopoly of the wealthy, to democratize knowledge, to free people from the domination of the 'education clique' and to unite manual workers and intellectuals" (Shaffer, 1982, p. 5).

In Tanzania, Mulenga (2001) describes how Julius Nyerere and other anti-colonial independence movement leaders, working at about the same time as Freire in the early 1960s, developed an approach to adult education that was intended to "arouse critical consciousness of Africans to awaken to the challenge posed by decades of colonialism and repression" (p. 450). Kassam (1994) writes that Nyerere's "philosophy of adult education resonates with the concepts of 'conscientization', empowerment and liberation very akin to the ideas expressed in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*" (p. 247) Nyerere saw colonialism as well as capitalism as antithetical to what he considered to be African values of cooperation and communalism, and wanted Tanzanians to "take ourselves out of the resignation" to the lives they had lived for

centuries (as quoted in Mulenga, 2001, p. 451). Nyerere's larger goal was to end unequal systems of unequal wealth and exploitation so that Tanzanians could become self-reliant (Kassam, 1994; Mulenga, 2001).

Popular education also developed as part of "popular workers' education" in England between 1955 and 1985, connecting adult education with the militant working class labor movement in existence at the time (Grayson, 2016). Grayson (2016) writes that social movements during this period were linked to workers' education and that within workers' social movements, "'education' was seen as a transformative–even revolutionary–process" (p. 116). Grayson argues that these programs were developed by, and in turn created, what Gramsci called "organic intellectuals" (p. 119). These programs were creative and flexible in response to the needs of diverse groups of immigrant workers:

> Meetings were called in pubs and clubs adjacent to problematic workplaces. Health screening sessions were arranged. Mosques and community centers were turned into makeshift clinics, run in conjunction with local Pakistani, Yemeni and Afro-Caribbean groups, uncovering expected but previously unquantified or officially addressed racial inequalities in occupational health. (hazards magazine, as quoted by Grayson, 2016, p. 120)

He argues that this working class education was "best viewed as a series of interlocking social movements," which were "fluid, open, participatory and inclusive, closely in touch with living communities in ways which [conventional bureaucratic political] parties had mostly ceased to be" (Rustin, 1989, as quoted in Grayson, 2016, p. 114).

In Latin America, early radical adult education programs also predated Freire and likely influenced his work. Wiggins (2011) describes how in Peru, students influenced by Marxism created "popular universities" with the goal of educating "the popular sectors for the project of liberation." In Mexico, President Lázaro Cárdenas promoted socialist schools in the early 20th century to "teach adults to read and write and mobilise them to take advantage of land reform," and in Nicaragua, anti-imperialist leader Augusto Sandino created the Academy of El Chipotle in 1926 which emphasized "the importance of improving practice through collective reflection in

which officers and soldiers participated as equal" (p. 36). McLaren (2009) argues that the Cuban Literacy Campaign also influenced Freire's ideas and work. This campaign, which began in 1961, used a force of 308,000 volunteers, including adult educators, workers from factories, and students. Volunteers lived in peasant households, working alongside families by day and teaching them to read and write by night, and the curriculum "explored colonial oppression and understanding the transformative projects of the revolution" (p. 58).

In Brazil, Brown (1975) and Leher & Vittoria (2015) describe how Freire's ideas came out of a context of economic and social struggle of the 1960s, including the organization of 50,000 peasants into Peasant Leagues, the work of the Brazilian Communist Party, and mass literacy campaigns including the one Freire organized in Angicos, Brazil, in 1962-63. Brown (1975) describes how the "Popular Culture Movement," which included "culture circles" that Freire helped to develop, was created in Recife under the leadership of the new mayor, who had been elected in 1962 through a coalition of the Socialist, Labour and Communist parties. At the same time as the literacy program in Angicos, peasants organized through Peasant Leagues had occupied a large plantation and redistributed the land to the workers, which the state government legalized (Brown, 1975). The next month after the program ended Angicos had its first strike involving 85,000 workers which landowners called a "communist plague," and then another involving 200,000 workers (Fernandes & Terra, 1994, p. 126; as cited in Torres, 2013, p. 19). In April 1964, when Freire and his colleagues were planning to expand the literacy program to 20,000 literacy circles, Brazil's military leaders took over the government. The governor was arrested and put in prison, and Freire was under house arrest and then also imprisoned for 70 days before going into exile (Brown, 1975).

While the coup prevented a radical shift in power relations within Brazilian society, Freire's exile ironically also led to his ideas spreading further than they might have otherwise (Boyd, 2012). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), in particular, which Freire wrote while in exile, had a profound influence on international social movements of the 1970s and 1980s

(Cadena, 1984). In turn these social movements influenced popular education; as Burke and Arnold (1983) write, “During the 1970's, popular education was shaped by the growth of mass-based movements for social change in South America, leading to the expansion and enrichment of the methodology developed by Freire” (p. 6). Popular education spread to revolutionary movements and national literacy campaigns in Central America in the 1980s (Mayo, 1993; Hammond, 1996), during which time the core ideas of popular education “spread to every corner of Latin America” (Jara, 2010, p. 292). In Africa, Freire influenced the thinking and practices of Stephen Biko and other revolutionary leaders and educators in the South African freedom movement during the 1960s (Msila, 2013; Luckett et al., 2017), as well as the revolutionary movement in Guinea Bissau, where Freire actively supported the development of the revolutionary government’s national literacy program (Torres, 1993).

In the United States, popular education also developed prior to Freire’s work. For example, Greer (1999) describes how the U.S.-based Work People’s College, founded in 1917, taught working class students academic classes that would help them learn “how to think” and hoped its students would then “use their intellectual energies to analyze existing power relations and to imagine new ways of more equitably organizing society” (p. 256). According to Altenbaugh and Paulston (1980), the Work People’s College was the first of many “workers’ schools” that flourished in the early 20th century and supported the radical labor movement during that time. Altenbaugh and Paulston credit the Scandinavian folk schools, the British turn of the century workers’ schools like Ruskin College, and the German socialism that influenced Jewish-American immigrants with providing the inspiration for the first workers’ schools.

In 1932, almost forty years before Paulo Freire wrote *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, one of these workers’ schools opened in a small town in Tennessee based on the same principles (Thayer-Bacon, 2004). Originally called the Highlander Folk School, the school’s goal was to support poor, rural people in the South to “become empowered to think and act for themselves and change their lives” (Thayer-Bacon, 2004, p. 8). Through its educational programs,

Highlander provided what Morris (1986) has called a "movement halfway house" for the Southern labor movement of the 1930s and 1940s, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and other regional struggles for self-determination. Highlander staff member and former civil rights student activist Candie Carrawan said of Highlander in 1990, "From its start, this has been one of the few places that takes seriously the notion that grassroots people, dispossessed people, who do not have money or power or much formal education can solve their own problems" (as quoted in Branch & Sachatello-Sawyer, 2013, p. 15).

Within the U.S. African American freedom movement, activists like Ella Baker and Septima Clark (both of whom contributed to Highlander's work) engaged in democratic educational projects to support young Black people's critical consciousness in order to combat white supremacy beginning in the 1940s. Payne (2008) writes that the "foundation of the thinking" of organizers like Baker and Clark was "their profound confidence in the capacity of ordinary people to grow and develop" (p. 62). Baker used this philosophy in her work with organizations like the NAACP, which she thought was

> overly concerned with recognition from whites, overly oriented to a middle-class agenda, unaware of the value of mass-based, confrontational politics, not nearly aggressive enough on economic issues, and too much in the hands of the New York office. (Payne, 2008, p. 888)

Baker pushed the leadership of the NAACP, and later the Southern Christian Leadership Council, to bring their work "back to the people" by building local memberships and activism among Black people who were low-income, rural, young, and women (as quoted in Payne, 1989, p. 889). Her work contributed to the creation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1960, and influenced "the framework of the ideas" that became the basis for the SNCC's Freedom Schools in the 1960s and the Black Panther's Liberation Schools of the 1970s (Payne, 1989; Payne, 2008, p. 57-58).

SNCC's Freedom Schools of 1964 were one of the most effective expressions of popular education that Baker's work helped to cultivate. The goals of the Freedom Schools were to make

it possible for students to understand and "challenge the myths of our society" and find "alternatives and ultimately new directions for action" (Conference of Federated Organizations (COFO), 1964, in Emery et al., 2004, p. 56). Classes were held in informal spaces like church basements or outside, attendance was voluntary, and while the classes were intended for tenth and eleventh graders, younger children and older adults filled the classes as well. While the content was intentionally fluid to respond to the particular interests and needs of the students, pedagogically teachers were encouraged to use questioning as their primary method of instruction. One guide distributed to teachers during the summer stated that, "In the matter of classroom procedure, questioning is the vital tool… The value of the Freedom Schools will derive mainly from what the teachers are able to elicit from the students in terms of comprehension and expression of their experiences" (COFO, 1964, in Emery et al., 2004, p. 77). The schools were far more successful than organizers had anticipated: in July 1964 there were 41 functioning Freedom Schools in 20 different towns around the state, with 175 teachers and an enrollment of over 2,000 (COFO, 1964, in Emery et al., 2004).

While the United States carries the valuable legacy of these early popular education projects, Freirean popular education also spread from Latin America to the United States in the 1980s. It traveled here via two different trajectories: first, directly from Latin Americans who had experience in their own countries and brought the tradition with them when they emigrated (Theodore, 2015), and also from Canadian and U.S. activists who spent time in Central America and then translated the practice into North American contexts (Arnold & Burke, 1983). While some aspects of the approach shifted in the U.S. context, many of the core principles influenced radical and progressive sections of the U.S. labor movement, as well as immigrant rights, racial justice, community, youth, and feminist organizing struggles (for example, see Delp et al., 2002; Dziembowska, 2010; Miller & Veneklasen, 2012; Nguyen & Quinn, 2016). At the same time, these U.S.-based struggles have also had an impact on popular education; in particular racial justice and feminist organizing have influenced popular education practice in the U.S. context to

have a stronger racial justice and feminist lens (for example, see Burke et al, 2002; Movement Matters, 2019).

Popular Education Theory

In the context of the historical discussion above, this section attempts to define the broad tradition of popular education through 1) contextualizing popular education through the framework of grassroots social movement building, 2) a summary of Freire's original theory of popular education, and 3) a discussion of the core tenets of popular education as they have been developed by practitioners and scholars. This theoretical framing provides a basis to understand the contemporary studies described in sections three and four.

Grassroots Social Movement Building

Popular education was developed in the context of grassroots social movements; therefore this section will focus on literature related to theories of grassroots social movement building in order to place the role of popular education in a wider context. Early social movement theorist Charles Tilly (1978) defined social movements as the "sustained interaction in which mobilized people, acting in the name of a defined interest, make repeated demands on powerful others via means which go beyond the current prescriptions of the authorities" (p. 23). Social movement theory helps to explain how people without structural power are nonetheless able to make desired changes in society. Instead of being limited to system-sanctioned political mechanisms like electoral politics, which may not represent the interests of people at the grassroots level, these movements use what Tilly (1978) calls a "repertoire of collective action" that enable people to place direct demands on those in power through unsanctioned mechanisms, for example civil disobedience and strikes (p. 15).

While Tilly (1978) and other early social movement theorists emphasized the large-scale mobilization of people and resources to explain social movements, many social movement theorists argue that the local level processes of grassroots organizing are just as important, if not more important, for explaining how social movements are built and the character they develop

(Payne, 2007; Van Til et al., 2010; Voss & Williams, 2012; Affiong, 2017). Voss and Williams (2012) note that the emphasis on large scale mobilizations has been critiqued by activists and community organizers "for their relative neglect of locally based, grassroots movements and for ignoring questions about how individuals and organizations gain the capacity to act" (p. 356). In his historical analysis of the civil rights movement in particular, Payne (2006, 2007) calls the emphasis on mass mobilization a "top-down" form of social movement analysis that emphasizes national organizations as well as "large-scale, dramatic events, thus obscuring the actual social infrastructure that sustained the movement on a day-to-day basis" (2006, para. 10). Payne argues that top-down interpretations of how social movements are built overemphasize the roles of national leaders and institutions, downplay the role of economic and other forms of pressure, and "reduce the movement to a 'protest' movement" (Payne, 2007, p. 421).

In order to develop what Payne (2006, 2007) calls a "bottom-up" analysis of social movements, Payne (2007) and Voss and Williams (2012) distinguish *mobilizing* from *organizing*. In a bottom-up analysis of social movement building, the emphasis shifts to the day-to-day work being done at the local level: Payne calls this *community organizing,* which is "a tradition with a different sense of what freedom means and therefore a greater emphasis on the long-term development of leadership in ordinary men and women" (p. 3). Whereas mobilizing is "protest action" to win concessions from the state and economic elites, organizing is the building of "individual participation, civic engagement, and institutional capacity at the local level" (Voss and Williams, 2012, p. 359). So while mobilizing uses existing organizational structures to change power relations, organizing creates them. Affiong (2017) notes the consequence of using mobilizing without organization:

> Without the more long-term, concrete and enduring weapon of organization, mobilizing becomes a quick fix, band-aid type solution to problems where we are in danger of mobilizing people away from organization and transformation unto the path of survival on a pillar-to-post basis.[15] (p. 4)

[15] To go from "pillar to post" means "to keep moving from one place to another" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Without the grassroots structure built by organizing, social movements based solely on mobilizing do not have the same power or democratic nature. Hogan (2019) notes that while the day-to-day work of organizing is often invisible, tedious and "never high-profile," community organizers know that it is necessary to "spend time and energy developing people at the base as their own leaders–one person at a time;" she says Ella Baker called this "spadework" (p. 68).

Emphasizing the day-to-day organizing level of social movement activity makes it easier to see how popular education work at the grassroots level contributes to larger social change projects and the character of these projects. Former Black Panther and longtime activist Angela Davis (2016) writes, "It is essential to resist the depiction of history as the work of heroic individuals in order for people today to recognize their potential agency as a part of an ever-expanding community of struggle" (p. 2). Similarly, Truscello and Nangwaya (2017) write that,

> Under the organizing model the people are the principal participants and decision-makers in the organizations and movements that are working for social change. The people are not seen as so ideologically underdeveloped that they need a revolutionary vanguard or dictatorship to lead them to the "New Jerusalem." (p. 18)

From this perspective, it is not the charismatic leaders that determine the nature or success of resistance but the slow, methodical day-to-day relationship-building, analysis, strategizing, and culture of organizing that is developed over time at the grassroots level.

The emphasis on organizing within Payne's (2006, 2007) and Voss and Williams' (2012) approach to social movement theory does not mean that links between the local and national or international level are ignored. When organizations at the grassroots level work together to build larger social movements, their impact has more potential than as isolated groups, forming the capacity for large-scale systemic change. Acevedo (1992) writes that to build larger movements, it is necessary to "establish links of solidarity among diverse social groups that, for historical reasons, could share the same political project" (p. 49). This solidarity grows out of a recognition of common interests: for example, Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) describe the social solidarity of some U.S. unions in the 1980s that spoke out against apartheid in South Africa and

in opposition to U.S. intervention in Central America (p. 195). Or as Angela Davis (2016) describes, activists in Palestine recognized the tear gas canisters used in Ferguson on social media and tweeted advice to Black activists on how to respond (2015). This type of solidarity makes possible larger visions for change–where "another world is possible"–than local groups may imagine possible otherwise (von Kotze et al., 2016). von Kotze et al. (2016) write that, "It is not enough for groups to act as isolated collectives… they do need to join with larger collectives or social movements to strengthen possibilities for deep-rooted transformation" (p. 111). As a framework for understanding popular education, this "bottom-up" analysis of how social movements are built emphasizes how popular education can contribute both to local-level organizing practices and broader movements for social transformation.

Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000), Freire describes his original theory of popular education. While he does not use the term "popular education" until later writings, the theoretical foundation used by Freire in his literacy work in Brazil and then picked up by other social movement organizations was first laid out here. While Chapter 2 of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* which describes banking v. problem-posing education, is often assigned on its own in high school, college and graduate education classes, it is best understood in the context of all four chapters together, where Friere describes 1) the nature of oppression, 2) the role of the oppressed in freeing themselves and the oppressors, 3) critical consciousness and praxis, 4) the role of the educator, and 5) social transformation as the goal. In this section I will briefly summarize each of these.

First, Freire highlights and critiques the relationships of domination that exist within social, political, and economic structures and the ways that these structures dehumanize both the oppressor and the oppressed. Freire (2000) calls these structures "authoritarian," and cites four aspects of authoritarian rule: *conquest, divide and rule, manipulation, and cultural*

invasion; each contributes to the dehumanization and domination of the oppressed through denying their own subjectivity, autonomy, authenticity, and capacity to reflect and act.

Freire (2000) argues that while both oppressor and oppressed are dehumanized, it is only the oppressed who can free themselves and in doing so also free their oppressors. Yet while the oppressed have the desire to become free, to become fully human, they also internalize the consciousness of the oppressor. Freire writes that "their ideal is to be men [sic]; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors" (p. 45). The oppressor consciousness functions through myths deposited into the oppressed, such as the myths that "anyone who is industrious can become an entrepreneur" or of the "the charity and generosity of the elites" (p. 139). Popular education seeks to develop an "ability by which people can distinguish the liberating forces of their culture from the oppressive ones, in order to promote cooperation and solidarity" (Acevedo, 1992, p. 18).

Freire (2000) maintains that in order to become fully human and change the relationship of domination, the oppressed must develop a clearer understanding of the true nature of their oppression, what he calls critical consciousness. For Freire, this consciousness comes only through praxis by the oppressed themselves: the collective process of *reflection* on their concrete situations combined with a collective process of *action* to change power structures. This collective action is necessary for critical consciousness because it is only through becoming involved in the "organized struggle for their liberation" that oppressed people come to understand not only the reality of their oppression but also their capacity to change it (Freire, 2000, p. 65).

Because their "ontological vocation" is humanization, people may on their own eventually perceive the contradictions of their oppression and decide to engage in collective struggle against it, but the "humanist, revolutionary educator cannot wait for this possibility to materialize" (Freire, 2000, p. 75). This intervention, however, cannot replicate the oppressive relationships used by the oppressors. He argues for revolutionary leaders and educators who are

committed to the liberation of the oppressed to reject the banking approach to education and instead engage in dialogue with the people in order to support their critical consciousness and collective agency.

The content of this dialogue must be "the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (Freire, 2000, p. 95). Through an approach that Freire called problem-posing, aspects of people's lives that they may have thought of as unchangeable are "re-presented" back to them as problems for them to consider (p. 109). Freire called these problems "limit-situations" because they are initially perceived by people to be insurmountable barriers (p. 99). Through reflection and dialogue about these limit-situations, people may come to see what they considered to be "given" as socially constructed, historical, and under constant transformation (p. 107). This new understanding can contribute to their willingness and capacity to engage in collective action.

Transformation is a result of praxis, or reflection and action on the "structures to be transformed" (p. 124). Freire is clear that this transformation is revolutionary in the full sense of the word, where "revolution seeks to supersede the situation of oppression by inaugurating a society of men and women in the process of continuing liberation" (p. 137). Because people's "ontological vocation" is to become "fully human" (p. 56), and the structures themselves are dehumanizing, the oppressed must engage in *both* an internal and external transformation that is capable of liberating them from these dehumanizing structures. Freire writes that "the oppressed will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it"–a fight for the restoration of their humanity (p. 45).

Identifying Core Tenets of Popular Education

Popular education has evolved over the past fifty years since Freire published *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* and there is no doubt that popular education is a "contested term and practice" (Luckett et al., 2017, p. 257). Freire encouraged his approach to be remade in different

contexts (Macedo & Araújo Freire, 2005), and a wide variety of programs have fallen under a broad "popular education" umbrella. Yet Acevedo (1992), Wiggins (2011) and others have argued that identifying common characteristics can help educators, in Acevedo's words, to "establish appropriate links between the liberating discourse of Popular Education and their daily educational practice" (p. 4). Acevedo (1992) writes that "although the practice of Popular Education has advanced, its theoretical formulation has lagged behind" and that this lag in theory creates potential "risks of Popular Education being coopted by interests contrary to those of the popular sectors" (p. 1). Acevedo notes that others in the field see the lack of theory as a strength of popular education, because it is always being remade in different contexts. But he finds that despite these concerns, a specific framework for popular education would ultimately be useful because

> a clear theoretical orientation expressed by practitioners… that allows them to establish appropriate links between the liberating discourse of Popular Education and their daily educational practice… would help them avoid the pitfall of recreating practices of domination through the merely mechanical use of participatory techniques. (pp. 3-4)

For Acevedo, theory can provide support for practitioners to clarify what popular education means in practice–the political and pedagogical principles based on previous experience that can guide future work. Similarly, Wiggins (2011) argues that it is important to clarify what popular education is in order to "speak meaningfully about the philosophy/methodology and differentiate it from other systems of thought and education," including critical pedagogy (p. 38).

Many authors agree that there are common elements of popular education (Acevedo, 1992; Bartlett, 2005; Dziembowska, 2010; Jara, 2010), and some scholars have developed a set of criteria or tenets to describe it. While U.S. literature focuses on the link between learning and social struggle, international literature places this social struggle in the context of larger movements. For example, in his study of popular education programs in community and labor organizing in the United States, Boyd (2012) found that while programs had a wide variety of

definitions of popular education, these definitions contained common characteristics, including that popular education "roots the content of a course or workshop in the concrete struggles and concerns of ordinary people" (p. 4); it is a collaborative and participatory learning process where participants are involved in all stages from curriculum planning to action; it is based in dialogue instead of lecture as the primary pedagogical method, based on the idea that all participants are both teachers and learners; it focuses on collective learning and the use of praxis, what Boyd calls "action-reflection-action;" popular educators tend to be critical of the "social, cultural and political "status quo;" and the larger goal is "to equip and empower communities to bring about fundamental social and community change" (p. 4).

International literature has developed a similar set of tenets, but these include a more direct link to social movements and social movement organizations. For example, based on their analysis of 28 NGOS engaged in community and social movement work in South Africa, Luckett et al. (2017) describe popular education as both a theory and a practice of social action that seeks to further learning within social movements by emphasizing the key principles of social justice "both in process and outcomes"; education content that is grounded in the questions and contradictions of people's collective "daily, social, political and cultural reality" that they want to examine, reflect upon, and change; dialogue where all voices are heard; and action or reflection, or praxis, where students "read the world in order to change it" (p. 257-8).

Cadena (1984) is even more explicit in the relationship between popular education and social movement building. He distinguishes popular education from other types of education by both its goals and practices, including its view of a "new society" as not only a goal for the future but as enacted in its daily work through implementing new social relationships that are "suggested by the principles of an alternative society;" its aim to "expand the number of organizations and of people committed to such society;" and its contribution to the "growth of critical consciousness, development of capacity to transform reality, and… strengthening of class organizations" (p. 34).

But perhaps the set of criteria that most clearly defines the broad tradition of popular education, as will be shown in the studies to follow, was developed by Acevedo (1992). Working in Colombia as a trainer of popular educators, Acevedo (1992) developed a theory of Latin American popular education that highlights both its "pedagogical dimension" and "political orientation." His criteria are that popular education is 1) a *political education* in that it is "committed to subordinated sectors of the society" and seeks to develop an "alternative political project of the popular classes for transforming society" (p. 16-17); 2) integral to the work of grassroots *popular organizations* whose goal is to enable "the popular sectors to become an autonomous social movement" (p. 17); 3) a *dialogical* process between teacher and students, which makes it both *participatory* and *democratic*; 4) *critical*, in the sense that it attempts to "unmask" the practices of power structures in order to help people "distinguish the liberating forces of their culture from the oppressive ones, in order to promote cooperation and solidarity" (p. 18); and 5) *transformative*, in that it begins with the concrete conditions people live in and enables them to analyze those conditions in order to take action to change them in a process of praxis. By including the second criteria, where the goal is the development of autonomous popular organizations as part of an autonomous social movement rooted in the popular sectors, Acevedo's description distinguishes it from critical pedagogy by identifying the role of popular education in a larger democratic political project.

What becomes clear from these different efforts to describe popular education is the importance of the organizational and social context in which popular education functions. Jara (2010) writes that after Freire's literacy work in Brazil, the ideas of popular education spread throughout Latin America, "linking up with the organizational processes of urban and rural social movements" (2010, p. 292). Similarly, Kane (2000) writes that, "Perhaps the key post-Freirean advance in Latin America was that popular education tied itself umbilically to the development of popular organisations and movements" (p. 46). This linking up of popular education to social movements is often implied in descriptions of popular education but not

always named. Without this link being explicit, it is possible to extract the techniques of popular education from the larger political context, which many scholars note has already happened: for example, Miller & VeneKlasen (2012) argue that over the years, the interactive learning methods of popular education have been separated from the "explicit political objectives and organizing strategies that are vital to popular education theory and practice" (p. 2). Similarly, Acevedo (1992) argues that "it is the principles and the purposes, not the techniques, that make popular education a tool of liberation" (p. 42). And Macedo and Araújo Freire (2005) lament the way Freire's broader philosophy has in many cases been reduced down to a method instead of a "broad and deep understanding of education that has its political nature at the core of its concerns" (p. xiv).

Popular Education Practice: Contemporary International Literature

Internationally, a body of literature on popular education maintains a strong link between the pedagogical practice and larger political vision of popular education. This literature can give us both a sense of what Freire's ideas look like when they are part of modern social movements to transform power structures, as well as some of the challenges and tensions in applying Freire's ideas in these contexts.

In Latin America, Valente and Berry (2015) highlight the role of popular education in social movements as part of the landless workers' movement in Brazil. They focus on the work of the MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra, or Landless Rural Workers Movement), which has succeeded in helping landless peasants permanently occupy (and in many cases legalize) thousands of land settlements across Brazil. They find that the MST settlements have been more successful in winning improved material conditions and educational opportunities than non-MST settlements, which they attribute in part to the MST's educational organizing approach that prioritizes collective leadership from the local to national levels. At the local level, it starts with the small-scale organization of ten to fifteen families into nucleos de base (base nuclei), which are "responsible for addressing the issues that arise in the

community through debate and consensus" (p. 268). The authors argue that it is this bottom-up popular education organizing approach, along with their emphasis on education for the next generation via building schools and influencing teaching pedagogy, that has made the MST so successful.

Two important large-scale studies outside Latin America are Boughton & Durnan's (2014) study of a national literacy campaign in Timor-Leste[16] and Australia, and Kapoor's (2004) study of environmental popular education with 60 villages in India. Boughton & Durnan (2014) analyze how Cuba's literacy campaign was applied in Timor0Leste and indigenous communities in Australia in 2004. The initiative for the campaign in Timor-Leste came from the leadership of the independence movement and was carried out nationally, mobilizing over 200,000 people to participate along with 600 literacy facilitators and community organizers. The authors argue that the program was "contextualized to local circumstances . . . and adapted to local realities" with a "high degree of local control exercised by facilitators and participants" (p. 575). While the authors note that aspects of the literacy program did not engage students in dialogue as they relied on pre-recorded DVDs, Boughton and Durnan (2014) write,

> No doubt some will argue that the structured and pre-developed character of the lessons themselves are less than Freirian, but we are not the first commentators to argue that this focus on the literacy lessons themselves is too narrow a conception of Freire's philosophy and practice, and ignores much of the point of his larger oeuvre. (p. 576)

The role that the program played as a vehicle for democratic participation and self-determination, not just the teaching technique, was central to what Boughton and Duran argue made the Yes, I Can campaign authentic and effective popular education.

In India, Kapoor (2004) examines the role of "environmental popular education" carried out with 8000 *adivasi* ("original settlers") in 60 villages in the Eastern Indian state of Orissa. Kapoor focuses on the role of an NGO started by a group of ten *adivasi* cultural workers, or what Kapoor calls "activist-educators" in 1995 to "support the *adivasi* way of life, for which the forest

[16] Timor-Leste is a newly independent island nation in the Asia-Pacific, winning independence in 2002 after a long armed civil struggle against its colonial power, Indonesia.

and the land are of primary significance" (p. 45). Based on participant-observation field notes taken by the author and by the activist-educators, Kapoor analyzes how their use of "dialogical problem-posing" encouraged discussion in villages about the underlying causes of their loss of access to the forests and consequent shift to illegal cultivation practices. He describes how through the use of codes, including traditional songs, ritual symbols and stones, the activist-educators drew out feelings held by *adivasi* about "deforestation, landlessness, dispossession and crop failure" as well as threats of violence from corrupt state officials who have the "very real ability to arrest, cuff, beat, and jail" those that do not pay illegal bribes for using their own land (p. 48). Through continued dialogue and activist-educators sharing their knowledge about root causes, over time villages have developed a "network of solidarity" and collective strategies to secure control over their land, resulting in land titles for over 400 families. Kapoor (2004) writes that:

> These Kondhs are gradually overcoming their fear of the *sarkar* (state) as they realize that change through asserting themselves, as opposed to trying to survive within the shrinking parameters of an unjust system, is painful but possible, and that they can engineer these possibilities by relying on a long tradition of collective action, participatory leadership, and consensual decision making. (p. 51)

At the same time, Kapoor reflects on the need for honest and critical discussion within and about the program about how the *adivasi* are victims of deforestation but also contribute to it by cutting down the forest for their survival, so that their "ability to mount a critique has been vastly eroded by their subordination" (p. 53). He argues that to acknowledge *adivasi* agency means the *adivasi* should not be idealized, and cites Freire's warning "of the two risks of elitism and *basism*," where for Freire the "rejection of popular knowledge and practices was as dangerous as its exaltation or mystification" (p. 53).

As with Kapoor's study, international popular education literature identifies a number of tensions in carrying out popular education in practice. One significant tension identified is the relationship of popular education to the state. For example, Ismail (2009) and Luckett et al. (2017) both seek to understand why popular education became less effective over time in local

social struggles in South Africa after the African National Congress (ANC) took power. Through a qualitative study using interviews, focus groups and on-site visits, as well as quantitative data from surveys through two NGOs, Ismail (2009) seeks to understand why popular education became less effective in a women's organization called the Victoria Mxenge Housing Development Association (or VM). Ismail describes how as the apartheid state was ending in 1992, VM's parent organization initiated a "movement of poor homeless people" and "acted as a catalyst to motivate poor women living in informal settlements" to build houses, but also go beyond that to build a social movement with broader goals (p. 283). Ismail argues that the women used their own previous knowledge, which they "included and added to the knowledge gained from the experts" (p. 283-4). They then mobilized other women to do the same, taking them through the process so that the VM women "were the advocators and the adult educators" in a popular education process (p. 284). Ismail argues that when the parent organization became a housing developer in 1998 partnering with the state, VM women's pedagogical practices slowly became more top-down. Ismail writes that "the VM women did not have the capacity or time to take… members through the entire development process" which meant that "opportunities for discussion, reflection and dialogue were lost" (p. 287). Ismail argues that the South African women in VM became less successful in part because they did not build a "counter discourse to capitalism" which prevented them from sustaining a movement toward "independent and self-reliant communities" (p. 291).

Similarly, based on a historical study of 30 South African NGO's, Luckett et al. (2017) argue that popular education during the anti-apartheid movement was collective, experimental, democratic, and creative, for example with Stephen Biko and the Black Consciousness movement in the 1960s using community learning groups and study circles on university campuses, challenging "colonialist and apartheid conceptions of knowledge and education" (p. 265). But after the ANC took power, "the main liberation movement became the government" and there was a decline in popular education, as the government took a neoliberal approach

which undermined grassroots power; popular education began to shift toward individual versus collective change (p. 269). The authors argue that a collective, "emancipatory" form of popular education "continues to exist in the cracks and crevices in the search for an alternative society" (p. 272). They argue that this type of popular education can play a role in the new social movements organized by students, workers and others against the modern South African neoliberal state.

Some studies look at what they see as inherent tensions in Freire's approach. Bartlett (2005) does this through an ethnographic study of three different adult NGO literacy programs in Brazil. Echoing Cho's (2010) concerns about the emphasis on localism and abstract ideals of love and democracy in critical pedagogy, Bartlett finds that Freire's ideas of love, taken from Che and Liberation Theology, were interpreted by teachers in a way that limited their application of popular education. The dialogue that teachers engaged students in were limited to personal issues, without challenging those experiences or helping students to place them in a larger political context. She finds that teachers distorted Freire's meaning by primarily seeking to be "friends" to students, enacting the equality of teachers and students that Freire prioritized without his other political pedagogical ideas (p. 354). Related to Kapoor's (2019) call not to idealize or reject the knowledge of oppressed people, Bartlett sees unresolved tensions in Freire's ideas between respecting students' "popular" knowledge and alternatively seeing them as possessing "false consciousness" (p. 357), which she argues leaves Freire "open to two contradictory interpretations" (p. 360). She writes:

> Freire argued for a directive (though nonauthoritarian) role for teachers, engaged in trying to achieve an essentially predetermined outcome for dialogical knowledge construction. Thus, teachers serve as a kind of vanguard. This contradiction in Freire's work, which has been highlighted by other Freirean scholars, placed teachers in an untenable position (p. 357).

For Bartlett this tension was unresolved, as teachers saw their work as both "respecting and valorizing" student knowledge while "socializing students into their own way of seeing the world" (p. 357).

In another study that analyzes the risks in carrying out popular education work, Kee and Carr-Chellman (2019) ask whether Freire's framework "still applies when discussing questions of Indigenous critical consciousness" (p. 90). Through the lens of limitations in Freirean literacy campaigns in Guinea-Bissau, Nicaragua, and the Andes, they analyze literacy programs with Indigenous people in Canada where they work. The authors note that after Guinea-Bissau's independence from Portugal, a literacy campaign that Freire helped the new revolutionary government design in 1974 was carried out in Portuguese, not the indigenous language, contributing to an internal colonization. Similarly, after the Sandinistas took power in Nicaragua, Kee & Carr-Chellman write that the Miskito Indigenous people engaged in armed rebellion against the Sandinista government, claiming Indigenous rights to the land. The Miskito people

> …did not embrace the [Sandinista-run] Freirean-inspired literacy campaign but, instead, saw it as interference from the central government infringing on their cultural and linguistic sovereignty. Even though instruction was offered in several languages including Miskito, Sumo, and English, the campaign's attempt to create a revolutionary national culture unified around pro-Sandinista aims was interpreted as an attempt to"homogenize" the Miskito culture and language, resulting in "a loss of identity and regional power" (Blackburn, 2000, p. 12, as quoted in Kee & Carr-Chellman, 2019, p. 97)

In analyzing these efforts, that emphasized the "national culture" over local indigenous self-determination, Kee & Carr-Chellman (2019) argue that Freire's approach "too easily operationalizes liberation as a universal concept that can be lived-out in the same way for all people in all places" which ignores the unique meaning of liberation in different contexts (p. 97). They write, "Very concretely, reliance on outside intervention often applies a limited conception of literacy that is not aligned with the needs of the local people" (p. 101).

The international literature demonstrates that outside the United States, Freire's ideas continue to be used within the context of larger social struggles to promote democratic grassroots power. The authors identify many of the benefits of using problem-posing education and opportunities for praxis within organizing struggles and broader social movements to support oppressed groups' agency and self-determination. But this role for popular education is

not viewed as unproblematic: Many of the studies directly and honestly analyze the tensions that arise in popular education work, where maintaining a democratic pedagogical commitment while being located within political organizing struggles means that popular education programs can walk a fine line between creating new relationships of oppression, as Kee and Carr-Chellman (2019) discuss, and not doing enough to interrogate the existing ones, as Bartlett (2019) articulates.

Popular Education Practice: Contemporary U.S. Literature

Although recent research on popular education practice is more limited in the United States than internationally, there have been some studies as well as reflections by popular educators on their work in the past twenty years, particularly in the labor movement and immigrant rights organizing. While some of this literature highlights how popular education in the U.S. context has continued to support democratic grassroots power, some also represent U.S. interpretations of popular education as more individual and relationship-based, as either a precursor or alternative to social struggle. Also in contrast to the international literature, the U.S. literature shows less critical engagement with the tensions that arise in popular education work.

In the U.S. literature, a handful of studies focus on the role of popular education within labor, community and immigrant organizing struggles. The most prominent example is Delp et al.'s (2002) edited volume *Teaching for Change*, the only book written about popular education in the U.S. labor movement in the last twenty years. It gives detailed descriptions of practice written by popular educators themselves; for example McAlevey (2002) describes an organizing campaign developed by a coalition of unions with low-wage workers of color in Stamford, Connecticut. The popular education process she describes was 1) starting from workers' own experiences holistically (not just about workplace concerns) which led to the analysis that housing was their primary concern, 2) carrying out a power analysis with rank and file members of the political forces in the city, and then 3) supporting the workers in carrying out multiple

campaigns, including one to stop the demolition of low-income housing. Organizers identified that key lessons from the campaign were to address racism directly in organizing, reject workplace/non-workplace divide, and invest in a power analysis at the beginning with members.

Theodore (2015) looks at the organizing work of day laborers in the U.S. as part of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON). Through twelve in-depth interviews with day labor organizers as well as participant observations, he traces the history of popular education to Latin American social struggles and describes how they are using it to help other day laborers self-organize. He finds that organizers bring traditions of popular education from Latin America, but then integrate workers' experiences from their home countries democratically so that the process combines outside with internal knowledge (p. 2043). For example, he describes how day labor leaders propose setting a minimum wage of $15/hour in Southern California at a particular hiring site, providing a space for workers to discuss and debate the pros and cons of the proposal, and then vote on it. While leaders developed the proposal and structure, ultimately the decision belonged collectively to the workers themselves. Theodore writes that "Popular Education… can be seen as a part of a broader emancipatory project to radically democratise knowledge production and decision-making" (p. 2038).

Also focused on immigrant workers, Chang et al. (2012) describe a participatory research project carried out by the San Francisco-based Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) with Chinese restaurant workers organizing around health and safety. The worker participants took part in trainings that elicited their knowledge and experiences while also giving them tools to do the research, which they carried out through focus groups, surveys of over 400 restaurant workers in Chinatown, and observations of restaurant working conditions. Worker researchers engaged in critical reflection on their experiences throughout the process as well as action to address the issues they identified, including leafleting workers about their rights and helping two groups of workers win back pay from their employers. The authors find that "combining

critical analysis and consciousness-raising with action" improved the quality of both the research and the workers' organizing efforts (Chang et al, 2012, p. 248).

Tomaneng (2017) looks at how migrant Filipina domestic workers became activists while participating in a community organization, the Filipino Migrant Center (FMC) in Southern California that was organizing around issues facing their low-wage members. Through a methodology of critical ethnography, Tomaneng used interviews, participant observation and document analysis to understand migrant workers' experiences, focusing on how political education, Filipino Critical pedagogy, and community organizing help to develop an "activist and social justice mindset" among the women participants (p. 50). She finds that by engaging in both a Philippine and Filipino American-based political education while engaging in community organizing, the women developed an oppositional consciousness that supported their continued activism.

While most research focuses on the work of individual organizations, one U.S. study looks at popular education programs nationally to understand common characteristics. Seeking to understand broadly what popular education looks like in the United States in practice, Boyd (2012) conducted 25 interviews with popular educators around the country. He found that while interviewees had a wide variety of definitions of popular education, these definitions contained common characteristics (described above in the section on core tenets). He also found that the 40 programs he studied contained five common features in their *practice* across all programs: 1) building a sense community at workshops in order to create an environment of "openness, risk-taking and accountability" (p. 8); 2) providing space, both literally and figuratively, for people involved in organizing to engage in learning and dialogue, to "meet, to network, to plan, and to reflect," especially for those who are "normally degraded and disregarded by dominant culture" so that they can go from "from confusion to vision, and from fear to courage" (p. 9); 3) including dialogue as central to their work; 4) viewing the role of the educator/facilitator as part of a

"circle of learners"; and 5) participatory democracy as both a method and goal of popular education.

While Boyd focuses on community-based popular education programs designed to support social transformation, some studies on popular education in the U.S. context place a greater emphasis on personal transformation, while the link to specific organizations or social struggles is backgrounded or not discussed at all. For example, a study by Glowacki-Dudka et al. (2017) of two workshops for community educators on "authentic leadership" at a "well-known" adult education and organizing center focuses primarily on the teaching approach within the workshop space.[17] They use a case study methodology and generation of themes to understand educators' motivations for attending the workshops, which include "seeking renewal and inspiration" and "personal growth and learning gained from the experience" (pp. 384-85). None of the themes they identify relate to broader social movements or organizing struggles, but instead emphasize listening to participants' individual needs and experiences related to the process of the workshop itself. The authors conclude by referencing Myles Horton, the founder of Highlander:

> Horton dreamed of a place where people could come together. He promoted storytelling, dialogue around the campfire, and the use of art and music *to create cohesive groups in intimate settings first, before communally addressing more intense issues of social justice*. Academic learning was not enough; rather, personal connections between people were key to fighting norms designed and enforced by the status quo. (p. 388; emphasis added)

Building "cohesive groups" is the primary lens they view popular education through because they see it as necessary to move to the second step of addressing larger structural issues, yet they don't discuss how it contributes to this next step.

In her study of fifteen incarcerated women participating in a poetry class, Baird (2001) similarly acknowledges the larger social context of popular education but focuses on its pedagogical aspects in supporting women's development of voice and activism. Students chose

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[17] From the details provided, the center is likely the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee.

authors to read together, including Patricia Hill Collins, Maya Angelou and Nikki Giovanni, and then wrote poetry related to the reading. She found that women moved from a "culture of silence" (quoting Freire) to a level of self-confidence by using words that "held meaning for them to assume responsibility for their communities by trying to humanize and liberate them" (p. 6). Thus while the class was not directly connected to a particular organizing or social movement, there was the intention and potential as women develop critical consciousness through the reading and writing process. Yet again the emphasis was on the individual and collective work that happened within the classroom, without discussion of how it connected or might have connected to larger struggles.

Even in some studies about community struggles, the U.S. literature more often emphasizes the relational aspects of popular education over structural change. For example, Beckett et al. (2012) analyze two "Paulo Freire-influenced" popular education projects carried out by community organizations with Latino immigrant parents in Los Angeles and Watsonville, California (p. 5). The first program engaged parents in leadership development workshops to critically reflect on their own experiences and the deficit frameworks that Latino immigrant parents face in schools. The second used digital storytelling to represent Latino families' experiences with their children's schools back to them (as a form of Freire's codification of generative themes) as a way to challenge deficit narratives. They find that the primary benefit of the two projects is in the community building that happened in the process, not the political results: "the focus [of The Project] was on building relationships or community, on deliberative discussion and active listening, and on learning from one another rather than on the actions or products produced from the meetings" (p. 11).

Just three studies that I could find in the U.S. literature also look intentionally at the tensions in the practice. Dziembowska (2010) traces the history of NDLON (the same organization from Theodore's 2015 study) to the creation of the Pasadena Day Labor Program which began through popular education leadership development workshops with day laborers

on street corners in the 1990s "to help workers understand the relationship between the social context and their personal experiences so that they could begin to collectively determine what to do about the situation" (p. 144). The workshops led to "intercorner conferences" where workers met from across the city to discuss the problems they faced and potential solutions, leading to stronger organizing efforts. These efforts also led to the creation of an independent organization of day laborers. Established through a general assembly of 150 day laborers, the goal was to build "an autonomous democratic organization of day laborers" that could defend its own interests based on the view that "only through involving people in their own problems can we create a more humane and democratic society" (IDEPSCA 2000, 1999, as quoted in Dziembowska, 2010). But organizers interviewed in the study describe how the organization fell apart after only two years, as a result of challenges of creating a structure that was both democratic and able to make decisions for the organization. Instead, day labor programs worked to create a national network of day laborers, which became NDLON.

In the Delp et al.'s (2002) edited volume *Teaching for Change* described above, some popular educators acknowledge the difficulties in carrying out popular education programs. For example, Utech (2002) describes both the achievements and challenges of using popular education in union-run ESL classes she taught with nursing home workers, where her goal was not only teaching them skills but "providing a forum for them to critically examine problems and their root causes, develop strategies, and take action as union members to address the problem" (p. 188). Using a problem-posing approach, Utech facilitated discussions about who had power in the students' workplace and why, had students read stories about workers learning to stand up for their rights, created a workers' rights quiz, and helped students read their union contract. These activities led to students discussing a supervisor who violated their rights to paid overtime; they developed and carried out a plan to collectively talk to the supervisor, which resolved the problem. At the same time, Utech acknowledges challenges the class faced,

including how to respond to complaints that members raised about their union representatives or their contract.

Other tensions mentioned by authors in the same volume include Tau Lee and Baker's (2002) discussion of the constraints of working as popular educators within unions where "it has been rare for us to be able to work with a group of workers as we might wish: over a sustained period of time allowing workers to explore their experiences of oppression, discuss root causes, develop a critical analysis of their experiences, and identify strategies for action" (p. 73). And in her discussion of a union organizing campaign with immigrant janitors in Los Angeles, Arrellano (2002) reflects honestly about the challenges she and the other organizers faced trying to use a popular education approach to build the democratic participation of the janitors in the campaign. She says that in the beginning, because of their lack of understanding of how popular education worked, the organizers were "attempting to do the propaganda manipulator thing" because they "wanted to be participatory, we wanted to be democratic, we just weren't sure how to do it" (p. 67). She describes how over time, through conducting ongoing evaluations with members to get their feedback, staff organizers were able to adjust their practice which she says "was crucial in helping us overcome obstacles in the process" (p. 67).

Finally, Boyd's (2012) study, described above, also discusses tensions in popular education practice. Boyd quotes a popular educator he interviewed from an organization called Training for Change in Philadelphia, who felt that "some popular educators use dialogue in a somewhat manipulative way by subtly guiding persons to a position held by the educator" (as quoted in Boyd, 2012, p. 10). In response, Training for Change developed an approach to dialogue called "emergent design" where workshops are created in response to the "emerging needs" of a group. Emergent design allowed facilitators to be "more accurate" in the activities they plan so that the activities were "closer matches to the unique journey the group is taking" (Lakey, 2010, p. 148, as quoted in Boyd, 2012). Boyd finds that "popular educators must work hard to remove barriers to understanding, while being careful not to disrespectfully impose their

agenda on the group process" (p. 10). These studies give a glimpse into some of the tensions in the U.S. setting that I will consider in the two case studies.

Conclusion: Lessons and Gaps

This review of the literature shows that popular education has been unique in its role as a democratic form of political education embedded within community organizing struggles and broader social movements. A number of international and U.S. studies discussed above, including those by Valente and Berry (2015), Kapoor (2019) in India, Boughton and Durnan (2014) in Timor, Cubajeveite (2015) in South Africa, as well as Tomaneng (2017), Chang et al. (2012), Dziembowska (2010), and Theodore (2015) in the United States, find that popular education has been an effective tool in supporting critical consciousness, collective agency, and self-determination among poor and working class people, particularly poor and working class people of color and immigrants as well as internally colonized (Kapoor, 2019) and formerly colonized people (Boughton and Durnan, 2014).

Approaches to popular education that appear most effective from these studies are those that *value participants' knowledge, experience,* and *capacity for growth*, so that participants are the ones to gain new knowledge to help them address their real, lived problems. As Theodore's (2014) study about day laborers argues, popular education is a "process which places high value on the knowledge already possessed by the 'popular classes' and on the active process of learning and the development of capacity of critical thought" (Kane, 2001, as quoted by Theodore, 2014, p. 2038). The link between the "expert knowledge" and their own "local knowledge" seems strongest when it is made by participants themselves, so that educators and organizers neither impose knowledge from above nor leave the knowledge to what participants already possess. When combined with organizing, this approach appears to be a particularly effective tool to support the development of authentic praxis among oppressed people.

At the same time, the literature review shows that popular education may be understood and applied differently in the United States than internationally. While the recent U.S. literature

is more likely to emphasize the individual and classroom pedagogical process (for example Baird, 2001; Glowacki-Duda et al., 2017), contemporary international literature generally places those individual and group processes within the *context* of larger social struggles (for example Kapoor, 2019; Boughton and Durnan, 2014). This likely results from the reality on the ground that internationally, popular education is more often developed within social movement organizations as a central part of the organizing process, whereas in the U.S. its use appears more often disconnected from larger struggles.

Another important distinction between the U.S. and international literature is that the international literature more frequently engages the challenges involved in popular education work in a critical way. For example, Kapoor (2019) raises the question of how to neither valorize nor dismiss people's knowledge, and Bartlett (2015) sees this as a contradiction in Freire's work; Kee and Carr-Chellman (2019) question whether Freire's framework applies in the context of indigenous self-determination; and Ismail (2009) and Luckett et al. (2017) both identify the ways popular education became less effective when the ANC took power in South Africa and social movements did not know how to engage with the revolutionary-turned-neoliberal state. By contrast, only Delp et al.'s (2002) edited volume on popular education in the labor movement, Dziembowska's (2010) study on day labor organizing, and Boyd's (2012) inventory of U.S. popular education programs raise questions about the difficulties that popular educators have faced in the U.S. context.

While most of the U.S. literature does not directly address tensions in popular education work the way the international literature does, some studies do acknowledge challenges that educators faced due to the structural constraints of the sponsoring organizations or pedagogical questions about how to not fall back on indoctrinating methods. The U.S. studies also show that while historically popular education was embedded in social movement struggles in the United States, the emphasis on individual change in recent literature may mean that this link has been weakened. It is possible that this reflects the current context of organizing, where the broad

social movement struggles of the 1960s have given way to localized struggles and issue-based organizing. As Arguelles (2006) argues,

> In the United States, we don't have a popular movement. We have lots of movements for social and racial justice: a lot of people trying to resist and bring change and do good things. However, the fact that people are moving doesn't mean that we have a popular movement. (p. 51)

The lack of a larger movement may limit the potential of popular education. In the cases of the incarcerated women in the poetry class (Baird, 2001), for example, had there been a social movement to connect to, their activism may have been amplified and their goals more readily achieved. In his analysis of popular education literacy campaigns in Nicaragua in the 1980s, Mayo (1993) writes that

> …adult education, no matter how emancipatory in process and content it may be, does not, on its own, lead to social transformation. It appears likely to prove effective in this regard only when it is carried out in the context of a strong, all-embracing social and political movement. (p. 4)

The studies in this review suggest that this may be true, where individual and collective agency are necessarily limited by the extent and nature of the movements of which they are or are not part. As Kane (2000) writes about popular education in Latin American popular social movement organizations, "Experience showed that in the context of these alternative organizations, where the demand and infrastructure for collective learning already existed, popular education could be most effective" (p. 46). Thus while popular education contributes to the building of social movements, it also needs social movements to reach its liberatory potential.

At the same time, the U.S. literature suggests that even in times of low social movement activity, popular education can still have a transformative effect–albeit on a smaller scale–when used within local grassroots organizing struggles that are not solely issue-based but focused on developing people's capacities to be agents of change. Delp et al.'s (2002) edited reflections on union organizing, Dziembowska's (2010) and Theodore's (2015) studies on day laborers, Chang et al.'s (2012) study with immigrant hotel workers, and Tomaneng's (2017) research with

Filipina domestic workers all provide evidence of popular education supporting authentic praxis by people at the grassroots level. It appears that Acevedo's (1992) criteria for popular education described earlier still apply: these cases all appear to 1) engage people in a political education, 2) connect them to popular organizations–organizations of people at the grassroots level, 3) involve them in a dialogical process that democratic and participatory, 4) support their critical analysis of their concrete experiences of oppression, and 5) support transformation by supporting and encouraging collective praxis where the people themselves determine what action they will take.

Still, there are many unanswered questions about what makes popular education work and what limits its potential. Kee and Carr-Chellman's (2019) concerns about popular education imposing a particular vision of liberation in the context of indigenous sovereignty, Luckett et al.'s (2017) assessment about the decline in emancipatory forms of popular education with the rise of neoliberalism, Delp et al.'s (2002) research that identifies the many ways popular education can be applied undemocratically, and Bartlett's (2005) questions about the consequences of leaving existing systems of oppression unexamined all speak to the importance of honest and critical analysis of popular education programs. As Bernard (2002) argues, "We need to unleash the full potential of popular education and not limit ourselves to promoting the form without the critical–including self-critical–content" (p. 7). Payne (2007) also argues that we need to tell the truth about movements to learn from them:

> Hagiographic [flattering] history is going to be attacked sooner or later. As James Baldwin noted: "To accept one's past–one's history–is not the same as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it. An invented past can never be used; it cracks and crumbles under the pressures of life like clay in a season of drought." (p. xxi)

With only a handful of empirical studies on popular education in the United States carried out in the past twenty years, more critical research is needed to understand how this pedagogical and political tool can support the building of democratic grassroots social movements in the decades to come.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

As described in the introduction, the purpose of this study was to understand how two U.S.-based popular education programs contributed to the building of democratic grassroots social movements through the creation of intentional spaces for reflection and analysis that are linked to organizing. I used a comparative case study methodology with two popular education programs in the United States: a nine-month community organizing leadership program with low-income residents of the Tenderloin District of San Francisco, California called the Grassroots Empowerment and Leadership (GEL) Program, and a labor education program with public school and hospital employees on the East Coast called the Workers' Dialogue.[18] While Freire's ideas have been explored extensively in the literature, and implemented with youth in and out of school settings, there is limited research on his ideas put into action with adults who are engaged in community, labor and other organizing efforts. The research questions were designed to explore both the broader political project and the concrete pedagogical practice of popular education through the lenses of praxis, critical consciousness, and democracy.

Research Questions

The guiding question that this study sought to answer was: *How does popular education contribute to the building of democratic social movements?* Within this guiding question, I had two specific questions to focus the study:

1) What role, if any, do popular education programs play in supporting participants' *praxis* (reflection and action), *democratic participation* in classes and organizing work, and *critical consciousness*?
2) What challenges and tensions arise in these three areas, and how do organizations navigate these challenges and tensions?

[18] All names of organizations, programs, and people directly involved in the study have been changed to protect the confidentiality of participants. I identified the geographical location of the programs as specifically as I felt I could to provide context for the reader while still protecting participants' identities.

Research Design

Theoretical Orientation

To answer these questions, I used a comparative case study approach (Creswell, 2012) rooted in critical research (Carspecken, 1996; Nygreen, 2009). In case study methodology,

> the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. (Creswell, 2012, p. 73)

I chose case study methodology because unlike ethnography, when the intention is to describe a "cultural group" (Creswell, 2012, p. 70), my intention was to understand and analyze an educational approach. In a comparative case study, the researcher chooses an issue or problem for investigation, and selects "several cases to explore the issue" which enable the researcher to "provide analytical insights on things that are similar and different" between cases (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 110). This comparison is what I did in the final discussion chapter, Chapter VIII.

My approach to case study was also grounded in the values of what Nygreen (2009) calls "engaged critical research for social change." Rooted in critical, critical race, and critical feminist theories of knowledge production, this type of research recognizes

> the political nature of knowledge and its production; skepticism of positivist social science; an attempt to equalize power relations between the knower and the known; a commitment to the transformative potential of situated and subjugated knowledges; a belief in participatory democracy, as the means and goal of social change; and the explicit goal of research for anti-oppressive change. (Nygreen, 2009, p. 16)

While case study methodology may presume to be value neutral and has been used for a wide variety of political purposes, in critical research there is an acceptance that researchers always have a set of values that guide their work. So while research is designed to discover something that is *true,* "critical researchers.... seek, through their research, to speak out against inequality and domination" (Creswell, 2012, p. 70).

Overview of Research Design

Using this "critical" case study approach, I focused on two popular education programs as different examples or "cases" of popular education work in both community-based and workplace organizing.[19] The Grassroots Empowerment and Leadership (GEL) Program was a nine-month community-based leadership training program with low-income residents in the Tenderloin and South of Market neighborhoods in San Francisco, and was a collaboration between three grassroots community organizations. The Workers' Dialogue was a series of month-long workshops designed to train rank-and-file union members as workplace organizers. This program was run by a national labor organization called the Labor Network, an organization with a long history of supporting militant grassroots worker action and democratic power throughout the United States. For six months in the Summer and Fall of 2020, I observed 120 hours of classes (and in the case of the GEL program, as I will describe below, also taught them), and conducted interviews with facilitators and participants so that I could understand both the intent and effect of the programs' work on a day-to-day micro level.

Unexpected Changes to the Research Design

There were two significant events that impacted my intended research design. The first was the COVID-19 pandemic. All aspects of social life in the United States and around the world were transformed, including how community and labor organizations did their work: much activity simply stopped for a period, and when it resumed, many meetings and classes went online. This was true for both programs in my study, which moved primarily to Zoom. The first two class meetings took place in the basement of a low-income resident building on Mission Street in February and early March 2020, just before the citywide shutdown on March 16th. After that all GEL program classes and meetings were moved to Zoom, and the Workers'

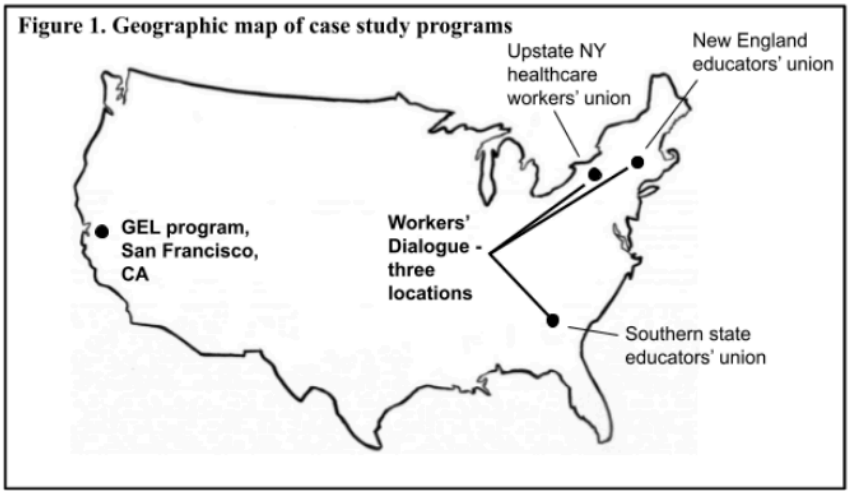
[19] I intentionally chose programs that encompassed *both* community and workplace organizing, because I believe that while labor organizing has the greatest capacity to build people's structural power as a result of being able to withhold their labor power, history shows that community organizing has the potential to also fundamentally change power relations, as the Civil Rights movement demonstrated.

Dialogue, which had been a weekend-long in-person workshop, was converted into a monthly program on Zoom with four two-hour weekly sessions for each group.

The second significant shift in my research design was my role: while at first I had planned to observe both programs, after the second GEL class in March of 2020 (well before my data collection period began in June), one of the two facilitators, James, had to stop teaching due to illness. Armand asked me to step in to co-facilitate two classes with Alim on approaches to social change. After these classes, when James's health did not improve, Armand and Alim asked me to continue to co-facilitate the classes with Alim. By June when I began data collection, I was embedded in the class development and facilitation, meeting weekly with Alim and Armand and co-facilitating most classes with Alim. While all of this was unplanned, it led to a much higher level of reciprocity and trust with participants. This was especially important in the GEL program given the higher vulnerability in this group, the starker differences between me and participants in terms of class and race background, and thus the greater need to build trust with them.

Research Setting and Program Background

The two case study organizations in this study were chosen using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2012), borrowing Acevedo's (1992) framework of key elements that identify popular education work, described in the literature review. The Grassroots Empowerment and Leadership (GEL) Program was a nine-month leadership program with low-income neighborhood residents in the Tenderloin and South of Market (SoMa) neighborhoods. The



Workers' Dialogue was a series of month-long workshops for rank-and-file union members sponsored by a national labor organization called the Labor Network that took place with members of a New England educators' union, an upstate New York healthcare union, and a Southern state educators' union (see Figure 1 for a geographic map of the programs.)

While the two programs could not have been more different in the type of sponsoring organizations, geographic location, and membership base, they both shared the goal of developing grassroots power. (Appendix A shows some of the initial primary differences and similarities that I identified between these programs). While healthcare and education workers may be considered "middle class" and therefore not "grassroots," and they certainly possess a level of privilege that low-income Tenderloin residents do not, from a *structural* perspective middle-income workers and low-income housing residents share more in common with each other than with the richest three American billionaires who, as mentioned in Chapter I, now control more wealth than the poorer *half* of the United States (Collins & Hoxie, 2017). By including both workplace and community organizing programs, I hoped to be able to see how popular education programs in both of these settings can support participant praxis, democratic participation, and critical consciousness, and the tensions that can arise in these different contexts.

Grassroots Empowerment and Leadership Program Overview

The Grassroots Empowerment and Leadership (GEL) program was a 9-month pilot education and organizing program for low-income Tenderloin and SOMA residents and consisted of two parts: bi-monthly political education and organizing classes, and autonomous community organizing/community development projects. The program was a collaboration between the Pinay Neighborhood Development Program (a new Filipino community organization based in SoMa), the Central City Development Corporation (a low-income housing provider with a community organizing department that ran leadership training classes in the Tenderloin), and the SoMa Community Association (an unincorporated neighborhood

organization).[20] Each participant was placed into a project group, and these groups met weekly or bi-monthly to develop their projects. The program prioritized uniting around common issues, helping participants develop a deeper understanding of how community issues relate to wider social issues, and engaging participants in collective decision-making and action, in order to build democratic grassroots power in the Tenderloin and South of Market.

Projects.

The projects were the core of the program; as Armand said, "Education should be connected with organizing. Otherwise, it will be just like a stack of knowledge, they're not actually [using it]." The projects were designed to give participants direct experience addressing the problems faced in the community. To set this up, each participant was assigned to one project and each project had a lead member to help move the project forward. Each project group used a template with questions to help them develop their projects.

While the design of the program was for participants to develop the projects themselves, the broad topics were decided beforehand and originated as part of a broader discussion. As part of the SoMa Community Association (SCA), Armand, June and other Council members did ten months of outreach in 2019, including holding building meetings as well as block meetings, interviews, and door-to-door outreach, to identify issues that residents would want to address in the community. From this outreach they identified the generative issue of cleanliness and safety in SoMa, which led to the *6th Street Activation Project*. The *Alternative Economy Development Project* focused on developing an alternative economy for the neighborhood, an idea that Armand and James had from an earlier effort to create a flea market in the Tenderloin, as well as seeing the economic independence of San Francisco's Chinatown and large-scale cooperative efforts like the Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland, Ohio. The *Electoral Organizing Project*

[20] To protect confidentiality, the Tenderloin Community Association, SoMa Community Association, Pinay Neighborhood Development Program, and other community organizations named in this chapter that participants were directly involved in are pseudonyms; organizations that are mentioned in the chapter that participants were not directly involved in are the real names.

focused on engaging Tenderloin and SoMa residents in electoral politics in the city. The *Housing Sustainability and SRO Organizing Project's* focus was on access to truly affordable housing, to "keep our community intact and sustainable by helping solve homelessness, evictions, availability of decent affordable housing for everyone, to ensure that no one will be priced out of their homes" (Project PowerPoint document).[21] Appendix B shows the project groups, goals, and participants.

The program was also designed to expand the project groups to involve more people in the community. Initially the projects started with the GEL class participants, and then once they had developed their initial planning, they began outreaching to other community residents to join the expanded project groups so that they could become larger community projects. The electoral project became a District 6 Committee; the 6th Street project joined with an existing "Clean-Aps" committee of the SoMa Community Association; the alternative development project became the Mariposa Alley Street Fair committee, and the housing project joined with a housing committee of the Tenderloin Community Association, an independent coalition of 15 grassroots groups. In most cases the project groups met weekly, and once a month they met with the expanded project groups. These additions to the project group were known and respected community members with strong ties to other community organizing work in the neighborhood.

Classes.

GEL classes were designed to supplement the projects by providing tools and a theoretical base for student learning and to provide peer support across projects. The GEL planning document written by Armand and James described the purpose of the classes as "for training and learning successful organizing methods used by social justice leaders, community engagement process, and project management" (internal document, "GEL Program."). Classes were a mix of larger theoretical topics like "What is social justice?", and more practical topics

[21] SROs are typically 8 x 10 foot rooms with shared bathrooms and no kitchen. They are the primary housing stock in the Tenderloin and adjacent part of SoMa.

like “Facilitation and Communication.” Appendix C gives an overview of the final list of class topics.

All classes started with a check-in question, for example, “What does community empowerment look like to you?” and “What keeps you motivated during these times?” These were all highly generative questions, with participants sharing their experience, opinions and knowledge of the Tenderloin and SoMa in a way that emphasized the grassroots and community-building focus of the program. After the check-ins, the structure of the rest of each class varied considerably. In many classes the pedagogy was activity-based, as in a class I facilitated on wage exploitation for the topic, “What is Social Justice?”, where participants were put in the role of McDonalds’ workers and had to figure out their wages and the owner’s take-home profit. Many classes were discussion-based, with breakout groups and whole group report-backs. There were also guest speakers; for example an artist from a community-based activist arts organization spoke in our class on art and activism; a local organizer shared his experience fighting gentrification in predominantly Latino and low-income Mission district; and a co-worker of Alim’s advised participants about how to negotiate with corporate housing developers over new corporate developments in their neighborhoods.

Workers’ Dialogue Program Overview

The Workers’ Dialogue was a labor education workshop to train rank-and-file union members to become workplace organizers, run by an independent labor organization called the Labor Network and sponsored by union *caucuses*–independent and informal organizations of union members–within different unions. Founded in 1979, the Labor Network supported militant grassroots labor struggles across the country through a number of projects: running a national conference for labor activists, publishing a national labor magazine called the Workers’ Journal, and supporting local education programs with union members. The Workers’ Dialogue was created in 2014 as a way to build rank-and-file member involvement within a New England

educators' union, and then it spread to other unions. This history will be described in more detail in Chapter IV.

During my data collection period, each of these workshops ran for two hours per week, for four weeks on Zoom. While each Workers' Dialogue changed in response to the specific group, facilitators used a 4-step organizing framework as a foundation for the discussion: *1) Assess the balance of power; 2) Bring people together around a common concern; 3) Help people to take collective action together as a group to solve a problem;* and *4) Evaluate and start again*. Facilitators started the dialogue with a question or prompt to enable people to reflect on and share their own experiences with power in their workplace (the first step). Participants responded to the questions by reflecting on their experiences in their workplace. Their experiences were the content for the discussions.

I observed six series of these month-long workshops in the Summer and Fall of 2020, all sponsored by progressive union caucuses, including:

- Two workshops with teachers, paraeducators and bus drivers working in urban and suburban New England schools, sponsored by the state educators' union–the New England Educators' Association (NEEA)–after a democratic caucus, the New England Caucus of Rank and File Educators (NECORE), took leadership in the statewide union;
- One workshop with educators from a Southern U.S. state who had been part of the "Red for Ed" strike wave, sponsored by the Southern State Caucus of Rank and File Educators (SSCORE) a caucus of educators that formed before that the Red for Ed strike;
- Two workshops with hospital and long-term care workers from a healthcare workers' union in upstate New York, sponsored by the Caucus of Healthcare Workers (CHW), a new caucus of healthcare workers that had recently won seats on its union executive board in upstate New York; and,
- One workshop with an educators' caucus called United Educators started by educators of color in one urban New England school district.

Before COVID, sessions took place in person and ran for a full weekend–a Friday evening and all day Saturday and Sunday. Soon after the COVID shelter-in-place began in March of 2020, facilitators discussed whether they could run the Workers' Dialogue classes online. In May, they decided to pilot a four week, two hours per week class on a weekday evening. The first class, facilitated by Naomi, was held with teachers at a vocational technical high school in New England; she reflected after this first set of online classes that, "It ended up not being that different. Rosa also said the same thing; we were both surprised by how not different it is" (interview, 6/22/20). In the transition to the online COVID era, the workshops provided a space for workers to process and respond to the stresses, fears and workplace crises related to the pandemic, and plan together how they could respond.

Research Participants

Participants in this study were the coordinators, facilitators and participants in the two case study programs.[22]

GEL Program Participants

For the GEL program, program participants were fourteen residents of the Tenderloin and SoMa who had been recruited through previous relationships and word of mouth. They received a $1000 stipend for completion of the program, which meant attending classes as well as eight hours of project work per month. The group was very mixed in terms of age (ranging from 16-60), race, nationality and language: Celia, Mahjawe, Nubian, Faith and Reynardo were Black; Anita, Gabriela, and Bianca were Filipino immigrants; Sunshine, Nina, June and Julian were white; and Mei was a Chinese immigrant. The wide variety of backgrounds of group members was intentional on Armand and James's part and proved to be an important element in the program, as it allowed them to learn from each other and build a sense of cross-cultural and cross-organization community and solidarity.

[22] Although it might cause confusion, I will use the word "participant" to describe the community residents who were part of the two programs. "Students" does not convey the role they played in these contexts.

Most participants were single-room occupancy (SRO) residents in the Tenderloin and SoMa, were formerly homeless and in recovery. They had gone through the labyrinthian shelter system to get permanent housing, and many talked throughout the program about the obligation they felt to help the people still on the streets. For example, Celia was active on the Tenderloin Community Association and worked on getting donations to bring sleeping bags to people living on the street. She had grown up in the Richmond District and worked as a Head Start teacher until she was thirty-eight. Through addiction and losing her job and apartment, she ended up homeless on the streets of the Tenderloin. With the help of a counselor at a local organization, she was able to get into an SRO in 2018. Sunshine grew up in Louisiana, and moved to San Francisco when she was 20, working in a famous local trans bar for many years until it closed in 2019. Julian came to San Francisco from Sacramento, and in one class he shared that

> When I came to San Francisco, I came from Sacramento homeless. The thing that I would love to see change… the only way to get any help as far as homeless is to help people get housing. I had a good caseworker who actually cared about getting me the help I needed, pointing me in the right direction. Otherwise I would have been running around in circles, and end up in the same place I started. The reason why I joined this program is to help fix that whole system. (Mid-way evaluation class, 8/8/20)

Mahjawe grew up in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, went to school and spent his twenties working as a therapist. It wasn't until he became addicted to drugs that he learned about the Tenderloin; his relationship to the neighborhood was "always related to doing dirt. It was never a positive thing" (interview, 3/26/21). But with the help of Walden House, it was also the Tenderloin where he got clean and found stable housing in a CCDC property in SoMa. Walden House also helped him to be put in "a position to be a leader or a mentor, giving back to the community I was in, especially the youth" (interview, 3/26/21).

Not all participants had this background: for example, Gabriela, who was from the Philippines, had been a teacher and government administrator there, and moved to the U.S. as an adult. After finding housing in the Tenderloin, she became active in a senior organization and met Armand through that work. Bianca, the youngest of the group and also Filipina, was a San

Francisco high school student who lived in the same below market rate (BMR)[23] building as Armand.[24]

The primary initial coordinators of the program were Armand and James, and the three facilitators of the program were Armand (for the project groups), and Alim and me (for the classes). All four of us volunteered our time, although Armand was also on staff at CCDC. Armand had been a student organizer in the Philippines during the Marcos dictatorship, was one of the founders of the Pinay Neighborhood Development Program, and had helped to build new autonomous neighborhood organizations. James, who had designed the program with Armand but was unable to facilitate due to illness, had grown up in the Chicano movement in Texas, and came San Francisco to work for an AIDS organization for gay men of color. He joined the Tenderloin Community Association and began working with Armand on organizing residents, and "one of the results of that was the GEL program" (interview 4/19/21). Alim came to the United States from Somalia when he was nine, and was mentored by Armand as a new organizer working at CCDC in 2014 after graduating from San Francisco State University. He had taught the leadership classes that CCDC runs for residents, and during the GEL program he worked for another community-based organization that fought gentrification in the Mission District of San Francisco. At the time of the GEL program, I had been teaching at the local community college, City College of San Francisco, with deep roots in working class San Francisco neighborhoods, including a (now closed) campus in the Tenderloin. As described in Chapter I, I had also worked as a union organizer and adult educator for many years, and brought this experience to my new role as a facilitator for the GEL classes.

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[23] In San Francisco, below market rate (BMR) buildings are new construction condominium buildings that the city requires to have a certain number of affordable units for lower to moderate income first-time homeowners.

[24] I was lucky to meet most of the program participants in the second class on March 14th, just before the shelter-in-place began and classes moved to Zoom. In the basement of a Mission Street SoMa low-income building, I met Reynardo, Celia, Gabriela, Anita, Sunshine, Bianca, and Iris. They were friendly and easy-going; they included me right away, not allowing me to take a passive researcher role but asking me to take part in introductions and discussions. This made the transition to my role as a facilitator smoother as they had already begun integrating me into the group.

Workers' Dialogue Participants

In the six sets of Workers' Dialogue classes I observed, there were a total of approximately 60 participants, all union members, some rank and file and some in union leadership roles in their locals. All groups were very mixed in job occupation, ranging from paraeducators to bus drivers to teachers in the two education unions, and from lab workers to nurses in the hospital union. For example, in one of the New England educators' workshops, participants included four paraeducators, a special education teacher, a Mandarin immersion high school teacher, an administrative assistant, an intervention teacher, a middle school guidance counselor, a community college student advisor and local secretary, a music teacher, and a former high school teacher and now staff organizer for the union. In one of the healthcare workshops, participants included a charge nurse, a medical ICU nurse, an operating room nurse, two long-term care nurses, an occupational therapist, a cat scan tech, an LPN, and a lab tech. The majority of participants in the groups were white, with the exception of the last class I observed with a group of educators of color where the majority of the group were Black and Latino.

The coordinators and facilitators were Naomi, Rosa, and Philip, all labor organizers and educators who had been doing this work for many decades. Naomi, a Jewish woman in her late sixties, had worked as a staff organizer for an educators' union for many years before retiring, and has since done volunteer support for rank-and-file organizing campaigns through the Labor Network. Rosa, a white woman in her mid-sixties, had been a college teacher and union member, then ran for and won the presidency of her statewide union through a democratic union caucus. At the time of the Workers' Dialogue sessions I observed, she was a staff organizer and educator for the Labor Network. Philip, an African American man in his sixties, had been an organizer for two east coast teachers' unions for three decades and was now retired.

Data Collection

Because of the shelter-in-place order beginning in March 2020, all data collection for this study was done online, primarily using Zoom. I observed and facilitated all classes and meetings on Zoom between June and December 2020, and also continued to participate in some of the work in the Spring of 2021. The Workers' Dialogue, which had been an in-person 3-day training, was initially put on pause after the shelter-in-place. In May, the facilitators decided to experiment with a one-month, two hour per week evening Zoom class. I observed six of these workshops during the data collection period between June and December. I also conducted 53 total interviews on Zoom with participants and facilitators from both programs, including all facilitators as well as half of the GEL program participants and about a third of the Workers' Dialogue participants.

Participant observation/Observation: For the GEL program, I was an active participant observer on the class side of the program as a co-facilitator, and mainly an observer in the project groups, which were coordinated and facilitated by Armand. In order to plan and evaluate the classes, I participated in weekly planning meetings with Alim and Armand, and took notes during these conversations. In the classes, Alim and I traded co-facilitation back and forth, and I was able to take some notes but this was more difficult as a facilitator. Armand recorded most of the classes on Zoom, which enabled me to go back and listen to sessions as needed. I also observed about thirty of the weekly project group meetings and took detailed notes during these meetings (about 170 pages of typed notes). For the Labor Network classes, the facilitators introduced me to the participants at the beginning of each set of classes, and I briefly described my research. After that, I was primarily a passive observer, and took detailed notes in each session as well as recording the sessions on an audio recorder to back up my notes.

Interviews: In addition to participant-observation/observation, I conducted 53 total semi-formal interviews on Zoom with 32 participants, facilitators and coordinators. Zoom interviews were recorded and transcribed automatically, and I also took detailed, almost

verbatim notes in each interview. Most interviews were 1 to 1.5 hours long, and used open-ended questions (see Appendix D for my initial list of questions). I interviewed a majority of participants twice, and in two of the Workers' Dialogues, I was able to interview participants before and after the classes to see what they hoped to get out of the programs and then their impressions after the programs were done. In addition to interviews, I had numerous informal conversations with participants in the GEL program–sometimes a participant would stay on after a class was over to talk about the class, or I would touch base with a participant to plan a future class. This was not the case in the Workers' Dialogue, where the programs were short and my role was more that of a traditional researcher.

Document Analysis: I also collected and analyzed documents related to the two programs, including: 1) program materials written by coordinators that described the theoretical orientation and design of each program; 2) planning emails written by coordinators and facilitators; and 3) emails from participants to me or to facilitators reflecting on the programs.

In total, I spent approximately 210 hours doing participant-observation, observation, interviews and in informal conversations. In the GEL program, I spent about 80 hours facilitating classes and observing the project groups, and another 40 hours conducting interviews and having informal conversations with participants and facilitators. In the Workers' Dialogue, I spent about 40 hours observing the classes and another 60 hours conducting interviews and in informal conversations with facilitators. Appendix E provides a detailed summary of the two primary forms of data collection, participant observation/observation, and interviews. I also kept a journal to record my experiences as a researcher and facilitator and my initial observations, and referred back to these entries frequently to make sense of the data.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2012) writes that data analysis for multiple case studies begins with a description of the case, then moves to an analysis of themes within each case *(a "within-case analysis")*, which is "rich in the *context of the case* or setting in which the case presents itself";

then to an analysis of themes across cases *(a "cross-case analysis");* and finally to analysis and interpretation of themes (p. 75). Following Creswell's (2012) process, I first coded data for themes within each program separately and then looked for themes across both programs. This process happened in an iterative way (Yin, 2003) where I created and revised codes as I compared them, going back and forth between them to refine codes and look for the underlying emerging arguments. Because of the large amount of data I had collected, I used the coding software Dedoose to organize and keep track of the data as well as the codes (but not to analyze the data). This enabled me to change codes and reorganize parent codes, as well as to easily find excerpts I had coded.

As themes emerged from the data, using the approach of member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), I shared my findings with program facilitators and participants at multiple stages in the process in order to triangulate the data, and revised my findings based on their insights. This began during the data collection period, when I often discussed ideas that were arising with the facilitators, and in the GEL program with the participants as well. I was also lucky to have multiple opportunities to check my findings with the two organizations during the data analysis period between January and November, 2021. I then did initial presentations of my findings on Zoom in March and April of 2021 to the lead GEL and Workers' Dialogue facilitators, and had multiple follow-up conversations with facilitators as well as some participants. These conversations both gave me invaluable feedback to my findings, and allowed me to share my initial recommendations with them.

Limitations

The primary limitation to this study was that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, what I studied was not organizations' typical work and I was not documenting it in a typical way. As Meyer (2020) writes,

> Physical proximity has been almost a precondition for building collective action… Activists of all sorts build community and make strategy over long meetings in kitchens and living rooms, pubs, and church basements. Good organizers listen to the people they

> want to engage and build human relationships, not just political transactions. COVID-19 threatens every classic element of social movement organizing, from initial strategizing to visible political expressions. (para. 7-8)

At the same time, as I will describe in the findings, participants reflected that at least for these particular classes at this particular historical moment, they found the online classes to be almost as worthwhile as in-person classes. Perhaps because of the isolation that many people were experiencing due to the shelter-in-place, participants reported that online spaces provided them with a sense of connection that they would not otherwise have had. Grassroots organizations that had been doing on-the-ground organizing work for many years stretched their capacity to implement new popular education strategies in the current context, and I was able to document some of these strategies as part of how popular education continues to be remade based on people's needs within particular historical conditions.

Ethical Considerations

During this study, it was my intention to treat participants and the information they shared with me with respect and confidentiality. This included both the basic level of Institutional Review Board ethics, and also and a deeper level of *reciprocity* ((Trainor & Bouchard, 2012). I applied for and received permission to conduct research from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco and followed their research guidelines. I shared with all potential participants an explanation of the purpose of the study and research methods, received and documented their formal agreement to participate, and took time at the beginning of our interviews to answer any questions they had. Recordings of interviews, interview transcripts, field notes, and researcher memos were held electronically in password-protected files to which only I had access. I also did my best to ensure that all participant comments could not be attributable to them in any identifiable way, and assigned pseudonyms to each participant. When it was not possible to avoid likely identification of participants, I shared with them the identifying quotes or descriptions and asked and received their permission to include them.

Beyond this basic level of ethical research, I believe that my approach to this study enabled me to have a relationship of reciprocity with the organizations, people and movements I was learning about, which is not simply transactional but "an ethical stance" (Trainor and Bouchard, 2012, p. 2). In both programs, program coordinators invited my participation to help them identify what worked about their approach and why. In the GEL program, I was also asked to help facilitate the classes to support participants' development as grassroots organizers and spent dozens of hours planning and co-facilitating the classes. After I finished data collection, I continued to be in touch with Workers' Dialogue and GEL program facilitators as well as some participants in both programs, engaging in ongoing conversations about the lessons to be learned from the programs and how it influenced their continued work.

Positionality of the Researcher

As I discussed in the introduction, part of what moved me to become an organizer was that I saw it as a way to balance out at least some of the power I have based on my race and class background. In organizing, the goal is to help people build their own power, so ideally the organizer decreases his or her own power in relation to the workers or members. But as I discovered, organizations may build their own power without actually building the power of their members.

Similarly, while a researcher may intend to support the power of oppressed groups and uphold the values of critical research, Nygreen (2009) points to the fact that this is not a guarantee. Any type of research, no matter how liberatory the intention, can "easily reproduce and exacerbate power inequalities while obscuring these processes through a discourse of false egalitarianism" (p. 19). As an organizer, teacher, or researcher, my social position will both bias what I see and what I value, and means that I often carry greater social power in spaces that I work. In this study I found that this positionality was balanced out to a great degree by the democratic strength of the organizations I was working with. Still, this was ongoing and

reflective work for me as I sought, like Freire did, to act in solidarity with people from a horizontal, not vertical, relationship.

PART II: FINDINGS

In Part II of the dissertation, I share the findings from the data collection conducted primarily between June and December 2020. There are four findings chapters: Chapter IV describes how facilitators of both programs worked to carve out autonomous spaces, free from many of the structural constraints imposed by traditional non-profits (the GEL program) and top-down labor union bureaucracies (the Workers' Dialogue). Chapter V and VI focus on what the programs were able to *do* with the free spaces they had created, in particular how each program supported participants' *praxis* and *democratic participation* through their organizing strategies and pedagogical practices, as well as the tensions that arose. And finally Chapter VII describes how the programs impacted the development of participants' *critical consciousness*. Chapter VIII is a closing discussion chapter that compares the findings of each program, arguing that both programs contributed to *changed social relations*, where participants were able to "enter the historical process as responsible Subjects" (Freire, 2000, p. 36). The chapter also compares the tensions in each program, arguing that their different approaches to conflict impacted their potential effectiveness in changing these power relations.

Three notes on the findings chapters: First, while the chapter on critical consciousness is last, it is the chapter that describes what I found to be the most surprising, that what participants shared as most useful to them about the programs was less about what they *learned* from the *teachers* and more about what they *experienced* with *each other*. What they experienced with each other was a change in their social relationships and subsequently a change in their awareness of their role in social change, where they began to understand their *collective historical agency*. This is what I describe in Chapter VII. The previous three findings chapters describe what made this possible.

Second, as described in Chapter I, Freirean popular education has a *goal* of transforming unequal power relations in society (the larger political orientation), which means that popular

education programs are often embedded in larger social struggles working for this transformation. Within those social struggles, there is a pedagogical approach that *prefigures* the larger transformative goals by using a democratic, participatory and dialogical learning method (the teaching practice) within social movement settings (Wiggins, 2011). The GEL program and Workers' Dialogue can thus each be seen in two parts, their social movement *organizing strategy* and their *pedagogical practice*. This is what I will describe in Chapters IV and V, showing how the programs contributed to greater grassroots power by being embedded in larger organizing struggles, and applying popular education pedagogy to democratize and strengthen these struggles.

Third, as noted in the introduction and the literature review, there are a number of tensions that have been identified in popular education work. Based on the findings, I identify the primary tension in both programs as a *structural* tension: the fundamental conflict between the democratic needs and sensibilities of people at the grassroots level and the hierarchical structures they engaged with, even structures theoretically designed to empower them like unions or non-profits. This tension led both programs to try to carve out autonomous spaces, as described in Chapter IV. While these new spaces granted a greater level of autonomy, because both programs were designed to empower participants outside the educational space vis-a-vis these larger institutions of power, facilitators had to make choices about how much conflict to encourage. This surfaced as *organizing* and *pedagogical* tensions that popular education programs must necessarily grapple with in the context of racialized capitalism. The last sections of Chapters V and VI explore how these tensions surfaced in the programs.

CHAPTER IV: CARVING OUT AUTONOMOUS SPACE

This chapter describes the background and context for both programs through the lens of social movement free space. In Chapter I, I introduced the concept of *free spaces,* which are

> small-scale settings within a community or movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in, and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization. (Polletta, 1999, p. 1)

This autonomy from dominant power can "allow people to collectively cultivate counter-hegemonic agendas and projects" and these counter-hegemonic agendas then make possible collective action (Heidemann, 2019, p. 314). Heidemann (2019) argues that under "under certain conditions, formalised popular education programs can act as free spaces that actively facilitate the reproduction of social movement activities" (p. 314). In particular, popular education programs can act as free spaces when they are able to "link the *tangible concerns and realities* of community-members to the building of *counter-hegemonic educational projects* that tie up with the emancipatory agendas of broader-level social movements" (p. 315; emphasis added). But when popular education programs are "pre-packaged, standardised and persistently require the approval of external actors with close links to established authorities, then the potential for such a site to act as an effective vehicle for social movements is highly questionable" (p. 315). The concept of free space clarifies that popular education inherently faces a structural tension: between the democratic needs of participants for greater agency in their lives, and the hierarchical and coercive nature of hegemonic power within capitalism.

While the Grassroots Empowerment and Leadership program and the Workers' Dialogue were distinct from each other in many ways, both were formed in the context of extensive efforts by their creators to carve out learning and organizing spaces that were free from many of the hierarchical and coercive pressures faced by traditional education programs so that they could link the concerns of participants to counter-hegemonic projects–they were trying to create free spaces. These efforts, and the contexts they came out of, are the subject of this chapter. In the case of the GEL program, facilitators intended to develop a program that was relatively

protected from some of the pressures of government-funded non-profits and their tendency to maintain the political status quo through what INCITE (2013) calls the "non-profit industrial complex" and Kamat (2004) calls the "NGOization of democracy." In the case of the Workers' Dialogue, veteran labor organizers sought to create a program that could resist the top-down bureaucratic structure and culture of the modern labor movement and its tendency to mimic the coercive practices within the workplace (Parker & Gruelle, 1999). This story of how and why they attempted to carve out these autonomous spaces is as important as what happened inside the programs themselves, and provides the context for what the programs were able to accomplish.

The Grassroots Empowerment and Leadership Program: Seeking Autonomy from the NPIC

The Grassroots Empowerment and Leadership was developed in the context of a long history of grassroots neighborhood resistance in the Tenderloin and South of Market neighborhoods of San Francisco. As will be shown below, it was also developed in response to the anti-democratic influence of a large city-funded non-profit, in line with many grassroots organizations and academics who have sounded the alarm about the encroaching influence of government- and foundation-funded non-profit organizations (INCITE!, 2013; Choudry & Kapoor, 2013). By creating a program *outside* the direct control of large government-funded non-profits, veteran organizers hoped to carve out a space that was protected from some of the institutional constraints facing traditional non-profits and thus able to support SRO residents' autonomous leadership. This section describes the background for this effort, including the historical context of grassroots resistance in the Tenderloin and SoMa, as well as the NGO restrictions on tenant organizing, leading organizers to look for independent avenues to build grassroots agency.

History and Background

As described in the methodology, the GEL program was rooted in two particular San Francisco neighborhoods, the Tenderloin District and South of Market District (known as

SoMa). From the outside, the Tenderloin and low-income parts of SoMa are only described for what they lack: safety, security, cleanliness, wealth. Participants in the program placed the blame for these real problems squarely on the city; they frequently described the Tenderloin as a "containment zone" for homelessness and drug dealing, meaning that the city has condoned the pushing of criminality and misery into an already struggling neighborhood. Alim noted in our first interview that "the Tenderloin is sandwiched between City Hall on one side, and the city's main commercial district [Union Square] filled with Balenciaga and Gucci stores and tourists on the other side" (interview, 7/13/20). At the time of the GEL program, tents lined many streets, and had multiplied by almost 300% since the pandemic began (Stone, 2020), while large public spaces like the nearby Civic Center were kept empty. Sidewalks and gutters were often filled with trash. Drug dealing happened in broad daylight on multiple street corners, despite a police station located in the middle of the neighborhood on Eddy and Jones Streets.

South of Market, or "SoMa," once home to longshoremen, immigrant farm workers and other manual laborers in the early 20th century (San Francisco Examiner, 2010), now includes a mix of single room residential hotels, high rises, and redevelopment including the new Twitter headquarters. While SoMa is a vast neighborhood, reaching up to Van Ness Avenue and stretching all the way from Market Street to the new Mission Bay development, and has gentrified significantly over the decades, the organizing work of PNDP and SCA focused on the remaining low-income blocks around 6th Street across Market Street from the Tenderloin. These blocks, like the Tenderloin, are known mainly for the problems they face.

While the problems in Tenderloin and low-income parts of SoMa are significant, residents did not see them as defining the neighborhoods. James, one of the creators of the GEL Program, told me that as a result of the community work in the neighborhood over recent years there was "more of a pride in it and identification with the neighborhood." He said,

> Now there is just more solidarity. People have begun to identify with each other… Whereas before, it was very alienating, if you lived here you hated it… People began to realize that there was a generosity, a tolerance for difference, a certain generosity that

> residents shared that people began to recognize. [Before] there was a lot of fear… it was a much more of a dog-eat dog world kind of attitude. And that began to shift, as people began to start realizing that they had some things in common. (Interview, 4/19/21)

Participants in the study took pride in this shift in the neighborhood; for example June said in one class that in the Tenderloin, "You can walk out your door and are meeting people, seeing people you know and they're friendly." She said that in the "Avenues" (the Sunset and Richmond Districts of San Francisco), "people say hello but you don't know your neighbor, don't take the time to stop and talk" (Electoral history class, 7/11/20).

From this view, the true story of this area is also the history of vibrant social movement struggles for San Francisco's low-income communities, for affordable housing, and for self-determination. The primary housing stock in the Tenderloin and adjacent part of SoMa is what are known as "residential hotels," or single-room occupancy units (SROs), which are typically 8 x 10 foot rooms with shared bathrooms and no kitchen. At the turn of the 20th century SROs were the majority type of housing in San Francisco, but with the wave of urban renewal beginning in the 1940s nationwide, this accessible housing was significantly reduced, especially between the 1970s and 1990s.[25] At the same time, there was an increase in poverty while funding for public housing decreased, forcing low-income tenants who had lived in apartments into fewer SROs. The result was more people needing low-income housing but far less of it available, creating a housing crisis that forced whole communities out of San Francisco and led to greater homelessness within the city. (Central City SRO Collaborative, n.d.).

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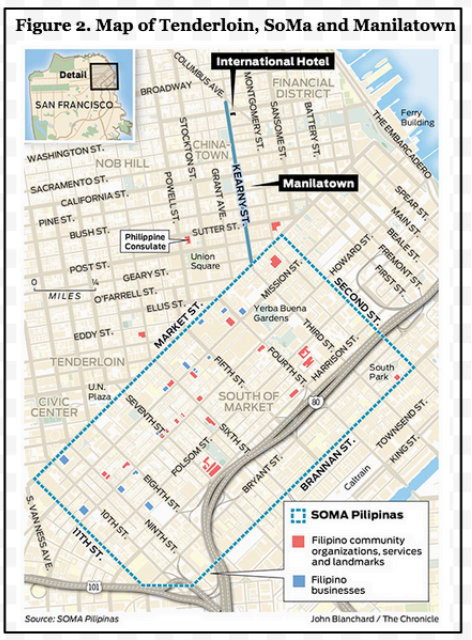
[25] Originally home to gold rush prospectors, sailors, migrant laborers, and low-wage city workers, SROs also became the "the first footholds" for Latinos in the Mission, Chinese in Chinatown, Japanese in Japantown, Filipinos in Manilatown, and African Americans in the Fillmore and Western Addition (Central City SRO Collaborative, n.d., (para. 4). Nationwide, one million units of SRO housing were demolished nationwide between the 1970s and 1990s. According to the Central City SRO Collaborative, "One of the principal causes of the widespread homelessness endemic in the United States today was the wave of S.R.O. hotel demolition that swept the country during the second half of the 20th Century." In San Francisco over 15,000 SROs were demolished or converted to condominiums as part of the city's plan for urban "renewal" between 1970 and 1990. The head of San Francisco's redevelopment agency, after whom the famous Justin Herman Plaza at the Embarcadero is named, at the time said, "This land is too valuable to permit poor people to park on it" (Central City SRO Collaborative, n.d., para. 10).

In response to the city's efforts to demolish low-income housing, activists began organizing in the 1960s against this urban renewal in the Tenderloin and SoMa, as well as in a once a vibrant Filipino neighborhood called "Manilatown" in what is now the financial district.[26] While the fight for Manilatown and the famous International Hotel–home to 200 Filipino seniors–was initially lost, it ignited a movement for tenants' rights. SoMa residents effectively organized against urban "renewal," successfully fighting to have "replacement low-income senior housing built to offset the destruction of existing housing" and community efforts protected. In 2000, the South of Market Action Network (SOMCAN) was formed, and successfully prevented eviction of elderly low-income residents and families at Trinity Plaza on Market Street, preserving hundreds of units (SOMA Filipina, n.d.). Other community institutions such as the Tenderloin Times, a multilingual community newspaper, and the North of Market Planning Coalition, a grassroots organization of activists who organized for city planning decisions in support of low-income residents, contributed to a civic organizing culture being developed in the neighborhoods (see Figure 2 for a map that shows the Tenderloin, SoMa, Manilatown and the International Hotel).

Figure 2. Map of Tenderloin, SoMa and Manilatown



At the time of this study, a number of different neighborhood institutions, many of which will be described in this chapter, continued to cultivate this civic participation. The culture that

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[26] Manilatown was a 10-block radius of low-cost housing and family-owned businesses, home to 10,000 Filipinos and "decimated" by the city's redevelopment efforts in the 1950s and 1960s (SOMA Filipina, n.d.). In the late 1960s, the neighborhood became the epicenter of a movement of tenants, artists and activists to defend low-income communities in the city against redevelopment when an SRO building called the International Hotel (also known as the "I-Hotel"), home to 200 Filipino seniors, was slated for demolition. Beginning with an eviction order in the 1960s, a ten-year community struggle to save the hotel culminated in a standoff in 1977 when hundreds of riot police attempted to forcibly remove the tenants while thousands of community members and activists surrounded the building. Using "brutal force," the police succeeded in removing the tenants (SOMA Filipina, n.d.). Through long-term community organizing, the hotel was eventually rebuilt, and houses low-income seniors today.

June and James described above rested on the organizing work done in the community over the previous fifty years; as Waters and Hudson (1998) described over twenty years ago, "Since the late 1970s…. the community has led a neighborhood renaissance through multi-lingual newspapers, enthusiastic residents, and organized activists and professionals who were determined to create a lively neighborhood where low-income people can afford to live" (para. 1).

Non-Profit Limitations

As part of this "neighborhood renaissance," local activists created the Central City Development Corporation (CCDC) in the 1980s to fight the loss of affordable housing.[27] The organization's initial goals were 1) "property acquisition, to ensure long-term affordability by removing units from the speculative real estate market," 2) tenant organizing, "with the aim of creating cooperatively owned and self-managed communities," and 3) activism through the mobilization of local residents "to protect these residents' interests in the face of proposed neighborhood development" (CCDC: Our History, n.d.).

At the time of the GEL program, CCDC owned dozens of buildings that housed very low-income residents, primarily in the Tenderloin but other neighborhoods as well. Their programs included an Organizing Division that ran community organizing classes and also sponsored community organizing efforts by residents. Armand, the primary architect of the GEL program, had created and helped to coordinate many of these programs, including community organizing classes; separate community associations for the Black, Chinese and Filipino residents; a healthy corner store campaign; a community garden; and an informal planning class to educate residents about the city planning process.

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[27] According to the National Coalition for the Homeless (n.d.), the wage needed for a two-bedroom apartment in 2017 was $21.21 per hour, "exceeding the $16.38 hourly wage earned by the average renter by almost $5.00 an hour, and greatly exceeding wages earned by low income renter households….If you are poor, you are essentially an illness, an accident, or a paycheck away from living on the streets."

Armand had spearheaded many of these efforts and was proud of the progress that had been made through CCDC. At the same time, he and James found that there were limitations to the organizing work they were doing there "because there were certain issues organizations [like CCDC] wanted to avoid" (interview with James, 4/19/21). Alim also felt that,

> CCDC is doing the best it can within its framework. However it's still a limited framework, just like with any other non-profit. The neutrality of it. Even though they are pushing for certain policies, certain ballot measures, there are certain things that they can't really discuss about, can't really advocate for. (Interview, 7/13/20).

One of these areas they wouldn't advocate for was the housing conditions inside their own buildings. Because CCDC was a low-income housing developer, it was also a landlord for the same residents that are being organized within the Organizing Division. While on paper there was a structure of participatory governance where residents had a voice in the management of their buildings, in day-to-day practice the organization used a bureaucratic grievance system that left residents to advocate for themselves individually. Armand, Reynardo and Mahjawe shared in interviews that there were many concerns that had been left unaddressed.

With no functional mechanism for CCDC residents to effectively address their concerns, Armand, Reynardo, Mahjawe and others began organizing a tenants' association. They successfully built tenant organizations in three geographic areas: the Eastern Tenderloin, Western Tenderloin, and SoMa. They did this openly; a planning document written in 2013 stated that the association was not intended to "diminish or supplant the authority, power and work the authority" of CCDC but to "strengthen the structures of CCDC by including the voice of the residents in the planning and decision making process" by forming this autonomous organization of residents (internal document). Eight to ten buildings, including close to 1000 residents, were organized with leadership in each building, and the association met regularly with the CEO to discuss their concerns. Armand recalled,

> I was able to set up a regular check in with the CEO and the COO… so that they meet each other on a regular basis and they talk about tenant problems! [Laughs] They are bringing it directly to him! Like, oh my god, there should be some bureaucracy here [sarcasm]–talking about tenants, you have to talk to the building manager, not to the CEO. But they're bringing it directly to him. (Interview, 9/2/20)

Through the association, residents began to organize around getting security cameras on buildings and addressing complaints from residents about their building managers.

Around the same time, Armand had also tried to organize a union with CCDC staff after hearing complaints from building desk clerks and janitors. He had been transparent with management about the unionizing effort as well because participation was theoretically part of the governance model used by CCDC, and CCDC had recently asked mid-level managers what projects they wanted to work on independently. About both the tenant organizing effort and the union campaign, he recalls thinking at the time that,

> If we can actually create change in CCDC, we can create change anywhere. How can we make CCDC a people's non-profit? And actually work in governance participation, [where] governance is tolerated; and there's a system within so the participation will be institutionalized. Not just every year you come up with survey questions and people fill it out, no. No, it's not just a once a year thing to hear their voice, it should be everyday. And it should be in the system. (Interview, 9/2/20)

Armand's intention was to create an "everyday" democracy within CCDC, which he thought would be possible because part of the mission of the organization was to create self-managed resident communities.

But both efforts were shut down by CCDC management. The director of Human Resources called him about the union effort and told him to stop his efforts, which he did; and CCDC pulled the funding from the tenant organization. When Armand told me about this, I commented that he was able to keep his job, and he said, "Because I didn't push too much" (interview, 9/2/20). Meanwhile, Mahjawe's supervisor told him to stop organizing in CCDC buildings. While Armand didn't fight on the union effort, Armand, Reynardo, and others did continue to meet with management weekly for two months to try to convince them to keep the tenants' association. But Armand recalled that CCDC management told him, "You know, even if you are correct, we are the ones making the decisions here. We are the boss and you are the organizer. You have to follow us" (interview, 9/2/20).

CCDC used not just the stick but the carrot in its approach: Mahjawe was offered a position on CCDC's twenty-member board just after the tenant organizing had been shut down. He decided that "I had to choose one or the other," meaning his board position or organizing tenants. He chose the board position, and while he continued to help out with supporting tenants as a volunteer community member, he admitted that, "If there was anything that was contradictory, I just asked, 'Is it ok for me to do this?'" (Interview, 3/21/21). He felt he was able to continue to "advocate and tell people who to talk to" because of the connections he had in CCDC, but he stopped the tenant organizing work.

Before the program was shut down, Reynardo said that, "We were rocking and rolling, and we were doing things. We were starting to motor up. But CCDC and their way of doing business [went] behind our back to close us down" (personal communication, 6/22/21). He said about this experience of successfully engaging in resident organizing and then having the funding cut that, "It's still a hard thing to swallow, thinking about what we were trying to accomplish, and being taken out by a group [CCDC management] that was supposed to be caring for us" (interview, 11/28/20). Armand reflected back on the experience that "CCDC crushed it because they were probably afraid it would actually challenge them" (interview, 9/2/20).

These experiences led Armand and others to have a changed view of CCDC: "It started as activist organization in the 1980s; the first executive director was a firebrand, so then now it just turned into some sort of non-profit model" (interview with Armand, 9/2/20). This reflected Armand's current thinking of non-profits:

> My thinking is that non-profits right now are gearing towards just preservation of the status quo. That's my feeling. They don't want to create like real, real, you know *real* systemic change. Even starting from within, meaning if they can't do it from within their organization, how will they do it outside of the organization? When the mayor says "No, you cannot do that," they will just say, "OK, mayor," something like that. There's no strong – "Hey, we are for these people." (Interview, 9/2/20)

In particular, he said CCDC was unlikely to challenge elected officials because the organization received funding from the city: "We get a lot of money, in the housing, in the programs that we do. A lot… That would be at risk" (9/2/20 interview).

As a result, they decided that their neighborhood organizing work needed to be broader than CCDC, which led them to create new organizations outside of CCDC's direct control. These included the Pinay Neighborhood Development Program (PNDP), which became the parent organization for the GEL program, as well as two new neighborhood resident councils, one for the Tenderloin (the Tenderloin Community Association, or TCA) that began in 2016, and one for SoMa (the SoMa Community Association, or SCA) (Figure 3 shows the relationship between these groups and organizations). In line with the increasing awareness of the threats of NGOization, James explained that the creation of the Tenderloin Community Association came out of the desire to be free of the non-profit model:

> Non-profits are great allies and great advocates, but ultimately residents don't control them… Their direction is–not that it runs contrary to our interests, but it's not necessarily an expression of our interests. We [TCA] were intentionally not incorporated as an organization to avoid all that, having to create a bureaucratic infrastructure, because it takes a lot of time and energy, and you can lose your focus. (Interview, 4/19/21)

As a result, TCA received resources and support from CCDC but "can make a decision that is contrary to CCDC's decision" (interview with Armand, 9/2/21). For Armand, the limitations of CCDC were that government funding could prevent the organization from standing up to the mayor and elected officials; for James, the bureaucratic structure of non-profits prevented them from being directly controlled by residents and acting in their interests. In both cases, they hoped the new organizations would be protected from these top-down pressures.

Creating the GEL Program

As part of these independent organizations, Armand and James designed the GEL program in 2019 to support the development of grassroots neighborhood leaders. Facilitators envisioned it as an autonomous project-based program and political education class for Tenderloin and SoMa residents. While CCDC also ran a leadership training program as part of its Organizing Division, Armand saw it as too lecture-based and theoretical. He also saw it as too transient; he said that in contrast to the CCDC program, where "after the class they're all gone," the GEL program would be "a continuing relationship-building with the members of the class" through the on-going projects (interview 9/2/20). To this end, the program planning document described four goals: 1) To build sustainable community organizing leadership in SoMa and Tenderloin, 2) To understand collective empowerment and how this can transform communities, 3) To understand the role of alliance and coalition in creating change, and 4) To learn about project and campaign administration (internal document, "GEL Program").[28] These goals reflected the values of the program that were focused on the development of the participants as independent community leaders.

The program would be co-sponsored by three organizations, CCDC, the SoMa Community Association, and the Pinay Neighborhood Development Program (PNDP), but it was PNDP, not CCDC, that provided the funding. So although Armand was staff for CCDC, the GEL program itself would be more independent from CCDC than the classes he had run in the Organizing Division. When he had initially pitched the idea for the class to CCDC management as a collaboration among three organizations, they argued that it should be a CCDC program only; he said, "My idea was there'll be three entities [but] CCDC thinks that, 'Oh, this is our

[28] The GEL program was part of Armand's philosophy of grassroots community-led change, which he called an "empowerment-based organizing model." This model had four characteristics as Armand described them to me: 1) it is a community-led, resident-led organization, and his role as an organizer is to provide support to them, including technical support, 2) it is focused on a particular geographic area to "know where to focus," hence names like the "Tenderloin Community Association" or the "SoMa Community Association" 3) it is issue-based, focusing on "issues people actually care about," and 4) it is solution-oriented (9/2/20 interview).

program, we should be the ones running it'" (personal communication, 4/26/21). Having some independence from CCDC was central to Armand's grassroots vision of the new program contributing to truly "community-run" organizations:

> This leadership program is part of my thinking that non-profits or people in the civic society should be more of a community-run; they should listen to the community. Those people who don't live in the area actually speaking for the area–you can only do that when you have a pool of community leaders who know, who understand how to analyze and know how to act. Otherwise it will be passive residents. I would want to see an active community leadership. By doing this [GEL] program, it would start for them to realize that it's about them. (Interview, 9/2/20)

This independence reflected a view of grassroots change as a democratic process: James told me that Armand "always had a broader vision, more democratic vision than the overall [CCDC] organizing division" (interview, 4/19/21).

This vision was rooted in Armand's philosophy of popular education, which "is more about learning from experiences of people by sharing it, and elevating those experiences into something concrete that they can actually solve the problems that came up from those processes." This differed from his experiences with student organizing in the Philippines, where they were doing what he called "solid organizing." He said it was not popular education and that they called it "solid organizing" because

> it was more informing them of what is happening, rather than getting feedback from them. When we are organizing we already have, "These are the points 1, 2, 3, 4, 5–this is what Marcos was doing." We already have it, it's not like we're bringing consensus… no. (Interview, 9/2/20).

The GEL program was thus designed to grow Armand's vision of neighborhood residents building consensus, in order to build grassroots power rooted in a network of autonomous community-based organizations. This approach came out of the belief that low-income residents could build the skills, knowledge, values and relationships that would enable them to become effective organizers in their communities, but that for this to happen there needed to be autonomy from the pressures of traditional non-profits that could undermine a true grassroots vision.

Armand and James' experience of CCDC morphing from a radical organization to "some sort of non-profit model" reflects growing awareness of the deradicalizing effects of non-profits through *NGOization* and the *non-profit industrial complex*. Choudry and Kapoor (2013) define *NGOization* as a process of "institutionalization, professionalization, depoliticization, and demobilization" of local and international movements for environmental or social change "in complicity with state and private-sector interests" (p. 1-2). This seems to be exactly what CCDC did in ending the democratic vehicle of the tenants' association. INCITE (2013) and others call the growing control by the state and corporate interests over grassroots movements the *non-profit industrial complex,* which links the state and "owning class" with "surveillance over public political ideology, including and especially emergent progressive and leftist social movements" (Rodriguez, as quoted in INCITE, 2013, p. 8). INCITE (2013) argues that the NPIC is an extension of the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC); but "while the PIC overtly represses dissent, the NPIC manages and controls dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus" (p. 8). CCDC's resistance, even to a collaboratively run class, reflects INCITE's argument that the NPIC promotes a social movement culture that is "non-collaborative, narrowly focused, and competitive" (p. 10). Armand's recognition of this influence was critical at a time when, as Cherniavsky (2013) argues, "non-profits and NGOs are uncritically celebrated across the disciplines as the most logical mode of social change, and are figured as the preeminent form of political agency" (p. 2).

As will be seen in Chapter V, the GEL program's greater autonomy from CCDC translated into a political and pedagogical environment where facilitators had the freedom to *respond* to participants, including changing curriculum as needed, use a developmental long-term approach to support participants' growth as organizers, and engaging in cross-organization coalition-building–all approaches that were curtailed within CCDC. This reflects the role of grassroots movements being able to create organizations that "actively challenge the nonprofit industrial complex in the way they operate" where "it's not uncommon for these organizations to

remain outside of the nonprofit world, either due to lack of resources or because they intentionally choose to remain free of the nonprofit industrial complex's influence" (Morgan-Montoya, 2020) But as will be explored at the end of Chapter V, despite its greater autonomy, the GEL program did not use that relative independence to challenge CCDC, developers or city government around housing, showing how difficult it can be to support people's democratic aspirations within larger coercive structures given the reach of the NPIC.

The Workers' Dialogue: Seeking Autonomy From Labor Bureaucracy

As in the GEL program, Workers' Dialogue facilitators sought to carve out an independent space for authentic popular education that cultivated participants' democratic power and reflection/action on their organizing work. But in the case of the Workers' Dialogue, facilitators sought autonomy from a top-down, bureaucratic labor movement that tended to undermine democratic member participation. Fantasia (1988) describes this need for autonomy:

> Industrial action embodies a transformative potential when it can achieve a degree of independence from the institutional structures designed to contain it. That is, in the United States a routinized, bureaucratic system has been imposed to channel conflict and sharply limit worker solidarity.

Fantasia argues that what he calls *cultures of solidarity* "will tend to emerge only when workers or employers circumvent routine channels and workers seek, or are forced, to rely on their mutual solidarity as the basis for their power" (p. 19). This section describes how organizers worked to create a space that could support workers circumventing the routine channels of labor bureaucracy, when the opening created by a new militant union leadership with links to a national network of union activists and educators made possible a new form of labor education.

History and Background

Whereas the story of the GEL program is rooted in the history of struggle among low-income residents in a particular geographic neighborhood, the Workers' Dialogue is rooted in the struggles of workers in the U.S. labor movement. A strong and militant labor movement in the early part of the 20th century gave way to a bureaucratic form of unionism in the 1950s,

where unions "partnered" with management to deliver wage and benefit improvements to workers. This came to be known as "business unionism" or a "service model" of unionism, because workers were treated like customers who were offered a service (including handling grievances and negotiating contracts) instead of as the agents of a class-based social movement (Parker and Gruelle, 1999). This approach worked in the boom years after World War II when company profits were rising. But in the 1970s, falling profits, as a result of increased overseas competition and a shrinking capitalist economy, led to an aggressive corporate attack on unions and working class gains made in the previous decades. This included moving factories to the mostly non-union South and countries with lower labor standards, as well as the breaking of strikes, the most famous being President Ronald Reagan's firing of 70,000 air traffic control workers in 1980. Unions, whose democratic rank-and-file participation of the early 20th century had been significantly hollowed out by this time, were unprepared to face this frontal assault. Strikes have declined 95% since the 1970s, and union membership, at a peak of 35% of U.S. workers in 1954, had declined to just 10% by 2021 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Meanwhile, the share of income going to the top 10% has steadily increased over the same period (see Figure 4).

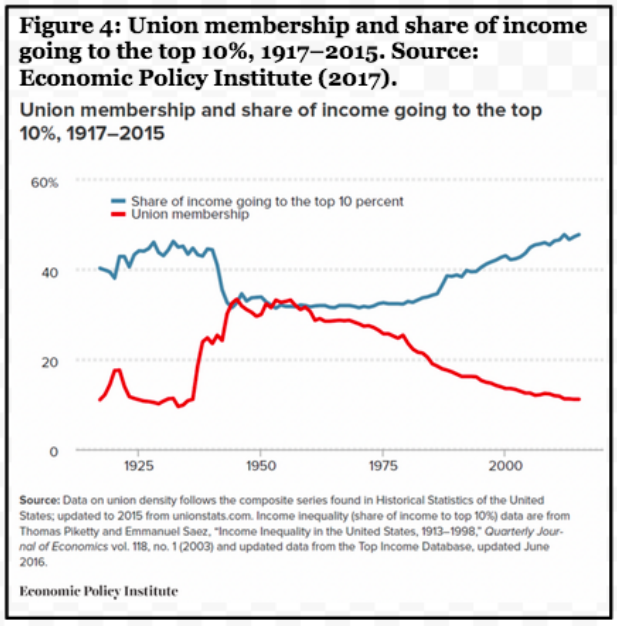

Figure 4: Union membership and share of income going to the top 10%, 1917–2015. Source: Economic Policy Institute (2017).

In the 1990s, there was a shift at the top levels of the American labor movement, when some union leaders began pushing for a move from "business unionism" to an "organizing model." In theory, as veteran organizers Mike Parker and Martha Gruelle (1999) describe in their book *Democracy Is Power: Rebuilding Unions From the Bottom Up,* an organizing model would mean greater union democracy as members would be "involved and functioning on their

own behalf" (p. 25). But in practice, the organizing model meant two things: 1) that unions would spend more money on winning union campaigns with new groups of workers to increase union membership, and 2) that unions would *mobilize* members to engage in actions decided by the leadership. This often meant turning on and off member involvement "like a faucet," where "union leaders encourage member *involvement* without member *control*" (p. 26). While this was an improvement from the business unionism from the previous decades, it left intact the fundamental structure of top-down unionism.

The Labor Network

The Labor Network, founded in 1979 by three socialist labor activists in Detroit, was based on a different model of unionism that was more in alignment with the militant wave of organizing earlier in the century. Known as "rank-and-file" or "bottom-up" unionism, this model emphasizes the democratic control of unions by the members themselves. Rank-and-file unionism is rooted in the belief that members have the right to run their own unions because they will be the ones impacted by the decisions they make, that "members have the right to make their own mistakes" and to learn from them, and that rank-and-file control is the most effective means to build power in relation to the employers (Parker and Gruelle, 1999, p. 15). The Labor Network's first project was a newspaper called the Workers' Journal that was "meant to put rank-and-file activists in touch with each other–to present a class view by reporting events and trends across the whole labor movement" (Moody, 2016, para. 6). The Workers' Journal editor reflected back that,

> The idea all along was that there were all these grassroots activists and groups in various unions around the country and that our mission was to bring them together–to give them a sense that they were part of a bigger movement. (Moody, 2016, para. 13)

This movement was a movement for union democracy: "a movement for rank and file based, democratic union reform" (Naomi, personal communication, 1/1/22).

The Labor Network used the newspaper, which continues to be published today, to support the building of this network for rank-and-file members and union leaders, and also

began bringing people together through local and national educational programs including a biennial conference that now brings thousands of attendees (at a high of 3000 attending the 2018 conference) from across the country and internationally (Labor Network, n.d.). The Labor Network continues today to act as a "hub for information and the generation of new ideas and new connections among workers in the United States who want to build a labor movement with more power" (Labor Network, n.d.).

The Role of Union Caucuses

A central part of the Labor Network's strategy for building rank-and-file union control has been to support opposition union *caucuses*, informal groupings of members within a union who organize together to press the union to function in a more inclusive, democratic, and/or militant way. Historically, U.S. union caucuses have often focused on addressing racism, sexism and anti-immigrant sentiment within the union (Parker and Gruelle, 1999).[29] Maton and Stark (2021) describe caucuses as "meso-level organizational forms that exist both within and apart from their broader unions" and they note that caucuses "tend to have greater flexibility to work beyond traditional union venues" such as contract negotiations and formal grievances (p. 5). It is this greater flexibility that has enabled caucuses to push unions to carry out more militant tactics like strikes and walk-outs by organizing for greater democracy *within unions* to make them more responsive to the membership's needs.[30]

Union caucuses have been on the rise in recent years, particularly within education unions after a group of Chicago teachers who organized as the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE) won their union's top leadership positions and then went on to organize a

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[29] For more on union caucuses, see Garcia (2002) and Association for Union Democracy (n.d.).

[30] Since its founding, the Labor Network has provided institutional support for many of these caucuses, for example the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), which was founded in 1976 and has grown ""from a tiny group of rank and filers to a large influential movement" (p. 5). TDU "learned how to become a thorn in the [Teamsters] union's side, challenging its contracts, finger pointing to officials' corruption and lopsided multiple salaries, and electing reform-minded members to local and national positions" (Franklin, 2017, para. 4). Working for greater democracy *within* the union enabled TDU to engage in "long-term rank-and-file union organizing," fighting for stronger contracts, higher wages, protecting pensions, and a successful campaign to prevent UPS from converting full-time jobs into part-time jobs (Early, 2013).

successful strike in 2012 (Maton & Stark, 2021). Thirty additional education caucuses have emerged around the country after CORE's victory, including two that were part of this study, Maton and Stark (2021) write that educator caucuses "tend to see the union as the most viable political platform for effecting radical educational policy change and strive to push their union to embrace a member-driven approach while employing assertive tactics like walk-outs, strikes, and allied resistance with local communities" (p. 4). In 2013, dozens of educators from these caucuses met at a Labor Network conference, and in 2014 they founded the United Caucus of Rank and File Educators (UCORE), a nationwide network of educator union caucuses that provides "a physical and virtual space for educator activists to meet, share strategies and tactics, and support one another" (p. 7).

The Context of Changing Labor Education

Labor education has generally followed the trends of the overall labor movement (Tarlau, 2011). From radical independent worker schools at the turn of the 20th century, labor education in the 1950s gave way to bureaucratic nuts and bolts courses offered by unions and new university labor education programs, covering "such matters as how labor officials handle collective bargaining and how to run a union" (Luxemberg, 1979, p. 58). While the Labor Network's educational work provided a stark contrast by focusing their conferences and workshops directly on the needs of rank and file members, *pedagogically* most of the workshops they ran continued to use a more traditional training approach. Naomi, a board member for the Labor Network and longtime organizer, began experimenting with alternative pedagogical approaches with different groups of workers, based on the view that they needed a space where they could more actively develop as organizers. She recalled:

> It was through this practice of trying to do what we would call formulaic training that I would realize that in any given group, no matter what you did, some people would say, "I know this, I know this, I'm going to turn off because this is basic for me, and other people would say, "Wow, this is completely blowing my mind, I never even thought of this, my head is exploding. And other people are saying, "What? What is this? I have no idea what this is." People's way of accessing the information or way of seeing themselves–you are not giving people any freedom to decide where they would see

> themselves in the system. You're saying, "This is how it is." And inevitably people feel confused or overwhelmed, or, "I got this, I'm already doing this." None of those reactions are useful. That pushed me to say, what would be a better use of our time? (Interview, 5/5/21)

She began working on more dialogue-based approaches that could "allow people to see themselves as part of a dynamic process." But it was not until a particular need arose inside one union that she and other veteran labor organizers were able to turn these experiments into a well-formed model for labor education that returned it to its more liberatory roots.

Creating the Workers' Dialogue

The idea for the Workers' Dialogue was born in 2014, when a newly elected, progressive statewide leadership of a New England educators' union sought to increase rank-and-file participation in the union. This leadership came out of a caucus of radical rank-and-file members that ran for and–to their own surprise–won the top seats in the union's leadership. This caucus, called NECORE (the New England Caucus of Rank and File Educators) ran on a platform that opposed testing and austerity, supported high quality education for all residents and broader economic and racial justice, and believed that the union "is strongest when rank-and-file members organize for power to solve problems in their workplaces and communities" (NECORE, n.d.).

But with over 100,000 members and hundreds of statewide locals ranging from preschool to higher education, cultivating rank-and-file organizing was challenging because of the entrenched power structure that still existed at the local and statewide levels of the union. As Andrea, the union's director of training and professional development and participant in the first Workers' Dialogue, described it, the union had been "an old boy's club" where instead of contested elections there was a "round robin" of officials moving from position to position. She said it had not been a union but "more, you know, go to dinner at the statehouse, and let's come back and say, 'This was the best deal we could make'" (interview, 12/29/20).

When Rosa, an "unapologetic leftist" (Clawson, 2018, para. 1), was elected president of the statewide union as part of the new caucus that ran its own slate of candidates, she looked for

ways to change the top-down culture of the union. She had worked with the Labor Network on her campaign for president, so she was familiar with their work and knew Naomi. She had also taught in the Education Department at the state university, and was "very familiar with pop ed methods" (interview with Naomi, 9/2/20). The union staff had a more traditional view: Naomi told me that Rosa had

> constant struggles with senior staff, the director of organizing, director of field operations–always pushing her towards an agenda that she hated: giving a talk, opening up for Q and A, giving a response. She didn't know why at the time, but she knew people needed to be talking with each other. (Interview, 8/19/20)

As part of this orientation of wanting members talking to each other, Rosa invited Naomi to develop a new leadership training program for the union with Philip, a longtime organizer in the union, who Naomi says was "amenable to experimenting" (interview 9/2/20). It was out of the relationship among these three veteran organizers, in the context of the new leadership that supported a more experimental and democratic educational model, that the Workers' Dialogue was born.

Instead of a standardized curriculum, Naomi and Philip developed an approach that was essentially a guided dialogue, using questions they asked participants about their experiences in their workplace. They set up sessions to run for a full weekend–a Friday evening and all day Saturday and Sunday. Participants were not usually statewide leaders but rank-and-file members or local leaders, sometimes from one school district, sometimes from multiple districts across the state. They included teachers, para-educators, and bus drivers. Naomi and Philip would start the session with a question about participants' experiences in their workplace, and this would begin a conversation that would last through the weekend. In lieu of lectures about organizing, lessons would be pulled from participant experience and analyzed collectively.

Over time, Naomi and Philip began to identify a general framework for the training based on the steps of their model of organizing: it would start with 1) helping participants to assess the balance of power between workers and management in their own workplaces, 2) identifying common issues that they could organize around, 3) talking about how they could

come together around a common demand, and finally 4) reflecting and start again. But how this process unfolded looked different in each session depending on the needs of the participants. Andrea described the model Philip and Naomi had developed as being "about respecting that the participants of the Workers' Dialogue hold their own answers, but they haven't had the process of connecting the dots. So [this training] is key" (interview, 12/28/20).

In the NEEA, at the same time that Naomi and Philip were developing the Workers' Dialogue, the new leadership was focused on building greater union involvement among members of color. Philip said that Rosa asked him to "go out and organize the unorganized among members of color," and he was successful in involving a number of new leaders, in particular in one urban district where Andrea worked (interview, 11/16/20). As part of this process, Philip and Naomi decided to hold Workers' Dialogues exclusively for these emerging leaders, and they held the first one with Andrea and other members of color in her district. Andrea recalled that of the group of 12 participants, she initially knew only two, but that "what emerged out of that was these relationships that are tight" (interview, 12/29/20). It was from these new connections that came the creation of a new statewide caucus for members of color called the Educators of Color (EOC) Network. While the EOC Network was independent of the caucus that had taken leadership, because Rosa was clear that "it needs to come in the authentic voices of people of color," it worked in alliance with the new leadership caucus (interview with Naomi, 12/28/20). The development of the EOC Network was tied to a vision of leadership that Philip and Naomi were working to cultivate in the Workers' Dialogue that was distinct from the traditional top-down model of leadership.

> Philip has done an amazing job with shifting the paradigm and breaking–I want to say disrupting the way people think about leadership. The [Network] model is more about the collective, about the village, and leaders grow leaders. Philip said a good leader grows leaders. The traditional model is, "I'm a strong leader." The model of the Network is: We are all leaders, not the chairs, not the union leaders–we are all leaders. (Interview, 12/28/20)

Andrea said that this different view of leadership and the power of the EOC Network chapters "really emerged out of the Workers' Dialogue. Philip and Naomi led us to understand how to take our passion, how to take what we've experienced as people of color, and translate that into sustained action" (interview, 12/29/20).

This type of independent organizing that came out of the Workers' Dialogues was encouraged by the new union leadership. Andrea and other EOC Network activists created the union's first race-related stress study, organized protests to encourage districts' hiring of staff of color, changed bylaws, and generally "did a lot of disruption" both inside the union and with school administrations (interview, 12/29/20). The independent member organizing extended to other workplace issues as well; for example Michael, a participant in a 2017 Workers' Dialogue, went on to actively organize a protest with his coworkers against the principal's use of teacher evaluations as a form of punishment. The principal had "twelve people sitting in [his] office demanding answers… We put it to him… with a wink and a nod like, 'If you keep fucking with us, we are going to go to the boss, and you will get shitcanned.' It was very empowering" (interview with Michael, 8/10/20).

Reflecting on the impact of the Workers' Dialogue while she was president, Rosa said that she "would hear stories of somebody who was organizing in a building [school] in ways that were new." Or she would go to a meeting and see someone who was "thinking like an organizer," and then find out they had been through a Workers' Dialogue. She said that over time there were enough "little pieces of action" started by different groups of workers that were "connected to each other to say we've created a different way of thinking about the union" (interview, 9/21/20).

Because of this increased independent participation by members, the program was perceived as a threat by some entrenched leaders. Looking back on the beginning of the program, Andrea recalled that,

> There were people in the union who would say, "It's a coup, and Rosa wants members to overthrow their locals."[31] It was perceived that way because that's what happened with the Workers' Dialogue, but it's not because Rosa wants to bring down the union as some people felt and probably still do believe. But it's for members to be engaged–she wanted members to have more ownership. (Interview, 12/28/20)

Despite this resistance, Workers' Dialogue sessions ran continuously every month or two. When I asked Andrea what shifted in the union as a result of the training program, she said, "What shifted was that pyramid style of leadership. Rosa… did not fear the membership. She invited the members into the space. And that's the whole Workers' Dialogue model" (interview 12/28/20).

From its origin in the New England educators' union, the program expanded to other groups of workers who were beginning to organize new opposition caucuses in their unions, and who connected with Naomi, Philip and Rosa through the Labor Network. One of these was a group of hospital workers from upstate New York who had attended the Labor Network's 2018 national conference and met Naomi there. They had won some seats on their union's executive board but, as in the New England educators' union, were fighting an old guard leadership that still held a majority of seats. Soon after, Naomi ran a Workers' Dialogue with them and other members in the local. Nina, an RN and now union executive board member, described her experience in that training:

> Some of the people had never met anyone from other sites. We were all in different job titles, and we all had this, "Holy crap–why have we never met? We're so like-minded." It was amazing to start that conversation in the same local union [smiling]. It was cool to know our co-workers, union brothers and sisters. (Interview, 8/25/20)

Nina said that sharing their experiences in that training helped them identify the common issue of staffing in the hospitals. She said, "We had conversations about what is the biggest issue at work, how has nursing changed from your first years, what has been done in the past, and how

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[31] A "local" is short-hand for a local union with its own independent leadership structure. Historically these were truly local, at the city or county level. Beginning in the 1990s, ironically as part of the new leadership that brought forth the "organizing model" in the U.S. labor movement, locals were combined into "mega-locals" around the country that could span from one state to the other. A prominent example is SEIU Local 1021, which combined ten locals into one and now stretches from the Bay Area to the Oregon border (Early, 2010).

can we make a difference?" This led them to develop a plan to address staffing in the hospital, including mapping out their 4000 members and spending a year asking workers in every department to sign a petition on staffing, which helped them to build participation and unity despite the lack of support from their union leadership.

Over the next two years, Naomi continued to facilitate Workers' Dialogue sessions with the hospital workers, but as in the New England educators' union, Nina said there was resistance to Naomi's approach:

> It was a divided local…The executive board was the end-all be-all, they wanted to be the ones to make decisions, they were very tied to the grievance process,[32] and stupid committees that really nothing comes out of. The other half of us, we wanted to get members engaged. (Interview, 8/25/20)

As with the New England local, the new leadership was able to continue their organizing and education work despite this resistance, until this conflict between the new leadership and the old guard culminated in a "pitched battle" (interview with Naomi, 8/19/20). Naomi recalled:

> Everything was falling into place beautifully, then the district vice president who was a founding member of [the local] 30 years ago, a bureaucrat, she saw what happened [and she engaged in] open warfare, shut down open bargaining, shut down the staffing demands. (Interview, 8/19/20)

This led to the firing of Nina and another caucus leader named Sean, and to the termination of the Workers' Journal contract with Naomi. But it also led to greater member militancy and Nina and Sean's reinstatement: in five days opposition leaders collected 1500 signatures to demand a union membership meeting, and 100 people attended–which Nina said was "unheard of"–in which they voted to reinstate Nina and Sean. It also led to the formal creation of the opposition caucus: Naomi said that in the process of organizing to reinstate Nina and Sean, "folks in the network right then were becoming coalesced as a caucus" (interview, 8/25/20). When I observed the two sessions Naomi facilitated online with this group in August of 2020, the caucus

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[32] In most unions, there is a formalized grievance process negotiated with management and written into the union contract. While this grievance process allows members to address problems with management, it can also take months to years.

had enough power to reinstate the Workers' Dialogue program, but struggled to carry out their organizing plans because the old leadership still maintained a majority of seats. Naomi said at the time, "That's where it's at–that deep and profound struggle between two forms of unionism" (interview, 8/19/20).[33]

In addition to the upstate New York hospital local and the New England educators' union, Naomi also worked closely with newly developed caucuses of teachers in the South and Southwest that were part of the "Red for Ed" strike wave that swept the country in 2018. Jesse, one of the leaders in the 2018 strike, told me that after connecting with Naomi through the Labor Network in 2017, he talked with her almost weekly throughout the strike. He said, "I had never been through a strike–never, especially one like this. She was a stabilizing force, and kept my head in the right place" (interview, 11/23/20). Naomi continued to support the teachers after the strike ended, facilitating their first Workers' Dialogue that I observed in the fall of 2020.

In 2017, Rosa sat in on her first Workers' Dialogue with Naomi and Philip in the New England teachers' union, and in 2018, after her second term as president ended, she joined the Labor Network staff and began facilitating the workshops as well. Philip also began to use the same approach with public housing tenants to help them form local tenants' associations and take on the housing directors, and found that "it works" in that setting as well: "The participants love it–they get so much out of it. Because it's built on their experiences–It's yours, you own it" (interview, 10/25/21). Through these workshops in different settings as well as one-on-one mentoring conversations, Naomi, Philip and Rosa continued to refine the approach.

All six sessions that I observed for this study came out of the efforts described above, and were sponsored by the three caucuses that had been established in the unions. This sponsorship by caucuses instead of unions was very intentional on the facilitators' part: as Naomi told me, by having the Workers' Dialogue hosted by caucuses, "We acknowledge problems in the

[33] In November of 2020, the caucus ran candidates for the remaining seats, winning all but one.

employment relationship (exploitation), and we acknowledge problems in the union relationship (lack of democracy)" (personal communication, 12/19/21). In other words, by situating the program within union caucuses, the Workers' Dialogue was able to both recognize and support the necessary role of unions and also recognize the need for democracy within union structures. The independence of the Workers' Dialogue was thus the result of three factors: organizers with experience in popular education who were dedicated to supporting a bottom-up labor movement, their emphasis on working with opposition union caucuses to build this movement, and the rise of some of these insurgent caucuses in education and healthcare unions that had built autonomous (if always contested) power.

Conclusion

The histories of each program provide context for understanding the importance facilitators of programs placed on having independence for their popular education work. The autonomous space creates the *conditions* for the types of relationships and learning that make popular education transformative:

> One of the most important tasks of critical educational practice is to make possible the *conditions* in which the learners, in their interaction with one another and with their teachers, engage in the experience of assuming themselves as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons. (Freire, 2000, p. 45)

Whether from the NPIC or top-down labor bureaucracy, facilitators recognized (or found out) that mainstream organizations that are *theoretically* designed to support people at the grassroots level can actually undermine their roles as social actors. Facilitators recognized that autonomous spaces had to be consciously built to have greater protection from the coercion and hierarchy of capitalism and the state. The next two chapters describe how programs used this autonomous space to apply the liberatory practices of popular education in the context of larger organizing struggles. They also describe how despite creating these relatively free spaces, the tension between hierarchy and democracy still showed up in the form of organizing and pedagogical tensions, thus raising questions about how to best apply popular education principles within organizing work.

CHAPTER V: THE GRASSROOTS EMPOWERMENT AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

This chapter describes the work of the Grassroots Empowerment and Leadership program through the lenses of praxis and democracy, focusing on how the program strengthened the role of SRO residents in the Tenderloin and SoMa as "historical Subjects" to address issues they wanted to change in their neighborhoods (Freire, 2000, p. 160). This approach included two aspects: a larger *organizing strategy* so that residents could effect political change in their neighborhoods, and the *pedagogical practice* inside the classes and project group meetings. This chapter also looks at how the structural tension of hierarchy v. democracy led to organizing and pedagogical tensions, in particular limitations of the program's non-confrontational approach as well as lack of critical praxis connecting the learning in the classes to the action of the projects.

Organizing Strategy of the GEL Program: Grassroots Civic Empowerment

The GEL program's primary organizing strategy was *grassroots civic empowerment,* where residents were given the opportunity to articulate and push for the needs of low-income communities in their neighborhoods and in San Francisco City Hall politics. One of Armand's organizing documents while building the tenants' organization in CCDC summarized this vision and strategy:

> We want to alter the power structure in ways that is [sic] unimaginable to most. How do we do this: build sustainable grassroots power, develop effective grassroots leaders, education and training, civic engagement and political actions… that will eventually create a real community based grassroots movement. (Internal document, "Empowerment Based Organizing: A Transformational Organizing Model, n.d.)

This collective civic empowerment approach had features consistent with a radical direct democracy but was also, as will be discussed in the "tensions" section, circumscribed by the orientation towards participation in the city's representative democratic structure. This section describes the program's four grassroots organizing strategies: *pushing a grassroots agenda at City Hall, community "activation," direct action,* and *negotiation,* focusing on the ways this approach did effectively encourage and cultivate the collective engagement of residents.

Pushing a Grassroots Agenda at City Hall

The main organizing strategy of the program, used by both the electoral project and the housing project, was to engage participants directly in city politics. Celia, the lead for the electoral project, described its purpose as to "get some political power behind things in the community" (interview, 11/30/20) and Armand said that while the alternative economy project "would be more focused on building their grassroots economic power," that "they would need an ally so it's not just they're doing it by themselves. How do you save this rent controlled building?" He and other members of the program saw the electoral process as a way to institutionalize grassroots gains.

Program participants who had been working with CCDC for a number of years, including Celia, June, Gabriela, and Mahjawe, had fought for a number of community issues at City Hall and had achieved some political victories. For example, June described how their organizing work had led to an increase in low-income housing as a part of new housing developments. She said that at a Board of Supervisors meeting residents shared their personal experiences with housing; she remembered Reynardo saying, "Affordable for who?" and she personally told the Board that,

> We didn't just want luxury housing being built, but we wanted housing to be built for the lowest of low, for those with 30% AMI [area median income] which I am one now. To see the Board of Supervisors…stop and pause, and turn and look at you, and look at you the whole time speaking… they let us know that we were being heard. And they really heard us. And with that we have had changes made, we've had laws passed. (Interview, 8/20/20)

Other community issues they had won were a free food program for seniors, new legislation to prevent evictions for SRO residents due to increasing rents, and the creation of a separate department for sanitation to keep neighborhood streets clean. Participants had also helped to elect a progressive Board of Supervisors member for his first term in 2018. Celia, June and Gabriela had gone door knocking together with him and his aides, and June said that during the campaign, "He really listened to us–he included a lot of what we were saying" in his campaign pledges. He "promised that the Tenderloin would no longer be a containment zone. I never

heard someone say, 'This area is so neglected–it won't be a containment zone anymore'" (Why Elections Matter class, 7/11/20).

Continuing from this background and orientation in CCDC, primarily the electoral organizing project but also the housing sustainability project engaged residents in elections and policy-level change. The electoral project's long-term goal was to form a citywide organization of low-income residents with committees in each district; they began this process by inviting other neighborhood leaders into the expanded project group, which then focused on the November 2020 election. They collectively developed a draft platform of neighborhood priorities, including preserving diversity and inclusion in the neighborhood, police reform, addressing systemic racism, and low-income housing and homelessness support (see Appendix F). They then invited three progressive Board of Supervisors candidates to Zoom meetings where they presented their platform. Based on candidates' responses, the group agreed to endorse all three and then actively campaigned for them. In a separate meeting, they also analyzed and made recommendations on ballot measures that they shared with groups in their network.

As part of the project's goal to address district issues at City Hall, the group also supported Faith, a resident on nearby Treasure Island that was part of the same district, in her efforts to get the city to address acute needs on the island, including substandard housing, frequent power outages, and a lack of resources during the pandemic. A single non-governmental agency, the Treasure Island Development Association (TIDA), had been given authority over all municipal services on the island while it built a new housing development. Faith called Treasure Island a "mass plantation" because "a bunch of white men and white developers get to determine our fate" (Evaluation class, 9/14/20).[34] During the pandemic, with

[34] Located between San Francisco and Oakland and accessible only by the Bay Bridge, Treasure Island was not a primary location of the GEL program's organizing work. But because it is located in the same legislative district (District 6) as the Tenderloin, Faith–a longtime activist on Treasure Island–was recruited to the program and participated in the electoral organizing work. TIDA's webpage reports that, "The Authority is vested with the rights to administer Tidelands Trust property. TIDA is also *responsible for administering vital municipal services to Treasure and Yerba Buena Islands*." (City and County of San Francisco, n.d., emphasis added).

the electoral project's support, Faith worked to raise to public officials the lack of resources, including COVID testing and food access. Towards the end of the program, she put in her name for a seat on an oversight commission for Treasure Island, and other class members called in to the government hearing to advocate for her.

The housing sustainability project focused on organizing SRO residents around housing issues to win housing electoral reforms. They held tenants' circles for residents to talk about issues in SROs; developed ideas for creating an oversight and accountability commission to be a watchdog for abusive slumlords; and helped with a campaign to set rents at 30% of income for people living in supportive housing and then widening that, with the ultimate goal to win the 30% cap for all residents of San Francisco "to shut down the shelter system forever" (Housing sustainability template). This campaign for supportive housing, called #30RightNow, and was carried over from work many of them had been involved in the previous year. In 2019, the Board of Supervisors had allocated money in the budget to bring rents down to 30% of income for tenants in SROs, but this money hadn't been allocated for all supportive housing tenants or made available for the '21-'22 budget cycle.[35] Cameron, part of the expanded project group and active in the Tenderloin Community Association, had been spearheading the current effort including engaging in two hunger strikes to pressure the mayor to allocate the funds. Group members helped her with outreach, wrote letters, made calls to District Supervisors and aides,

[35] According to a petition written by the #30RightNow Coalition, "A year later, after much pressure from community, including a pre-pandemic action in City Hall, the mayor allocated the funds" to bring the rents from 50% down to 30% of income for almost 700 tenants (#30RightNow, Sept. 15, 2020). But over 2000 tenants were still not covered and "have not seen relief yet." The petition stated:

> Thousands of people of color (especially Black), immigrants, families, seniors, veterans, and disabled people have been struggling for years to pay exorbitant rents for such small and sometimes toxic spaces. Many are getting by on a meager SSI (Supplemental Security Income), Social Security, or GA (general assistance) check; and now with COVID-19, we are trying to shelter in place and stay safe while many are sharing bathrooms and common spaces. We were promised safe, decent, truly affordable and supportive housing but many have not received it. (#30RightNow, Sept. 15, 2020).

and spoke during public comment when the item came up before a Board of Supervisors committee.[36]

While mostly non-confrontational in their approach, in some cases participants were more honest and direct in asserting community needs with politicians. For example, in a meeting with a District Supervisor candidate, Faith corrected him about his assumption about why people didn't get involved in community work:

> Board candidate: The biggest type of challenge is [finding] people who want to take that next leap of faith–we need someone like you. 99 out of 100 times it's overwhelming [for people]. Faith, you are shaking your head.
> Faith: That is misinformation. That's not the [real] narrative; it's not giving the information to the community. I'm outside a nursing home for my auntie because I'm committed to the call. It's not that you don't have people to step up; it's that they are not given the opportunity. (Meeting with Board of Supervisors candidate, 10/9/20).

In this exchange she questioned his assumption that the problem was people not stepping up, but that there weren't mechanisms for real participation.

With Celia's encouragement, Faith was even more forceful in an electoral project meeting that Armand had set up with the current neighborhood District supervisor about ongoing community issues. This meeting was set up because Armand believed that it was "important that we have a seat at the table," but that "the seat at table may not be official–we can actually force a seat at the table." He said that for this meeting with the supervisor, "We are inviting him to the table, he's not inviting us. We can define our agenda and ask him to come: 'This is our agenda, talk to us'" (personal communication, 4/26/21). As with the candidates, the group developed and then presented their agenda. When it was her turn to share about Treasure Island issues, Faith pushed him to commit to fund programs she and other community members had helped set up because TIDA and the city were not making necessary services, like COVID testing and meal programs, available to residents. She continued:

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[36] While the Board did not vote to approve the funds, the District Supervisor introduced legislation in October 2020 that was passed in January 2021. The budget was finally revised in May and took effect for the '21-'22 budget year; the San Francisco Examiner credited this victory to the organizing work done in the community (Mojadad, 2021).

> The structures put in place don't allow residents to have feedback or say over life conditions…. TIDA is the mayor, office, and the landlord… we're not a concern…We had a wonderful hearing [with you]; all that was exposed and then things went back to business as usual. We need a commitment to… deal with racism that still exists. If we allow TIDA to continue, we're going to have a push-out like the Bayview. We have to cut the presentation and go straight to the point.

When Faith was finished, Celia said to her, "That's it. Great, Faith," and then to the supervisor, "You just got jacked up." He replied, "I signed up for it. In my office we have done everything to align with residents, and fight like Faith is talking about but we can do more and escalate it…You have my commitment–I never aligned with TIDA. I'm always fighting, but we need escalation" (Meeting with district 6 supervisor, 3/19/21). While I only observed this level of direct engagement by participants with politicians a few times, the program provided a space where they had the opportunity to express the needs of the community to those in power.

Community "Activation"

The second organizing strategy focused on what the program called community "activation" rather than policy change. This meant residents working together to address problems directly; this was the approach used in the alternative economy and 6th Street projects because, as Nubian described it, "We know our own neighborhoods, but they don't come to ask us. They pretend we don't exist. So the best thing for us to do is to come up with our own solutions" (Sustainable economic models class, 9/12/20). Alim also described the rationale for this approach:

> The game is lopsided in favor of one group. Remember when the rules don't apply to you… The biggest level of empowerment isn't to fight against a system that is set up for your failure but to use that energy to start anew. (Sustainable economic models class, 9/12/20)

This approach was rooted in the creative process of participants imagining what the neighborhood could become and then take steps to make that vision a reality. While these projects were not directly oppositional to structures of power, they gave participants practice creating meaningful community projects, challenging both an individualist approach to social change as well as what Freire (2000) called a "fatalistic perception of their situation" (p. 85).

For example, in the alternative economy project, the primary problem the group identified was the economic gentrification of the Tenderloin and SoMa. To practice creating an alternative economy development model, the group planned a neighborhood street fair for low-income residents; their goal was for this to be "an ongoing event that will be featured in the community, to showcase and highlight what people are already doing in community, arts and crafts, with existing organizations and low-income populations" (Alternative economy project template). While the fair was the short-term goal, it was the process that created the community "activation." As described in the pedagogical practices section, meetings that included other community leaders served as a way to not only plan logistics but to talk through how the community itself could provide the needed resources for the fair.

After working collaboratively for months on planning and outreach, the alternative economy project held their in-person outdoor fair on Mariposa Alley in November, with neighborhood vendors selling art, t-shirts and crafts as well as Filipina lumpia and ice cream. They gave each attendee $20 worth of "Street Fair Cash" that they could use to buy any of the items for sale at the vendor booths (see Figure 5, first and second photos). Mahjawe and Nubian performed a street theater show with a local community-based theater group that project group members were part of, and local Tenderloin and SoMa organizations staffed booths with information for the community (see third and fourth photos). Most of the GEL program participants were there and helped out with the fair; for example Lina stood on the street corner of Mariposa Alley and 6th Street with flyers inviting passers-by. Attendees were low-income community residents who

Figure 5. Mariposa Alley Street Fair, November 2020

were either connected in some way to the organizations involved or saw it as they walked by 6th Street. Every detail of the fair was created and carried out by the project group members and community allies.

The 6th Street project used a similar organizing approach of having residents themselves make the community changes they sought; but instead of an alternative economy it focused on transforming 6th Street. In our interview, June described the rationale for the project, saying the focus on safety and cleanliness was based on surveys they did in the community that showed that "cleanliness and safety on 6th Street is so important to people there, or even to people passing by. And for me it's important too because I go through there a lot, I walk. So I can understand. Well, to be given charge of saying, 'Ok, *this* is a problem'" and then have the responsibility to "develop a project to help resolve this" (interview, 8/20/20). June said the goal was to be able to "walk in this area without fear, [to make it] a happier place for everyone to enjoy each other." Anita said of the project that cleaning up 6th Street "is the dream of all the people. One of the dreams" (Outreach class, 8/22/20)

The group's primary short-term goals were to get commitment from the city to prioritize cleaning up 6th Street including the installation of "big-belly" trashcans, and to hold a social "activation" kick-off event with a cleanliness survey to educate residents and promote the project. They also developed four longer-term goals: to hold monthly or quarterly safety trainings; improve the outside façade of the 6th Street buildings through greenery and lighting; employ local residents to clean the street weekly; and hold the activation event monthly with theater and music.

The city did install the trashcans in SoMa and the Tenderloin; the District 6 supervisor was quoted in the local newspaper as saying, "What people there have been saying all along is: 'Give us trash cans and bathrooms and we can help keep our neighborhood clean.' You can walk for blocks in the Tenderloin and not find a trashcan. And many of the trashcans there are broken or overflowing. It's a huge problem" (Chan, 2020). The group also held their kick-off event on

6th Street that included outreach to residents using the survey, but they were not able to realize most of the other ideas before the program ended. COVID's impact on the projects especially affected this project that had planned to do in-person outreach to build the effort; and also when Armand stepped back, June and Anita were not able to take over the leadership of the project and move forward with it. Afterwards, June said in the graduation class,

> It's going to take time to get people on board. Something that yes, we are committed to doing. People say…how bad 6th Street is. Changing people's habits is going to take time. We need to keep doing it. We are gonna make a difference. It's not something big like snap our fingers, we'll get there. (Graduation class, 11/21/20).

The long-term vision for the project and community ownership over the process meant that June anticipated more opportunities to continue the process after the class ended. At the same time, challenges moving forward could have been the subject of deeper reflection, as will be discussed in the tensions section below.

Direct Action

The third strategy was engagement in direct action, where participants made demands of city officials outside the official legislative process through civil disobedience or protests. For example, Carolyn, a member of the expanded electoral project, helped to organize a protest to bring back the 27 bus line after public transit was cut at the beginning of the pandemic. Cameron and the #30RightNow campaign, in coalition with other neighborhood organizations including TCA, Disability Rights Now, and the Chinese Neighborhood Association, organized a protest inside Mayor London Breed's office to demand that the mayor release money that had been allocated for supportive housing rent relief. Faith, in addition to organizing residents on the island against the poor housing conditions and lack of public resources, was also working with

Figure 5. Treasure Island (top left and right) and 27 bus line protests.

residents to address the frequent power outages as a result of the aging electrical system. She and other residents organized a demand letter and small march against the power outages; many of the GEL class participants signed the demand letter and also outreached to others in their network to support. Figure 6 shows photos from some of these actions. While these actions were mostly initiated outside of or prior to the GEL program, the program's structure allowed for participants to share this work they were doing and to get support from a wider network of community activists and residents. The check-in time at the beginning of project meetings was a place when this information was shared, questions asked, and action coordinated.

About the role of direct action in the work, one of the documents Armand wrote about his organizing approach described it a form of "reasonable militancy," where

> Our strategy is more of building and collaboration rather than division and action. We are for democracy rather than dictatorship. We unite rather than divide. We are persuasive rather than coercive. We ask rather than demand. We only use direct action as a tool to build and force the target to dialogue and negotiate. We use reasonable militancy to build power, bring people together, and hold participatory dialogue, collective bargaining and negotiation to create benefits for the most impacted. (Internal document, "Empowerment Based Organizing").

In a follow-up interview with Armand, I asked him why they didn't use direct action more frequently, and about this idea of "reasonable militancy." He told me that it was a product of his 20-30 years as a community organizer, and that,

> I was a radical organizer when I was young… I always wanted to fight. Like you know, confront people and everything. But I realized that you have to have a way to actually create concrete outcomes from the fight. So that people will realize that their sacrifices actually result in something. That's why when I say direct action is just a tool–it's just a tool to force your target to negotiate. Because that negotiation is a way for us to actually create the concrete results from that. (Interview, 4/26/21)

The program's greater emphasis on electoral change and community activation reflected this view that direct confrontation should not be the primary strategy, but a tool to be used only when necessary. But as will be discussed in the tensions section below, that direct action was relied on so infrequently may also have reflected Armand's hesitation to engage in organizing activities that could threaten CCDC's funding.

Negotiation

The fourth strategy used in the GEL program was negotiation. As Armand described in the previous quote, direct action from his perspective should be in service of being in a position to negotiate with corporate developers who sought to build new developments in the neighborhood. Armand explained the logic of this approach in a planning meeting with Alim and me:

> When we fight against the developer we only have two minutes–two minutes in pubic hearings, so we can only have 100 minutes if have 50 people there. But sometimes when there are 50 people the time gets reduced–it's designed against us.

Instead, he asked, "Why is there no community planning commission in the grassroots?" With a community planning commission, Armand said, the community could say to the developer,

> "Before we go there, you have to sit down with us"… That would actually be able for people to not have just two minutes–we can create an institution. It will start from the community level rather than from city level. (Class planning meeting, 10/4/20)

In the GEL program, participants were in a position to negotiate in this way with housing developers thanks to recent community organizing work, where neighborhood organizations had joined together in 2013 to create an informal citywide planning coalition that used the city's planning process to slow down development projects until they won greater benefits as part of a 2011 law requiring a community benefits agreement.[37] Together, the law and the coalition work meant that the developer would need community support or risk losing city approval for the project. June explained this process in a 6th Street project meeting: "Part of the way of doing this process, they'll go to City Hall and want approval. They want to show they have community support." She acknowledged this could be an antagonistic process:

> The developer will say, "We already gave to the city," but the developer needs to get support from the community. If we say we won't work with you, we can go to City Hall [and say] "Look, they are not working with the community," and make it very negative to

[37] In 2011, during San Francisco's most recent tech boom, Mayor Ed Lee incentivized growing tech companies to move to the Tenderloin and SoMa neighborhoods by offering them six years of payroll tax exemptions. In exchange, they would have to negotiate a community benefits agreement (CBA), "a contractual obligation to engage in community and economic development efforts" (ICIC, 2021).

> the point that the Planning Commission says, "You aren't working with the community, sorry." (6th Street project meeting, 10/26/20)

Because of this prior groundwork that had been laid, a group of mostly formerly homeless SRO residents was in a position to meet with a wealthy corporate developer and wrest concessions to fund their projects.

The 6th Street project and the alternative economy project both met with the developer during the program; I was not in these meetings but was in the preparation meetings in the project groups where participants developed budgets and PowerPoint presentations to share with him. Coming up with a budget was not easy for them; they had never before planned these events and activities much less determined how much money they would need. As June said, "It's a lot of pressure, coming up with a budget–it's hard to approach it" (Open Hour, 8/13/20). But as with many things in the program, it was practice; they developed ballpark figures for different potential costs, came up with proposals, and presented these to the developer in a meeting along with the other representatives from the Central City Coalition, finally negotiating a contribution for the projects towards the end of the program. Through this process, participants had the experience of collectively being a part of negotiating a community benefits agreement for the neighborhood.

Through the four strategies used in the project groups, the program emphasized participants' capacity to work together on common goals as defined by residents themselves. Although, as discussed below, the collaborative electoral approach and lack of critical praxis on their political work may have in some ways undermined the agency the program sought to cultivate, the organizing strategy also emphasized their right to have a collective voice in the direction of their neighborhood and city.

Pedagogical Practices of the GEL Program

Within its larger organizing strategy, the pedagogical practices of the GEL program were intended to strengthen the program's organizing work. The GEL program did this through a

developmental approach to organizing, organic political education and coalition-building. Each of these aspects to the program gave participants opportunities to have the experience of engaging in political praxis, where they were able to develop ideas about how to create social change in their neighborhoods, practice applying them with encouragement and support, and then have space to reflect, troubleshoot and try again.

Slow Organizing: A Developmental Approach to Grassroots Social Change

The first defining feature of the GEL program pedagogy was that it took a *developmental* approach to organizing work, where the long-term capacity of the participants was prioritized over immediate organizing victories. Everything moved at a slower pace than in traditional community organizing, where crises often drive the work to move too fast for new participants to keep up. In this process, the program emphasized participants' agency, encouraging them to take on more and more responsibility. Four aspects of the program in particular supported this long-term developmental approach: 1) the use of collective brainstorming and vision, especially in the early project development stages, 2) the emphasis on collective decision-making, 3) the integration of skill-building and scaffolding into the classes and project work, and 4) the treatment of participants with patience and a lack of judgment about what they were able to accomplish.

Brainstorming and Vision.

The GEL program first supported a developmental approach through providing space and a structure for participants to brainstorm their vision for social change and how they might make some aspect of these visions a reality. Armand explained the motivation for this: "Change happens when there are empowered people. But empowerment will only last if there is *collective vision and goals*" (Evaluation class, 11/16/20; emphasis added). Unlike many organizing environments where efficiency is prioritized over creativity, in the project groups and even the classes, there was time for participants to simply think through what they wanted and what they could do. This reflected popular education's role as giving people "ownership of a capacity to

think" (Jara, 2010, p. 295) and was part of Freire's conception of praxis where oppressed people have "the right to dream differently" (2000, p. 22).

To provide a structure for this process, each project group used a template with questions to help them develop their projects; they started the process by answering the question, "What problem do we plan on solving with this project?" in order to develop a collective vision for their projects, which Armand had named their "Big Audacious Goals" (see Appendix G). For example, in the housing sustainability group, the group was tasked with brainstorming solutions to the housing crisis and developing a vision for housing sustainability in San Francisco, and then identifying concrete steps they could take. This visioning allowed participants to focus on not only the heaviness of the problems in the neighborhoods but the energy of imagining how things could be different. From this brainstorming came Reynardo's idea of setting rents at 30% across the board for all tenants in San Francisco as an expansion from #30RightNow campaign for tenants in supportive housing; "30 Across the Board" became the group's primary "Big Audacious Goal."

This form of brainstorming proved to be an effective way to generate creative ideas among participants. For example in the 6th Street project, the group had to imagine what they would like 6th Street to become–how it could be a welcoming, supportive place for low-income residents. As June described, "Well, to be given charge of saying ok, *this* is a problem, and then being able to use a template to come up with and answer questions, and develop a project to help resolve this with the goal of making it a long term thing" (interview, 8/20/20). And Mahjawe, who was part of the alternative economy project that had as its primary work to develop a community street fair, said that what stood out to him about the program was "the creative process… the group process of creating something together, imagining what the possibilities could be for our community" (Evaluation class, 8/8/20).

These were generative conversations that everyone could participate in because of their own experience living in the neighborhood–they did not need special knowledge or expertise;

they just needed their knowledge of the problems and their collective imagination for how it could be different. As Nubian said about the alternative economy project,

> We started brainstorming about our vision of a better society, a better new economy and–I can't think of these things by myself. I have a lot of different ideas, but the process of interacting with other people with shared passions, shared concerns and these ideas start bubbling up. (Interview, 7/22/20)

Because of brainstorming ideas with others in her project group, Nubian was able to begin working with others in a meaningful way directed towards making change based on a vision they cultivated together. In line with Freire's conception of praxis where the oppressed connect their own reflection on the structures to be transformed with action, collectively participants were able to be the experts and use that expertise to think of solutions.

After finishing the templates, this brainstorming continued as the groups worked on carrying out the tactical plans that they had created. This was not always an easy process for participants; for example during one housing sustainability meeting when Iris was trying to come up with an outreach pitch to SRO residents, she began brainstorming out loud what she wanted to say:

> Iris: We have big audacious goals we would like to share. We would like to share our big… [writing] big audacious goals so you can be involved in… so you the community… can be involved in housing decision-making. Or housing sustainability for all income levels. I don't know if we want to mention low-income. [Repeats whole thing as one message] - To empower–now there I'm stuck… To empower ourselves by reducing–
> Armand: Maybe something about SROs.
> Iris: To stop using housing as a weapon against the people…. To empower ourselves by not allowing housing to be used against people. (Housing sustainability meeting, 8/4/20)

Armand's encouragement for participants to have the time to figure out what *they* thought allowed Iris to try out her ideas, refine them, and get feedback without feeling rushed or pressured. Gabriela described the brainstorming as contributing to a democratic process: "There is nothing rejected–nobody is rejected in the group. Everything you say is accepted always in your own little way, your own opinion… There is no wrong answer, there is no wrong response or opinion… And that is a democratic process" (interview, 11/29/20).

Collective Decision-making.

As an extension and next step from brainstorming, continued development of participants happened through the process of collective decision-making. To make decisions on their organizing plans, the project groups continued with the template, which after the "Big Audacious Goals" included strategy, key stakeholders and allies, and a tactical plan with outcomes for each month. Armand facilitated the project groups in working together through each of these areas. This process took many meetings because he asked for input from each group member and looked for consensus, and also because of the technical difficulties of facilitating the process on Zoom, when not all participants could easily access or see the documents. Armand filled in the templates while sharing his screen as the groups discussed their plans, and he looked for common ground to find wording that reflected their collective wishes. In almost every meeting, he could be heard asking someone, "_____, what do you think?" This was different than a formal democratic process where people might vote; it was about bringing in each person's authentic voice to the planning process.

June reflected back that while this approach took some getting used to, she came to appreciate how it supported a collective process: "It's a different way, a collective way of getting everyone involved and getting their input and having it be a decision among the whole group instead of, 'I'll do this'–more of team building" (evaluation class, 11/16/20). After it was finished, the template reminded them what they had all agreed on so that the document, not Armand, could be the primary reference point for their ongoing work. Armand said of the template that, "Without those documents that they processed for two months, this will crumble. Because there's no core. There's no core purpose and understanding of why they are doing it" (interview, 9/2/20).

Most project decisions were made by the participants collectively, with Armand's guidance and support. Participants not only developed the templates collectively, but they also reached out to other residents to join the expanding committees; wrote the flyers, pamphlets

and PowerPoint presentations that they used to support their outreach; contacted city agencies for permits (as in the case of the street fair); and for the electoral organizing project, collectively developed positions on local ballot initiatives and met directly with Board of Supervisor candidates. Armand turned over facilitation as soon as project group members felt confident enough to take it on. Some technical assistance was provided by outside volunteers[38], but all other materials were created during meetings collectively by program participants and the community allies they brought into the projects through the same process they used for the template– word for word, they came up with what they wanted to say together.

Skill-building.

A third way the GEL program developed participants' capacities as organizers and community leaders was through the development of concrete skills in order to take on more ownership of the projects. Unlike traditional skill-based programs that decide what skills students need, train them in isolation from their actual needed context, and offer skills to support their individual growth, most of the skills participants learned were in service of their chosen collective efforts to make changes in their neighborhoods. This made the skill-building a democratic process, because it was in the context of collective plans that participants wanted to carry out and better enabled them to carry out those plans. These skills ranged from reaching out to a community member about the project, to facilitating meetings, to developing PowerPoint presentations, to sharing their screen while in a Zoom meeting. In some cases, we worked on these skills in the classes but in general, they developed these skills during project group meetings as they were needed to move forward in the work, through a process of scaffolding, where participants were given support to be able to carry out more and more of the work themselves.

[38] For example, a volunteer helped with layout and design of the 6th Street and housing sustainability project outreach flyers, and a UC Hastings student helped with the permitting process for the alternative economy fair.

This support was especially essential given the shift to online work in the context of the pandemic shelter-in-place. Many things that would have been straightforward had we been together physically became challenging for people; these included seeing the meeting agendas, which would have been put up on the wall in an in-person meeting; knowing how to share their screens, which they would have used paper flyers or brochures for; and finding emails that Armand and others sent, for example with updated templates. Sunshine reflected on the technology aspect of the program:

> At first it was kind of scary, technology differences or the levels of technology that people had and people not knowing how to use it, it was intimidating to some people, and it was aggravating at times, and frustrating. After everybody got comfortable with it, everybody kind of accepted it and took it on like it was natural and started working with it. (Interview, 11/28/20)

Because the work moved at the pace and based on the needs of the participants, they were able to develop the skills they identified as necessary to move forward with their work.

One of the key ways that scaffolding happened was through participants taking over project meeting facilitation from Armand a few months into the program. For example, in July it was Bianca's turn to facilitate. In our June meeting she said she wasn't ready, but in a separate conversation, she and Armand went over the agenda and she went on to facilitate the next meeting–despite saying she was nervous. During the meeting the group gave her support and encouragement, for example Armand prompting her, "What do we have next, Bianca?" Mahjawe commented that she was "so professional," and Armand said he was happy that "a young leader like Bianca is doing her first facilitation" (alternative economy project meeting, 7/9/20). She then went on to facilitate each weekly meeting for the rest of the month.

While most of the tasks were low-pressure, the "on-the-job" approach required a level of vulnerability on the part of participants, where in order to learn they had to be honest about what they needed help with. This was especially true with the program being online, where we as facilitators did not anticipate all the skills participants would need–or which ones would be challenging–in this new environment. To get to the point where it became natural took a level of

vulnerability, practice and collective support. For example, in an alternative economy meeting, Nubian asked how to share the brochure on her screen with someone when she did outreach to them over Zoom: "…If I wanted to share it? Because I haven't done that before" (Alternative economy project meeting, 7/9/20). In another meeting, she was unsure about what to say when emailing an ally about the street fair and asked for feedback. She said, "It was the first time I've written an email to someone I don't know… the wording of it. I'm trying to be genuine and sincere; it felt clumsy" (Alternative economy project meeting, 7/23/20). The expressed vulnerability was consistently met with positive feedback, patience and encouragement so that participants could keep being open about what they were still learning to do. As Nubian reflected back in our mid-way evaluation class, she said what she most valued about the class was "the platform to learn, the level of comfort to practice and make mistakes and to grow, grow together" (Mid-way evaluation class, 8/8/20).

No Judgment.

A fourth aspect of the developmental approach was that Armand treated participants–and they treated each other–with patience instead of criticism about what they were unable to do, essential when people were facing many other challenges in their lives. Gabriela described this approach in one meeting:

> We should not be judgmental. We need to be understanding. We need to be patient, persevere, and be compassionate with each other, especially people at the grassroots. That's why we are having this training, to be good, intelligent, effective, so we can help our community and neighborhood as part of a compassionate society. (Why elections matter class, 7/11/20).

This approach was evident in Armand's effort to turn over responsibility to participants, which meant that sometimes tasks did not get done. For example when I hadn't heard about a 6th Street meeting for a few weeks, I asked Armand about it; he said he was trying to transfer the leadership to them, so he told them to let him know when they wanted to meet and he would make the link, because they expected him to do it. He said, "We're building leaders here. I only

follow up with Reynardo if he hasn't called me closer to the meeting. I give him the opportunity if he thinks we need to meet" (personal communication, 9/29/20).

As part of this approach, if participants did not carry out the plans that were agreed on in the meetings, they were not pressured or made to feel bad about what they hadn't done. For example, in the housing project group, Julian and Iris had agreed to get names of SRO residents that had been collected through outreach prior to COVID, as well as draft a handout for the project group to conduct further outreach. But Julian' attendance was intermittent in the group meetings, and when he was present he acknowledged he had had technical trouble sending the names and also doubts about how to make the handout. Armand was patient, each time asking him for an update and making suggestions to help him move forward. In the August 22nd outreach class, Julian shared that for personal reasons he had not been able to get the list:

> Julian: I apologize about the numbers. I haven't done it.
> Reynardo: If you feel like chiming in you are welcome. Anyhow.
> Lina: Thank you for joining, Julian.
> Julian: Thank you for letting me come back.
> Reynardo: [We're talking about] outreach - how we can get community involved. (Outreach class, 8/22/20)

At no point was Julian shamed for what he hadn't done; nor did the group try to become a group therapy session for him. They showed him respect and patience, and continued toward their collective goals.

Another example of this acceptance was with Celia, who had been dealing with a chronic illness and was participating in meetings from the hospital. When Armand said during one of these meetings that he hoped they could have their first district meeting that month, Celia replied, "I don't know; I'm not doing well right now. I can't host any meetings… I don't feel like I can do it at the end of this month." Armand responded,

> I just want to clarify… the only responsibility you will have is to recruit someone, but if not that's also ok. Or if you know someone and you can't talk to them, each of us [can help]. Don't think it will be on your shoulders. Don't think that, Celia. This is a collective effort. (Electoral project meeting, 6/20)

Armand was able to reassure Celia that this was a group effort of which she was one part, which meant that she did not have to push herself or feel badly for what she wasn't able to do.

Faith summed up the impact of this approach. She had missed some meetings due to getting married and also organizing residents on Treasure Island during the program. In the graduation class, she told the group that she appreciated

> your support and flexibility with the crazy things going on in my life. [Understanding that I'm] wanting to be in this space but not always being able to be in this space. There was no judgment–I'm grateful for that. "Do what you do and we gonna work with you." That understanding and compassion has made all the difference. (Graduation class, 11/21/20)

The program's emphasis on supporting and encouraging what participants were capable of doing as one part of a larger whole, without pressure, guilt or blame, enabled participants to grow as community leaders.

Organic Political Education

Classes and project groups also created a space for deeper intentional learning about the history and theory related to problems they wanted to address. This followed Armand's vision that "there should be a continuing education program or a deliberate effort to educate our resident leaders to raise their social consciousness that they will expand their view from being parochial to embracing community and social change" (internal document, "Alliance and Campaign Principles, n.d.). This education, while intentional, was organic in that class content was adjusted as we went along both over the course of the program and within each class in response to participants. The project groups also provided a space for organic political education through check-in questions and impromptu discussions that happened during project meetings.

Organic Political Education in the Classes.

The organic nature of the classes started with the check-in at the beginning of class; these check-ins could take up a good chunk of the class time. These served as both check-in and opportunity for each class participant to share knowledge and experience with each other and

build camaraderie. Questions we used for the check-in, which were almost all created by Alim, included:

> "What is one thing you appreciate about your neighborhood?"
> "What is one thing that is helping you spiritually in this time (or if you don't like the word spiritual, helping you in any way)?"
> "What is an experience you have doing art, or what is art that you love?"
> "What does community empowerment look like to you?"
> "What keeps you motivated during these times?"

These were all highly generative questions, with participants sharing their experience, opinions and knowledge of the Tenderloin and SoMa in a way that emphasized the grassroots and community-building focus of the program.

Class planning itself was organic and fluid; Alim and I had most of the basic topics as written by James, but without James' guidance and with flexibility from Armand, we developed them on our own based on our own knowledge and experience, and by reflecting on what participants might most enjoy and benefit from within the given topic. In most cases, one of us would write a draft lesson plan and then share it to get feedback from the other. We checked in with Armand for clarification on class topics and after we had worked out a solid draft to get his feedback; in most cases he gave us small suggestions but occasionally might say, "I had a different idea," and we would rework a section.

In our own political praxis, as facilitators, we had in-depth conversations to plan and adjust classes. For example, in a meeting Alim and I had to plan a class that had been titled "Why Elections Matter," I asked him what he thought about changing it to, "*Do* elections matter?" After discussing it at length, we agreed that a generative question for the class could be whether social movements or elections are what make change. In our next planning meeting with Armand, we brought this question up to him. I gave the analogy of an iceberg, with elections what we see above the water and social movements what happen underneath that make the electoral change possible. Then this conversation ensued:

> Armand: You are correct–this protest movement, social movement is directly connected to what's happening in the electoral field. So it will be important to see that connection.

> Alim: I really like it in terms of seeing the politics–the electoral system from the perspective of the oppressed, how social movements have influenced elections, how they have influenced the politics.
> Tenaya: Does it matter to get people elected? Or is it the power in the streets? Or both?
> Armand: The power in the streets so important–it can change the election process, and where politicians stand, if there is pressure from an organized force. That's why it's so important–we as organizers, activists, are not organizing for an electoral purpose. We are organizing to build power. That's the main point. The electoral thing will just be a resultant of this empowerment-building process.

Alim responded to Armand by sharing a quote he wanted to use in the class, *"Preach about change but reform very little."* Armand said, "Yeah, that's good," and that "we would also want them see the real power rests on them." Based on this discussion, Alim created a lesson plan on the relationship between social movements and elections, focusing on the role of the protest movements of Black Lives Matter and Occupy in leading to progressive candidates being elected to office. We ended Alim's presentation with the question, "Do elections matter or do social movements matter?" which led to generative breakout groups and a class discussion on the relationship between social movements and elections.

As class facilitators, Alim and I also had the freedom to add other meeting structures as we thought they would be helpful. We added a regular "Open Hour" to discuss project work that there wasn't time for in class after participants expressed wanting more time to talk about how their projects were going. For the class on racial justice, which happened to take place at the height of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in the summer, Alim invited the Black class participants to help plan the class. After this class, which brought up strong emotions among participants and some conflict, Alim also initiated a separate racial justice discussion. We held three of these meetings on Friday nights, and they were intended to both work through some of the racial tensions in the class and serve as a forum to work on specific ways to support the BLM organizing happening in the city around defunding the police. Armand was encouraging and supportive of these supplemental spaces as ways to provide deeper learning and support for participants' project work and overall involvement.

Organic Political Education in the Project Groups.

The project groups were also spaces that included short political education lessons or conversations; these arose organically in the context of group work, which made them accessible and relevant participants. The organic political education in the project groups served participants' democratic participation because it was connected to what they were already talking about or working on; it was not imposed but a dialogical interaction in which they could ask questions or teach each other. They learned together about ballot measures, the political situation on Treasure Island, experiences of Black residents in the city generally, and relevant history like the Manilatown resistance movement that gave them a larger framework to contextualize their own struggles.

In some cases, the knowledge was shared by Armand; in others, the knowledge was shared as a dialogue in the group. In both cases, the space and time for these conversations flowed easily to and from the organizing work. For example, at the beginning of an alternative economy meeting, Nubian asked Armand about a recent road trip he had taken to Lompoc, a town near Santa Barbara where Filipino immigrants had settled in the 1940s and 1950s when they came to work on California farms. He reflected on the trip: "We went to the farm. But now it's all corporate farms. The farmers got gentrified. There are no more farmers– it's all machines and everything." He then explained that he had made the trip because of a Filipino author who wrote a book describing his life in Lompoc; Nubian asked him the name of the author, and he replied:

> Carlos Bulosan chronicled his story when came here from the Philippines–he was a farmer as well. He organized a union in Lompoc during that time… He chronicled everything, it's so beautiful. But the book is tragic–all the sacrifices, all the struggle. It was really hard for them. I thought there was still a Filipino community, and that it was improved. But no more. It's like what happened in Los Angeles–they had a Filipino town, now only signage… That's what happened here in the I [International] Hotel. Hopefully we are here in SoMa… I hope we will retain the community here. (Alt economy meeting, 9/10/20)

Then Armand transitioned back to the meeting, saying, "Alright, Mahjawe, we should continue–you and Nubian [are facilitating]." This type of relaxed organic exchange enabled participants to learn about struggles that were beyond their direct experience and that crossed racial lines in a way that avoided banking and that strengthened solidarity.

Similarly, in one dialogue about Treasure Island during a District 6 committee meeting, participants can be seen teaching, learning and getting connected:

> Lila: How are people coping with the power outages? Kids are doing lessons at home. How can we help them? Especially children, and their continuing education…
> Armand: Does anyone want to comment or answer Lila's question?
> Sunshine: They are trying to get batteries.
> Armand: Oh, I heard about that. Trying to purchase backup batteries, if there is an outage, to have backup batteries.
> Gabriela: They will contact PG&E regarding the problem of energy, electricity.
> Armand: So meaning–there will be two things. TIDA is the key organization that should support them, the entity that city created to administer the whole island. Treasure Island is part of District 6 so [the District Supervisor] should be involved, and of course the mayor. They are holding the rally, organizing residents. Whatever we can do to support them–we can sign the letter.
> Gabriela: We need some signatures. They are part of D6, we are part of the support for them…
> Armand: I can drive over there–my car can take six people.
> Carolyn: I have never been there–I've been by it on the [Bay] bridge a million times.
> Armand: Now you will go there and fight. Let's see what happens; they will send the letter next week. (Electoral project meeting, 8/28/20)

While Armand added to the knowledge and pushed forward support for the rally, he also encouraged participants' own sharing of knowledge and building of support for each other.

Horizontal Coalition-Building

Central to the vision of the GEL program was for participants to practice building networks that crossed organizational lines to unite low-income residents around common concerns. This approach was carried over from the organizing classes at CCDC, where as Mahjawe told me, outreach to other neighborhood organizations was part of their learning: "They gave us a list of places… all these organizing organizations in the neighborhood. 'Go here, go there,'… and come back and share it with the class" (interview, 3/26/21). But in CCDC overall, James told me that there was a tendency to not work in alliance with other organizations, and to even be competitive:

> Sometimes I think CCDC had a tendency to organize in silos… Often they had a tendency to duplicate efforts, so if we had a group like "Tenderloin Votes" which is a community-wide group, then they had an organization for voters in CCDC. They had a tendency to sometimes siphon off support. And at some point there was even, initially at least, a competition for supporters…. Armand's style very different from CCDC members–he always had a broader vision, and a much more democratic vision I think than the overall organizing department did. (Interview, 4/19/21)

The GEL program's emphasis on building coalitions across different groups was thus an intentional part of the program that set it apart from their work in CCDC, reflecting the program's commitment to build the autonomous power of low-income people.

Coalition-building happened both *within* the program, where participants built relationships and solidarity with each other across neighborhoods, racial groups, and community organizing efforts, and also by participants reaching out *from* the program to other residents and groups in the neighborhoods who shared the grassroots focus and agenda of the GEL program. This mutual relationship-based work reflected the *horizontalism* Sitrin (2006) describes, which includes "democratic communication on a level plane" and "non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian creation rather than reaction. It is a break with vertical ways of organizing and relating" (Sitrin, 2006, p. 3).

Intragroup Coalition-Building.

Coalition-building in the GEL program started inside the program, among the group of participants who had been recruited from different neighborhoods, racial and immigration backgrounds, and community organizing efforts. The structure of the program allowed for participants to share the different types of work they were doing and ways people could help; during project group and class check-ins, they often gave quick updates about what was happening outside the program. For example, during the program Nubian started working at a shelter-in-place (SIP) hotel, and she as well as Mahjawe regularly shared updates about efforts

to support the SIP hotels.[39] During one meeting, Mahjawe shared that there was a hearing coming up about the shelter-in-place hotels and asked people to help:

> If you know people, get their contact info and tell them we want to hear their stories because we are gonna be using that at the hearing. We are gonna have to fight with the city to get them to purchase those hotels and get into arrangement where people can stay there permanently. (Graduation class, 11/8/20)

Announcements like this one were ways for participants to build and strengthen their networks with each other without Armand being an in-between.

In addition to short updates or requests, Armand often used classes and meetings as an opportunity for participants to get connected to issues particular members were working on– this was a continuation of the organic political education described above. Faith's work on Treasure Island, for example, became a regular part of the District 6 committee meetings, giving her a way to talk through her organizing challenges and get support. Gabriela said the class was there to "give [Faith] the moral support, help with the problems in her community; we were there to support her" (interview, 11/20/20).

Because of Faith's work on Treasure Island, participants were able to learn and care about the issues faced by residents on the island that they had previously known nothing about. In our graduation class, Nubian spoke directly to Faith about how learning from her about Treasure Island had helped her connect to the issues being faced there:

> When I first came on in this class, we were talking about Treasure Island issues. I never thought about Treasure Island. But your voice, your passion–it got me to start asking questions about what was going on, to see your journey, that serious big problems are going on. (Graduation class, 11/21/20)

As a result of learning about Treasure Island first-hand from Faith, Nubian and the other participants became intimately connected to the issues and committed to supporting Treasure Island residents as part of their own neighborhood struggles. And because there were concrete and accessible ways to participate, this new learning translated to action: participants signed the

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[39] Shelter-in-place hotels are hotels that the city rented after the pandemic to house unhoused residents to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

petition, brainstormed with her in a special Open Hour that we held to talk about Treasure Island, and when Faith put her name in for a seat on an oversight commission for TIDA, called in for public comment. When she won the seat just before the graduation class, they expressed excitement and pride that they had contributed to this small victory.

The program also built this intragroup coalition-building through the space given for authentic personal interactions. While meetings were focused on the work at hand, participants often shared short personal updates during check-ins. For example, at the beginning of one electoral organizing project group meeting, Celia, who had had surgery on her spine and been in a long-term rehabilitation center, shared:

> I'm going home at end of the month… I can walk now. I'm getting better. They are going to come out and give me therapy three days a week. It depends on loved ones, friends and family the other two days… They said I'm going to do well. I'm happy–it's a big change. (Electoral project meeting, 8/6/20)

These check-ins were able to provide a balance between giving space for participants to share what was happening with them and moving forward in the work. Sometimes these were quite serious updates: in one meeting, Hurricane Laura had just hit Sunshine's hometown in Louisiana. During check-ins, Sunshine shared how she was feeling: "It hit right where my mom lives. She was evacuated; she was missing until last night. She's at a shelter in Alexandria–it's super scary. We're worried about coronavirus, now a hurricane" (District 6 meeting, 8/28/20). And sometimes these updates were light:

> Alim: What is something that you are learning right now?
> Iris: Learning to cook–I just started having access to a kitchen.
> Reynardo: Ugh… that I have a strange hairstyle?
> Lina: I started hanging out with my kids again, doing things together, watching a movie. I just started doing this during shelter-in-place.
> Celia: You guys are my favorite family, just wanted to say that. (Political economy class, 7/25/20)

These interactions show the level of comfort, warmth and vulnerability among group members, and also how they moved seamlessly from check-ins to project work. There was empathy and respect for people's personal lives that strengthened, without interfering with, the serious

shared focus of the classes and groups. From the culture of solidarity that was established among group members, they then reached out to others in the community to expand the project groups.

Intergroup Coalition-Building.

While the coalition-building work of the GEL program started among participants, it then extended to reach to other grassroots community members and organizations outside the program. Reynardo articulated the acute need for this kind of larger coalition in one project meeting:

> Everybody right now is doing their own project to find a way to get things done for their community. No one is on the same page. Therefore it's short-lived; we might get one or two things going on, [what we need is a] whole crowd into City Hall - everyone with one course of action, mind, things get done. If it's a separate agenda, [City Hall] can't hear all that. (Housing project meeting, 8/25/20)

External coalition-building happened in both the classes and the projects. Guest speakers were rooted in community work and helped to expand participants' awareness of and connections to other struggles, as well as sometimes offering support for specific struggles participants were in. For example Noe, a lawyer from Alim's organization Mission Defense, shared his experience and knowledge organizing the community to fight corporate development in the Tenderloin and Mission Districts; when we held a special Open Hour meeting for Faith, Noe joined and brought his knowledge of how to fight large developers to support her efforts.

The core of the coalition-building happened in the methodical work of the project groups. Each project group's template had as one of their steps to build their project groups into larger committees that included allies, and Armand guided project group members in reaching out to other organizations and individuals in the community to collaborate on the projects. For the alternative economy project, once they had a general vision for the fair, the group brainstormed a list of community members they knew who could help them with making the fair a reality and then took responsibility for reaching out to them. These new members including Cassandra, a local community artist and photographer who designed the fair logo, Tom, who

worked for a Tenderloin-based mental health organization and set up a mental health booth for the fair, Pedro from a local Filipino community organization who connected the group with local Filipino families cooking out of their houses to provide food for the fair and Abel from a neighborhood-based job readiness program, who set up community security at the fair. All of them helped to develop the vision and the reality of the fair as a grassroots effort and strengthened the relationships among community-members involved in different work.

The housing sustainability project expanded to include Erin, an SRO tenants' rights activist who was working on creating an oversight and accountability board for SROs; Cameron, who had been working on the supportive housing campaign; Shannon, a former CCDC resident and housing activist, and Leffet, the mother of a supportive housing tenant who was involved in multiple efforts in the neighborhood to improve conditions for SRO residents. Similarly, the electoral organizing project members also recruited other neighborhood activists and community members to their group in order to build the District 6 committee: Gabriela recruited Lila who lived in a low-income building in SoMa, and Celia recruited Lindsay, who was active in the Tenderloin Community Association and had successfully organized to get the 27 bus route back. These new participants came to meetings and became integrated into the group, bringing their experience and connections to expand the work.

This type of slow coalition-building work was not transactional but was about building authentic relationships based in mutual support. As Alim said at the end of our class on outreach, such an approach was especially important for organizing with low-income people:

> People who live in struggle get used.... When you open up your mouth to ask them to be part of that solution with you, is it shallow or is it deep, is it a holistic relationship? Community is about looking out for each other. (Outreach class, 8/22/20)

Program participants valued this emphasis on relationships, where they were not trying to get something from people but were working to strengthen their collective support in the community; as Mahjawe shared, "It was a very valuable lesson for me that the relationship and

trust you build with people and community is more important than getting a b c d done on a project" (Graduation class, 11/21/20).

Addressing Racial Conflict.

The developmental design of the program allowed for the building of relationships, trust, affection and common ground across difference, which helped participants to deal with conflict when it arose; the most significant conflict centered around race. This conflict became most acute during our class on racial justice. Alim's idea had been for the Black participants to help facilitate the class and share their personal experiences with anti-Black racism. We met with Celia, Mahjawe, Nubian and Reynardo to plan the class; while the planning discussion was productive, afterwards Celia and Nubian decided it would be too vulnerable to talk about their own experiences. We shifted course and opted for what we thought would be a less personal activity on four types of racism (structural, institutional, interpersonal, and internal). While the exercise itself went smoothly, strong emotions emerged in a conversation at the end of class when Celia and Faith, both Black women, expressed frustration that local non-profits and even neighborhood groups like the Tenderloin Community Association were controlled by white staff and residents. When Mahjawe tried to move on with the agenda, they said they felt their concerns were being shut down. Armand, as usual, was able to help diffuse the tension, but the class ended without resolution (journal reflection, 6/13/20).

Alim was able to bridge some of the divides that arose in that class through a follow-up conversation on racial justice that he set up to brainstorm ideas for redistributing funds from the police department to the Black community. Looking for a way to bring the group together, he decided to take a different approach, focusing on finding common ground. He started by reading the poem "Caged Bird" by Maya Angelou, and then said that he "wanted to see if we can have a discussion of how white supremacy affects all of our lives." He asked the group to talk in breakout groups about "your experience with that system as a caged bird," saying, "It's not just a Black issue and Black struggle. It pertains to all of us" (Racial justice conversation, 7/10/20). In

the report-backs, participants shared their own unique reaction to the poem; the mood, in contrast to our previous class, was one of listening and respect for different experiences. After this sharing, we moved into breakout groups and brainstormed ideas for where to allocate funds that the city planned to move from the police department into Black community programs as a result of the BLM protests. Instead of focusing only on the experience of the Black members of the program, Alim had shifted to focus on how white supremacy negatively impacted all of them in different but related ways, and how they could come together in concrete ways to challenge it.

Sunshine and Nubian also built a stronger relationship as a result of the conflict that arose in the racial justice class. While I understood Celia and Faith's frustrations to be with the structure of CCDC and other non-profits, not a critique of particular white members of the GEL program, Sunshine, a white trans woman, took Celia's comments to mean she shouldn't be there, and almost dropped out of the program: "I almost quit because of some things that Celia said–'No white people, no white people'" (interview, 11/28/20). While they were in different project groups and had no personal relationship before this, Nubian, a straight Black woman, reached out to Sunshine when she heard Sunshine was thinking of leaving the program. Nubian said during an Open Hour that they had a good conversation about race:

> It's a difficult discussion to have, and it's a discussion that you can only have genuinely and authentically when you trust people, because there is so much misunderstanding and fear around it. (Open Hour, 8/13/20)

Nubian explained in a later interview that what she learned in the class gave her the impetus to reach out to Sunshine: "The things I've learned in the class, when we talk about inclusion, that's what made me reach out to Sunshine for example. If I say I'm about inclusion, how would I want it to be shown to me, to extend that to others, without expectations? They're not always going to take the hand, but it makes an impact." Nubian said as a result of Sunshine sharing her feelings, Nubian was able to see that "who she was wasn't so different from me" (Interview, 11/10/20).

While Sunshine's initial reaction could be seen as a form of white fragility, Nubian used it as a way to teach and learn. She listened to Sunshine but also disagreed with her in the Open

Hour, talking about the importance for different groups to have their own spaces and that that need shouldn't be a threat to other groups. And Sunshine did reflect and learn from this experience, causing her to understand more where Celia was coming from,

> It's not just white people who have money and power, there are Black people who have money and power. But I understand where [Celia] was coming from too, because she is right though–most of the places that people do just come in and take over the things, that come in and take over, are predominantly the white people… To look at things through her eyes too, so I could see where she was coming from. That's part of why I didn't quit, I stepped back and saw it from that perspective and it made sense too. (Interview, 7/7/20).

Sunshine was able to hold the complexities of her own experience along with Celia's experience as a Black woman in a way that allowed Sunshine to evolve in her understanding of class and race oppression.

While Celia did not talk to me about what happened with Sunshine, she did share how the program helped her to find commonalities across race. Before the class on racial justice, she had expressed frustrations about Filipinos and other groups getting the benefits of racial justice work when they didn't have the same experience of historical systemic racism that Black people had. But at the end of the program, Celia reflected back on the activity on different types of racism that we had done. Reflecting on a moment where Bianca, who is Filipina, had shared a reflection about her own process to address racism internally, Celia said,

> To hear Bianca say that the work needs to come from within to change our views on other cultures. Do you remember she said something about that? And just to hear her say that, she's from a totally different culture. Listening to the Filipinos talk, a lot of them–to see that they feel exactly how I do, they know the answer. It's not just me that feels like that, it's other cultures too, that feel exactly like I do, they really do. (Interview, 11/2/20)

Experiences like these helped participants to see that people who might have more power in some ways (like Sunshine's white privilege or Bianca's relative position within communities of color) but had similar experiences in others could grow and learn, and shared common goals–this helped to *gel* the GEL program.

Tensions

The purpose of this study was to understand both the ways popular education programs effectively support praxis, democratic participation, and critical consciousness among participants, but also the tensions that arise in the work. The primary structural tension seen in both programs between hierarchy and democracy (described in Chapter IV) showed up in the GEL program as a conflict between the needs of residents for democratic power and the reality of the electoral decision-making structure process. In particular, participants wanted and needed decision-making power over access to affordable, safe, and habitable housing; Armand, Reynardo and others had organized to create this decision-making capacity within CCDC, but after it was shut down they shifted to more collaborative approaches, which created an organizing tension between collaboration and conflict. This also led to a pedagogical tension related to our ability as facilitators to link the class learning to the group project work through a critical praxis.

Relationship to City Hall: Collaboration or Conflict?

The GEL program generally encouraged a collaborative relationship between participants and structures of power, in particular city government structures. On the one hand, there was an awareness in the program that electoral power came from the organized power at the grassroots. On the other hand, the program prioritized a non-confrontational approach towards institutions of power. This created a tension that was not fully resolved about effective strategies to empower people at the grassroots level. In one housing sustainability meeting, the group talked about this question as whether to have an "inside" or "outside" strategy, agreeing that they needed both–an "inside-outside" strategy. As Cameron said, "No board or commission should exist without an inside/outside strategy because that's what gets the goods" (housing project meeting, 9/22/20).

While an "outside strategy" was theoretically one ingredient to put the community in the position to make stronger demands, in practice participants were trained to engage in political

change primarily through existing participation mechanisms. In the project groups, participants learned to speak in public hearings, address candidates on community issues, and also get commission seats–advisory roles in city government with influence but no legislative power. Armand said that the purpose of the electoral project was

> to build leaders, to bring them inside City Hall, to get appointed as commissioners so that the city is not populated by "experts"–the real experts are the people in the community. We just need to train them to be in these structures. (Electoral project meeting, 7/17/20)

The close relationship between program participants and elected leaders may have contributed to this view of electoral politics. In an interview with Celia, she said, "I know [four of the Board of Supervisor members] on a personal level" and that she was "really close" with two of the supervisor's aides. She said, "I know a lot of those people… I advocated for [the current district attorney's] campaign. I'm under his wings" (interview, 8/8/20). Personal relationships with city officials were seen as an important part of access and getting things done.

Because of this orientation, participants in the program often uncritically described city government as an effective means to solve community problems. For example Gabriela said that

> [the GEL program] is empowering the grassroots. Making them understand, educating them, informing their rights to voice out, especially in City Hall… Encouraging them that they are not alone in this world, they are being cared for, attended to, and the government is ready to help them (interview, 11/29/20).

And June said, "To be a part of this [class] is really great–and with the projects… to be able to work with the supes, and other non-profits or businesses" (interview, 8/8/20).

The assumption about the role of electoral politics also influenced what program participants saw as the options for their future organizing work. In one interview Sunshine described how she could use what she learned in the class to fight for trans rights, which had been her main motivation to take the class. She said the first steps she would take would be to "find out the problems and needs" of trans people and "get together, brainstorm about solutions"–basic community organizing steps. But then her next steps were to

> come up with plans and ideas–hold fundraisers or something to bring it to the public's attention. And then from there go farther, and just take it to City Hall, to the

> government, and try to get ballot measures or protections set up for us. (Interview, 11/28/20)

Because she had learned to work through the formal political process in the electoral project, that same process was what she could imagine using to fight for issues facing the trans community.

But not all GEL program members saw electoral politics as an effective way to make change. Reynardo, in particular, was frustrated with looking to City Hall to address community problems:

> They're still denying us to this very day, the rich and powerful, corporations, banks and everything else. It seems like they are all set up on chessboards, and we are the pawns that get rolled over… We go to these board meetings, for instance like at City Hall, and keep telling them stuff they already know. It's almost like a waste of time… Their reality excludes us. Their reality overlooks us. We don't count as numbers to them. We are empty, and have no power as far as they can see because they don't even see us. (Sustainable economies class, 9/12/20)

From Reynardo's perspective, the community did not have sufficient power to impact political decision-making in the face of more powerful players: "I don't see no change for the poor at all. [Mayor Breed] has been influenced–even a tough mayor, influenced by outside sources we can't see" (personal communication, 12/20).

James also expressed concern about the risks of using electoral politics as an organizing strategy. In one interview he said,

> I have less confidence in electoral politics than Armand does. I don't have a lot of confidence in it as an organizing project… It tends to create leaders, because certain people become identified with a particular politician, or have access to a particular politician, that elevates their leadership above the rest of the group in ways that I don't always find useful. I think it gives them a false sense of power. And I think it can be alienating to other members of the group. (Interview, 4/19/21)

For James, individual participants having a relationship with particular politicians could undermine the cohesiveness of the community. The result of this in the neighborhood was that, from James' perspective, "There's more lip service toward residents having a voice–there is a whole wave of resident leaders who are called upon by politicians or the heads of city departments or by the leadership of non-profits. They are now more consulted" (interview,

4/19/21). In his eyes this was in some ways a positive step, but from both his and Reynardo's perspectives it had not fundamentally altered the relationship of power between residents and city government.

While other participants did not make these same critiques, they frequently commented on the unresponsiveness of political leaders to issues facing the Tenderloin as the pandemic exacerbated the already crisis-level problems in the neighborhood. In meetings and classes, they talked about the massive increase in tents in the neighborhood while the mayor refused to move people into hotels, how the Tenderloin had the second highest number of COVID cases in the city, COVID risks for people who were unhoused, and the threat of evictions when the moratorium was set to lift September 30.[40] Julian said in one housing project meeting that, "The first thing is they should have moved people into tents before it blew up. There are empty hotel rooms. They refused to give up rooms on 7th Street… This could have been avoided for sure" (Housing sustainability meeting, 7/15/20). Participants were also involved in responding to the acute needs that the city wasn't addressing; for example in one meeting Celia talked about the increase in homelessness on Tenderloin streets:

> [Mayor] London Breed needs to have her ass pulled out of there. The lack of humanity is unbelievable, but I'm out there every day with these people; I've never seen anything like it. The encampments, people giving each other tents, masks, this person saying, "Celia, this person needs this…" (Electoral project meeting, 7/6/20)

[40] In the SROs, as for people who had to keep working in-person in congregate settings, this was a particularly serious issue. Because SROs are single rooms with shared bathrooms and no kitchen, there was no way for people to isolate or quarantine. Even for Tenderloin and SoMa residents who didn't live in SROs, they often lived in multigenerational housing "with cramped apartments and little green space" which meant that "neighbors — including San Francisco's largest per-capita population of children — have nowhere to safely recreate" (Sisto, 2020). Testing was not as easily accessible in the Tenderloin, SoMa or Treasure Island as it was in wealthier and whiter parts of the city (Chavez, 2020). As a result of all of these factors, the city's seven-day average case rate in September 2020 were 2.3 for white residents, 4.71 for Asian Americans, 6.5 for Black residents and 16.4 for Latinx residents (Chavez & Manseu, 2020). The rates were also significantly higher in the poorer neighborhoods of the city with higher populations of people of color and immigrants, and the highest in neighborhoods with the largest Black populations, which include the Tenderloin. At the same time, due to the risk of COVID spreading in congregate settings, San Francisco drastically cut its shelter capacity (Thadani, 2020). This forced an *additional* 1000 people onto the streets (Sisto, 2020) above the 5000 already there, and meant that the number of tents and makeshift structures on Tenderloin streets "exploded" by almost 300% between January and May 2020 (Thadini, 2020). After intense community pressure, the mayor finally agreed to move 1200 people into hotel rooms, but this was nowhere near the 7000 rooms that the Board of Supervisors had voted for (Sisto, 2020). Not surprisingly, deaths in the Tenderloin went up dramatically in 2020, and while they were not all directly attributed to COVID, "disruptions to services and shelter caused by the pandemic may have been a contributing factor" (para. 5). Although they may not have had all of these statistics at the time, program participants were seeing the effects in real time and processing all of this during the classes and project meetings.

Reynardo commented in a housing sustainability meeting that, "The pandemic is so severe, you would think the city would do more than it has done, instead has left them on the street. It blows my mind… People have big pockets, they're in the background, doing what they want done–giving each other high fives" (Housing sustainability meeting, 8/25/20). Participants recognized that politicians were being influenced by interests far more powerful than the residents.

The stark contrast between the reality on the streets and the pace of electoral change raises the question of why the program didn't teach participants to engage in more direct forms of organizing to pressure City Hall to make decisions consistent with resident needs. One contributing factor may have been that during the shelter-in-place, most in-person organizing work came to a standstill, which limited possibilities for protests and rallies. But it's unlikely this was the primary reason, because Armand didn't suggest training on how to organize virtual actions during COVID, for example. A second contributing factor may have been Armand's philosophy that direct action should only be a tool and not the goal, which came from his experiences in the Philippines where the movement was crushed by the government. His focus was empowerment of the grassroots, not activist battles with the state: as he said in one class, for structural change there is a need to "change the culture–new ways of thinking, new ways of doing things, that represent what people actually want… otherwise [we will have] what happened in the Philippines" (Political economy class, 7/11/20).

A third contributing factor may have been the role of CCDC as a continuing influence over the program. As described in the program overview, Armand had found limitations to his work in CCDC, including their shutting down of the successful tenant organizing work that he, James, Reynardo and other resident leaders were doing; they hoped the new organizations and the GEL program would be protected from those influences. In many ways, the GEL program was protected; it had a greater independence and freedom because of not being tied to a large city-funded non-profit. This independence enabled it to use the long-term developmental, organic political education, and coalition-building approach to build more autonomous efforts

of community leaders. But the line separating CCDC from the GEL program may not have been as clear as Armand would have hoped. In addition to Armand still being staff for CCDC, many members of the class also lived in CCDC buildings, and Mahjawe, June, and James were all on the CCDC board of directors. CCDC's role in preventing direct organizing among its own staff and residents, combined with the GEL program's emphasis on electoral politics and avoidance of confrontation, provides evidence that CCDC also may have extended a longer shadow to influence the program's less direct and more conventional form of democracy.

Teaching Tensions: Linking Reflection and Action

A second tension in the GEL program was that participants did not always have the opportunity to link the class learning to their project work through a *critical* praxis. While the classes were designed to supplement and support participants' project work, at times the program struggled to create a direct connection between them. This showed up in two ways: 1) the deeper critical analysis that happened in the classes was not consistently applied to the project work, and 2) needs that arose in the project work did not always get addressed in the classes.

From Reflection to Action.

In Freire's conception of praxis, students' engagement in struggle is informed by their own collective analysis of what is needed–this is what Freire argued could make education and social movements democratic. But in the GEL program, critical learning from the classes was not always applied to the project work. There were a number of classes that were designed to help participants apply learning to their projects, but often these were stand-alone classes that were often not directly incorporated into the projects. For example, Alim facilitated a class on "land-use organizing," or organizing around new development in the neighborhood. He shared a "capacity checklist" to help participants learn how to defend what he called their "equity baseline," meaning the minimum that housing developers should have to provide to build in the neighborhood (e.g. the number of affordable units). Alim had participants discuss the question,

"What are aspects in your community you are not willing not to compromise from outside players?" To which Mahjawe replied: "It's hard to say–it's hard to put it a certain way to say 'I won't accept it.' I work everyday to stop that but I'm still seeing it happen." Alim then had participants talk about how they could build their capacity so they could enforce their equity baseline. This exercise was inspiring to Mahjawe, who said that the equity baseline meant to him was "just don't back down, keep fighting no matter what they do, keep fighting for justice, for equity, whatever your demands are, don't compromise until get what you need" (Land-use organizing class part one, 8/10/20). There was a fundamental difference between Mahjawe's practical experience–that community standards were compromised regularly by corporate developers–and his reaction to the class material–that the community shouldn't give up on those standards.

In a project meeting after the class, I asked whether getting funding from the developer might undermine the autonomy of the alternative economy project. Mahjawe replied:

> I have mixed feelings about that part of it. There is a benefit we are getting from this… It's not forever - just for this period of time, it allows us to develop stronger alternative sources… How does that fit in with what we're doing? Does it damage or affect our intention or our goal?

Armand then replied:

> We can have a separate discussion about that–What is the principle behind it? Are we still in the right framework? We can talk about that. As Mahjawe said, this is just one of the many things in a package that we're trying to negotiate with the developer. We'll see–sometimes you need to use our enemies' resources to fight them. (Alternative economy meeting, 9/10/20)

While Mahjawe had some misgivings, he also saw the funding as supporting long-term independence, and from Armand's perspective, wresting concessions from the developer was a way to build more power. At the same time, they both acknowledged there were questions about this relationship and whether it supported the group's broader goals. Alim's "equity checklist" could have been an opportunity for deeper learning and assessment of strategy, but it was not

addressed in the project group's work negotiating with the developer, the place where the class learning was directly applicable.

Similarly, the class we facilitated on elections described earlier led to in-depth class reflection on the role of social movements in electoral politics. In class report-backs from breakout groups, Nubian said that "grassroots movements fuel the politicians" and that the "movement comes from the bottom"; Julian said, "Politicians want to follow the masses because they want to get elected–they want to react to the social movement that's happening" ("Why Elections Matter" class, 7/11/20). But this discussion did not get brought up again in the electoral organizing project to analyze how they could ensure their electoral work was grounded in community power.

While I was not clear on why this critical reflection didn't happen, my sense was that Armand was invested in the outcomes of the electoral approach as well as successful negotiations with the developer, so he wasn't able or willing to slow down and see what was or wasn't working. On the one hand, concrete outcomes helped the groups to see their ability to accomplish collective goals. On the other hand, the lack of critical reflection may have resulted in a lack of praxis for the group, which then translated into a less democratic process, because they didn't have the opportunity to decide if their strategies were producing the desired results. Ultimately this may have meant less power for their grassroots agenda.

From Action to Reflection.

From the perspective of praxis, just as there was not always a way to link class learning to the projects, there also wasn't a clear way to link challenges that came up in the project work back to the classes. At times the project groups struggled to move forward in their work, but their experiences were not used to critically reflect and analyze what they might do differently when they hit roadblocks.

For example, in July the 6th Street project group spent the meetings creating a PowerPoint presentation for the developer; they also worked on a brochure for outreach to SRO

residents. Armand and June facilitated a careful process of coming to agreement on the brochure–the slogans, wording, photos, colors, and layout. At multiple points Anita expressed frustration that the work itself was not happening more quickly:

> June: You want to snap fingers, have it done right away.
> Armand: Like magic.
> Anita: We keep talking and talking, we don't do anything.
> Armand: This is part of doing–we are undoing a 50 year process in SoMa. It takes planning.
> Anita: We make a plan, but have done nothing.
> June: We are coming up with solutions. Action comes after the solution. We have to think of the solution.
> Anita: Maybe the solution will come after COVID, then we will implement with action.
> Armand: Anita, next meeting you are facilitating. Make sure you facilitate based on action that you want. Three things - big belly, regular cleaning, education. (6th Street project meeting, 7/27/20)

Anita did facilitate the next two meetings, but the group still struggled to make progress. At the end of the program in November, the group held their activation event that consisted of tabling and outreach on 6th Street about the project, but the other goals that they had did not materialize. They didn't find a way to assess the source of Anita's frustrations or whether there was something they could do to make their work more effective.

Similarly, in the housing sustainability group, towards the end of the program one of the community members who had joined the group began to express frustrations about the work not getting done. The SRO oversight commission had not yet fallen into place, and the tenants' circles had been canceled twice due to miscommunication and participants being overwhelmed by other responsibilities. When it was time for Erin's report-back on the oversight board, she said, "Due to the fact that there wasn't a tenants' circle, we have lost that support. I don't see us moving forward. Over the past year, we have been hitting walls." Shannon responded:

> May I say that we didn't have a lot of people with a lot of tools–we have yourself, Leffet, Erin, and Tenaya. I have some tools, but not tools to move things forward. I need tools to get a foundation going; without a foundation we aren't going nowhere. (Housing sustainability meeting, 11/25/20)

Erin and Shannon were both committed in the long-term to the goals and to the work, but did not feel they had all the tools to move their housing sustainability projects forward; as with Anita, this was expressed through frustration.

Where could these tools have come from? A change that was made in the design of the classes may point to one source. In the initial planning document as developed by James, the second half of the program was planned as peer meetings and peer trainings after the first half of content classes. But when we got closer to the second half, the peer meetings/trainings were changed to content classes. Armand and Alim chose guest facilitators for three of the classes who gave presentations on political economy, sustainable economic models, and land-use organizing. Armand wanted there to be time for project groups to share their work with each other, but with full classes devoted to check-ins and content, there was very little time left for this sharing and it was usually rushed, without comprehensive peer feedback. Our "Open Hour" was a way for *us* as teachers to support participants, but it didn't cultivate peer support or collective critical reflection. It was not until after the program ended and James shared with me the vision he had for the class that I understood the value of peer meetings and trainings to support the project work. Could some of the tools and approach that James had proposed for the classes been effective to address the challenges that arose? If we had prioritized the time, the peer support, and the information that participants' needed based on listening closely to the needs that arose, could we have better supported their effectiveness in reaching their goals? I'll return to these questions in the discussion below.

Discussion

The GEL program, while initiated as a pilot program at the very beginning of the destabilizing coronavirus pandemic in March of 2020, nonetheless succeeded in being an innovative and transformative popular education program for participants. The program functioned out of a deep respect for participants' agency, providing the structure so that, as Truscello and Nangwaya (2017) describe in their distinction of organizing from mobilizing, "The

socially marginalized are placed in organizing situations where they are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitude to work for their own freedom and the construction of a transformed social reality" (p. 18). It shows how the program cultivated respect both for people's experiences *and* respect for their "abilities to learn and to act and to shape their own lives. You have to have confidence that people can do that" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 177-178). In this way the program followed Horton's understanding of the relationship between education and democracy:

> If we are to have a democratic society, people must find or invent new channels through which decisions can be made. Given genuine decision-making powers, people will not only learn rapidly to make socially useful decisions, but they will assume responsibility for carrying out decisions based on their collective judgment. The problem is not that people will make irresponsible or wrong decisions. It is rather, *to convince people who have had their ideas excluded in the past that their involvement will have meaning and their ideas will be respected* (Horton, 1997, p. 134; emphasis added).

The GEL program was able to convince people their involvement would have meaning by providing spaces for them to practice collectively addressing neighborhood and citywide issues.

This approach ran counter to the dominant narratives of low-income residents as either responsible for their circumstances or simply in need of social services to make it within the existing system; as Zweig (2000) argues,

> The tendency to "blame the victim" is extremely powerful. For conservatives, it justifies a certain hardness toward the poor, together with calls for the poor to transform themselves, their attitudes, their culture and values, before they can expect to be treated with respect. For liberals, it justifies a charitable attitude and policies designed to help the poor through education and training, and by teaching the poor proper work attitudes and behavior... the lack of a class context for poverty leads to a variety of programs designed to change the poor, to make them more mainstream. (p. 89-90)

The GEL program focused on the fundamental problems as *outside* of the residents themselves; instead of trying to "change the poor," the program focused on empowering them to address problems *they* identified, including access to affordable housing.

Through the community-based and coalition-oriented project work, participants were able to collectively intervene to address problems that they previously recognized but saw no way to change. The program's emphasis on enabling participants to see the conditions of the

Tenderloin and SoMa as problems that could be addressed instead of accepted follows Freire's (2000) concept of problem-posing pedagogy, where as described in Chapter II, aspects of people's lives that they may have thought of as unchangeable are "re-presented" back to them as problems for their consideration so that they can come to "perceive their state not as fated and unalterable, but merely as limiting—and therefore challenging" (p. 85). Through collective dialogue and then planning action on these "limit-situations," along with the building up of trust, unity, and solidarity among participants and with peers in the neighborhoods, participants engaged in a collective praxis that enabled them to see themselves as capable of taking action.

As Payne (2008) describes Ella Baker, the program's *developmental* emphasis was essential because like Baker and Citizenship Schools teacher Septima Clark, Armand possessed a "profound confidence in the capacity of ordinary people to grow and develop" (p. 62). Payne writes that this confidence is the "foundation of the thinking" for "organizer-teachers:"

> To the degree that they are focused on what people can become and the developmental steps they need to get there, they can look unflinchingly at what people actually are in the moment. Their deepest commitment isn't just to what people are, but to what they can become.... Organizer-teachers can believe simultaneously in individual agency and a structural critique of society. (p. 62).

Because most participants had only limited experience with any kind of political or community work, they needed experience, practice, and encouragement to be able to participate fully. Similar to Payne's (2008) description of Ella Baker's work, the program helped participants to "understand their own potential and their own capacity to act on the issues that mattered to them" (p. 56). In contrast to a mobilizing model, with its "quick-fix, band-aid type solution to problems" (Affiong, 2017), the GEL program emphasized a long-term approach of grassroots organizing, supporting participants' "individual participation, civic engagement, and institutional capacity at the local level" (Voss & Williams, 2012, p. 359).

The horizontal *coalition-building* approach enabled people to practice building relationships of mutuality and solidarity across divisions. Von Kotze et al. (2016) write that, "It is not enough for groups to act as isolated collectives... they do need to join with larger

collectives or social movements to strengthen possibilities for deep-rooted transformation" (p. 111). By doing broad-based work across ethnic lines in particular, the program strengthened common goals and prevented a siloed anti-democratic organizing ethic. Acevedo (1992) writes that to build larger movements, it is necessary to "establish links of solidarity among diverse social groups that, for historical reasons, could share the same political project" (p. 49) and the GEL program did this by bringing people Filipino, Black and white residents together around shared needs.

At the same time, the program's approach also raises questions about how popular education programs respond to the depoliticizing tendencies of government and non-profits. By emphasizing a more collaborative relationship with City Hall, participants were encouraged to work through the existing system, albeit collectively, rather than challenge it. Piven and Cloward (1977) argue that, there are "two systems of power, one based on wealth and one based on votes" and that how much influence people have is "consistently determined by location in the class structure." They argue that since power functions outside the formal system, so must people at the grassroots: "So long as lower-class groups abided by the norms governing the electoral-representative system," they will have little influence, and so must include "protest tactics that defy political norms" (p. 4).[41] Armand said about the program,

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[41] For example, the Black Lives Matter uprisings led to many different types of sustained activism and organizing; the community collaboration with the city on how to reallocate funding that the GEL program participated in was just one approach, and among the more conservative compared to more militant actions like street protests, marches, and occupations of city officials' offices. There is no doubt that the protests made the reallocation of funds possible; as Piven and Cloward (1977) argue, "It is usually when unrest among the lower classes breaks out of the confines of electoral procedures that the poor may have some influence, for the instability and polarization they then threaten to create by their actions in the factories or in the streets may force some response from electoral leaders" (p. 15). It is also true that both electoral and protest approaches can be used at the same time, but without a continued presence in the streets, electoral processes are not under enough sustained pressure to follow through on the community's demands. In fact this appears to be what happened with the police budget, as in June 2021 it was reported that while the initiative to "tackle disparities" in the Black community was going forward, the money would come from the general fund instead of SFPD's budget–which actually increased. Schneider and Irwin (2021) report that, "For the proposed 2021-22 budget, the San Francisco Police Department's allocation will decrease by $6 million, from about $668 million to $661 million…However, in the following fiscal year, the city projects the police budget will increase once again to $689 million. That's close to the police budget's all-time high of $692 million in FY 2019-20. By way of comparison, in FY 2010-11, the police budget weighed in at $445 million" (para. 9). An organizer from the group Defund SFPD was quoted as saying, "This is something we have to fight over and over again. The mayor comes out with these seemingly bold and aggressive plans using the language of social justice, but underneath are really status quo, if not worse, policies" (Schneider & Irwin, 2021, para. 6).

> This is not just about learning but about critiquing existing systems. Who is defining democracy? If someone defines democracy who controls the existing system, they will define it for them, not for us. So that's why this is one way of defining what a real democracy is from the grassroots. (Personal communication, 4/23/21)

The GEL program *did* enable participants to define "what a real democracy is from the grassroots" through its developmental and coalition-building work, yet it also allowed the structure and processes of city government to shape many of the strategies and tactics of the program.

By not engaging participants in the "forms of collective action that go beyond the current prescriptions of the authorities" as part of its regular practice (Tilly, 1978, p. 23), the program may have funneled participants into institutional tactics that could not change power relations in the fundamental ways the program sought. Because theoretically Armand believed in direct action as a tool to provide power behind electoral efforts, that it was not an intentional part of the program may reflect INCITE and others' observations about the way the non-profit industrial complex "manages and controls dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus" (p. 8). This will be discussed more in Chapter VIII.

Related to this, while the projects were rooted in participant experience and issues, the program did not always provide the space or tools to critically reflect on project work. The process of praxis is not just reflecting and then acting, but then reflecting on the action that has been taken in order to then be able to take more effective, more transformative action. For this reason, Freire (2000) described not just reflection but *critical* reflection as a necessary part of praxis: "When the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection" (p. 66). The program as initially designed had extensive time as well as tools for peer reflection, evaluation, and troubleshooting, which may have helped participants to work through some of the tensions around how to move the work forward. Questions of praxis and democracy are questions about power; when people can learn from their own actions, they can assess what power they do have, what they are doing

that is working, and what they need to do differently to build their power to win the changes they envision.

Despite these limitations, in many ways the GEL program epitomized the approach to organizing that Ella Baker called "spadework," where organizers took the time needed to cultivate participants at the grassroots level (Hogan, 2009, p. 68). Truscello & Nangwaya (2017) write that, "It is impossible to exaggerate the importance behind enabling the people to become the architects of the process and movements for liberation" (p. 19); while the program engaged primarily in tactics within the formal political system, it nonetheless contributed to participants' transformed relationships to each other and to the problems of their neighborhood and city.

CHAPTER VI: THE WORKERS' DIALOGUE

This chapter describes how in its practice the Workers' Dialogue provided a space for independent reflection and collective action among union members in education and healthcare unions. Focusing on the six month-long workshops I observed between June and December 2020, I show how these workshops encouraged participants to both build more democratic unions and organize for more power in their workplaces. While as Noam Chomsky argues, ideally unions are "the way poor people, working people can organize to develop ideas, to develop programs, to act with mutual aid and solidarity to achieve their goals" (Chomsky, Democracy Now, 12/31/21), in reality, as described in Chapter I, the business union model means workers don't have a structure or culture to self-organize. To remedy this, the Workers' Dialogue workshops gave people the free space to develop ideas for "mutual aid and solidarity," despite not only the pressure from their employers but often a lack of support from their own unions. This chapter first describes the larger organizing strategy that the Workers' Dialogue contributed to, and then its pedagogical practice. It also explores two pedagogical tensions I identified in the program related to the larger structural tension of hierarchy v. democracy: the first was how facilitators navigated the need to respect participants' own decision-making process while still also working to move them in a direction that could give them more power,

and the second was facilitators' discouragement of coalition-building with parents until participants had built more power with coworkers.

Organizing Strategy of the Workers' Dialogue: Democracy for Power

In the Workers' Dialogue, workshop facilitators were not only educators but also experienced organizers, working to build stronger and more radicalized unions that could fundamentally change the relations of power in society. Thus the Workers' Dialogue functioned in the context of, and contributed to, a larger movement to build rank and file power through a particular organizing strategy. This strategy consisted of two main pieces: 1) encouraging and making space for democratic participation within unions and 2) using this increased democratic participation to build more power in the workplace. One participant summarized this approach: "The initiative can come from rank-and-file members; we can help move union leadership. We don't have to wait for the union leadership or our own bosses to come up with solutions to problems" (NEEA workshop, 8/4/20).

Democracy in the Union

As described above, the Workers' Dialogue came out of efforts by the Labor Network to cultivate more democracy within unions, based on the belief that unions were the best vehicle to build power, and that "the power of the union lies in the participation of its members, and it requires democracy to make members want to be involved" (Parker & Gruelle, 1999, p. 14). As Carlson (2017) notes in her discussion of top-down versus radical democratic forms of unionism:

> Labor unions are capable of reproducing power inequalities and privilege within their governance. When these forms of inequality are reproduced through institutions tasked with representing poor and working-class communities… only the most privileged are able to access positions of authority in labor movements. (p. 86)

Therefore union leadership may want member *participation* without member *decision-making:* "Officials who want the ranks involved as troops often see rank and file *leadership* as a risk. Members may gain skills and confidence; they may demand even more say-so" (p. 28).

The Workers' Dialogue sought to cultivate this demand for "more say-so," which was why each of the six workshops was sponsored by one of the three opposition caucuses described above. Most participants were already active in the caucuses or were invited to workshops by caucus leadership; the exception was the New England union where the caucus had won leadership, and some participants attended in response to statewide announcements sent out by the union. This was in sharp contrast to the experience of popular educators in some of the studies described in the literature review, who weren't sure how to respond to complaints from members about their unions because they were there at the invitation of the union itself. Because of the autonomous space they had carved out, Workers' Dialogue facilitators were free to encourage participants not to back down when they came up against the top-down culture of their unions.

This role was especially important in the context of COVID-19. During the time of the workshops I observed, participants were facing the scary and confusing early stages of the pandemic as front-line workers. During the sessions, they talked about the extraordinary safety concerns related to the spread of COVID in their workplaces, and the overall pressure and stress due to the radical changes to their work lives. In the summer of 2020, educators questioned whether it was safe to reopen school buildings at all, and when many participants' schools did reopen–often with no notice after assuring staff they would be involved in the decision–participants talked about the myriad of concerns related to ensuring a safe work environment. These included not having enough PPE (personal protective equipment), the number of students in a classroom and on buses, how to address students not wearing masks, inadequate ventilation in buildings, and changing case rate criteria for switching to remote learning. They also talked about the vast increase to their workloads, being forced to teach remote and in-person at the same time, scrutiny and criticism from parents about remote teaching, having to keep kids on screen for many hours a day, teaching protocols changed constantly by their administrations, and exhaustion. Healthcare union members talked about the significant risk of COVID they

faced as front-line healthcare workers, the lack of PPE and access to testing, coworkers working after testing positive because of staffing shortages, and the hospitals not informing staff if they had been exposed. And in every session they talked about the short staffing which had already been a significant issue and was now at a crisis level, leaving people burnt out.

Although these issues were in the front of workers' minds, leadership of many participants' local unions was not stepping forward to address them. In some cases, local union leadership was actively aligned with management and unresponsive to worker concerns; one participant described a union representative as "cozy with the administration and not representing the members" (NEEA workshop, 11/5/20). In these situations, the workshops strengthened participants' ability to stand up to both their leadership and administration. In other cases, local unions were simply not strong enough to have an impact, and needed the encouragement and involvement of the membership. For example Kate, a special education teacher who was on her union's bargaining team but was not a union officer, described in one session how she got teachers together to talk about concerns related to COVID and develop a list of questions for the administration. Rosa asked her how the union had responded, and she said, "I shared it with the [union] president; he called and thanked me. He hadn't realized how everyone was feeling. He decided to call a membership meeting for early next week" (NEEA workshop, 7/28/20).

There were many examples, as will be described in this and the following chapter, where like Kate, workshop participants took the lessons they learned from the workshop and initiated autonomous union activity–reaching out to coworkers, creating surveys, organizing meetings, and in some cases directly standing up to union leadership. The new relationships that came out of the workshops with other members who were involved in the caucuses, and the existence of the caucuses themselves, gave them a *structure* to continue their involvement in the union in a meaningful, bottom-up way after the workshop was over. This countered the typical union bureaucracy, where, as Naomi described it in one healthcare workers' workshop,

> ...the general attitude of union leadership is, if you have a problem, call your rep, grievance officer, or labor lawyer and they'll fix it for you... The theory behind that is that a small number of people with a lot of expertise will take care of your problems for you... What we've discovered, if you use that approach, over time the people who are [leaders] tend to align with the HR or director of nursing. They start to think that their job is simply to solve problems by having conversations with the bosses. (CHW workshop, 10/26/20)

The Workers' Dialogue subverted this approach by repeatedly encouraging the rank and file members to collectively address problems themselves as part of the union. Rosa explained this in one educators' workshop: "It's important to talk things through... I keep hearing the idea of waiting for someone else to decide... But as organizers you create spaces; you decide what you are willing to put up with or not" (NEEA workshop, 7/14/20).

Over time, this approach built a new layer of rank and file organizing within the unions. For example Nina, now an executive board member in the healthcare workers' union, shared that,

> I think that that's just something our group from the original [Workers' Dialogue] and talking points we always try to make is that we have to strive to be more democratic with each other, more inclusive. I don't know that that's necessarily something commonly talked about in local unions, because they're typically top-down. We're working really hard to make it bottom-up–unions aren't this brick building, they're the members. If you don't have the relationships, you're never gonna tip that pyramid in the other direction. (Interview, 8/25/20)

The workshop was thus one piece of building a different kind of labor movement from the ground up, through both new organizing relationships and a culture of union democracy–"a culture of control by the members" (Parker & Gruelle, 1999, p. 1)

Power in the Workplace

Union democracy was not the final goal for the Workers' Dialogue, but in service of workers having more power over their working conditions. Rosa said in one session, "With the pandemic, how often I hear people waiting for someone else to tell them–waiting for the superintendent. Our job as organizers is to bring people together, and we're gonna decide how to solve this problem" (NEEA workshop, 7/28/20). Their focus was on how to change the *balance of power* in any given workplace, meaning an analysis and then action on "who has

power over us, how are we using it, do we agree, if we don't agree, what are we going to do to change it?" (Naomi, CHW workshop, 7/29/20).

This approach led to members taking initiative on workplace issues–their independent *union* activity translated to more militant *workplace* action. For example, during one of the New England educators' union caucus workshops at the end of the summer, a community college counselor who was a new union secretary shared concerns she and coworkers had about returning to work in person in the fall. After talking it through in the workshop, she helped organize a meeting with other counselors in her local to make a list of COVID safety demands, which they then presented in a meeting to management. In the healthcare union, two workshop participants went on to help speak at rallies organized by the union caucus to protest the potential sale of one of their long-term care facilities and the closure of a hospital pharmacy. Nina, one of the caucus leaders, told me that Donna, who had gone through the Workers' Dialogue, "had a job action last week because they closed the pharmacy used by the staff; we did a letter delivery and petition, and Donna spoke. That was a huge step for her" (personal communication, 11/20/21).

While many of these actions that took place during the six workshops were relatively small, they contributed to a larger strategy of shifting the balance of power that in some cases contributed to big wins. For example, in the Fall of 2020 the healthcare union caucus (whose leadership had all attended Workers' Dialogues) won all executive board seats that it ran for but one, and then used this new strength to help a sister union local with a strike at a nearby hospital in the Fall of 2021. While the president of that union was an "anti-vaxxer" (Naomi, 10/30/21), the Workers' Dialogue approach of finding common ground and using militancy around demands–including large and loud picket lines–contributed to winning the strike, including safe staffing ratios for most positions.

While the Workers' Dialogue sought to win these kinds of significant concrete changes, its emphasis was on *the workers' themselves making these wins*, not staff organizers or leaders

doing it for them. This showed a fundamental difference between the Workers' Dialogue and another labor education program that some participants had also attended, run by U.S. labor organizer Jane McAlevey. One Workers' Dialogue participant who had recently attended McAlevey's "Strike School" said that,

> Jane is trying to win. Beat back austerity, win the Green New Deal–kick the shit out of the capitalists, win things. I think [the Labor Network] has been trying to–what? Have workers have power in their unions. It's about democracy. Sometimes I think at the cost of winning. (Interview with 5/20/21)

Workers' Dialogue facilitators, by contrast, had a different view:

> The struggle for union democracy is *absolutely essential if we are to build real class power. It's not an end in itself… it is the only path to actually winning…* If–according to McAlevey–you win, but the union members are still just taking orders from the boss's playbook (in this case, the union bosses' playbook)… then what has actually been won? (Naomi, personal communication, 1/1/22; emphasis in original).

While both programs shared the goal of fundamental social and economic changes, there was a significant philosophical and thus strategic difference, where the Workers' Dialogue sought to change the balance of power on a micro level in order to change it on a macro level. This approach followed Freire's emphatic statement that the struggle of the oppressed

> does not lie *simply* in having more to eat (although it does involve having more to eat and cannot fail to include this aspect). The oppressed have been destroyed precisely because their situation has reduced them to things. In order to regain their humanity they must cease to be things and fight as men and women. This is a radical requirement. They cannot enter the struggle as objects in order *later* to become human beings. (Freire, 2000, p. 68)

The next section focuses in more detail on how the workshop's pedagogical practice supported participants' ability to enter the struggle as "Subjects" by engaging them in dialogue about their lived experiences at work "in the here and now" (Freire, 2000, p. 85).

Pedagogical Practices of the Workers' Dialogue

In popular education, there is an understanding that while organizing can build grassroots power, intentional spaces for learning can democratize and strengthen the organizing process by giving people the opportunity to practice and develop as organizers. The Workers' Dialogue had a pedagogical approach that followed Parker & Gruelle' (1999) argument that

union democracy "*needs to be taught, in this individualistic society*" and that a "union culture means that it becomes second nature for members to take a stand for solidarity when they see a need" (p. 38; emphasis added)–but it did not use a banking approach to teaching; instead it relied on dialogue, bringing out and sharing the wisdom in the group. The pedagogical approach of the Workers' Dialogue contributed to the democratizing and collectivizing work of the union caucuses in three ways: the program created a space for participants to 1) reflect collectively on their workplace experiences in order to bring out organizing knowledge that ran counter to the hegemonic narratives from employers and even their own unions, 2) practice finding a platform for collective action, and 3) work through fear and retaliation.

"Not Just Telling Stories": Reflecting on Experiences with Power

> In *A Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire (2000) argued that in the educational process,
>
> > The point of departure must always be with men and women in the "here and now," which constitutes the situ-ation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene. Only by starting from this situation—which determines their perception of it—can they begin to move. (p. 85)

But as described in Chapter I, a feature of many, if not most labor education programs is that they use a standardized curriculum. In contrast, one of the key features of the Workers' Dialogue was that there was no curriculum and "the content is entirely what they bring (interview with Naomi, 4/2/21). Philip explained that, "It's obvious from the get-go that it's not about the people facilitating, it's about you [the participants]." He said, "To prove it, there is no agenda, it's fluid. We go where you take it. We have values, skills that people need to learn to bring an equilibrium to the balance of power. But this is your journey" (interview, 11/16/20). And as Andrea said in our interview, "There is no PowerPoint, there is no syllabus, there is no agenda. It's just a conversation, a guided conversation with provoking questions" (interview, 12/29/20).

While the Workers' Dialogue was rooted in participant experience, the purpose was not "just to tell stories": Rosa told me, "It's not boundless space. We are here to do a certain kind of work… We are not here to tell stories just to tell stories. There is a focus that is very clear" (interview with Rosa, 9/4/20). This focus was connecting the content–participants' own

experiences at work–back to the four-step organizing framework to create a structure that any participant could actively enter into no matter their current level of union engagement. Naomi explained that, "We are trying to create a framework, a way to understand reality, a way of thinking, that allows people to see themselves as part of a dynamic process" (personal communication, 5/5/21).

Instead of a PowerPoint or lecture, the Workers' Dialogue began with the facilitators first asking generative questions which brought out participants' direct experiences in their unions and workplaces. Participants were then encouraged to analyze these experiences so that they could then collectively *reflect on and learn them*; as Philip said in the first Educators United caucus session, "We are going to engage in analyzing stories… we will be curious about the stories we heard, so we can pull out the learnings we can gleam from these stories" (Educators United workshop, 11/17/20). Through the process of dialogue, there was an organic *distilling of organizing lessons* about values and principles that could help them better access their collective power.

Eliciting the Stories.

Facilitators set the tone of each workshop by asking participants a question that could help to focus the conversations on participants' experiences with power in their unions and workplaces. For example, Naomi started one of the hospital workers' workshops with, "I want to ask you to think about a time in your work life when you felt that it was going to be necessary to act with some courage" (CHW, 7/29/20), and Philip opened the Educators United caucus workshop with, "The first question I'd like you to ponder… is to talk about the efforts that you have taken or have seen other people take to create a space for greater participation, greater involvement by [union] members" (Educators United workshop, 11/17/20).

These questions elicited stories about people's direct experiences in their workplaces. For example, at the beginning of the first workshop I observed with New England educators,

Rosa asked participants to "tell us a story of a time when you saw a problem in your workplace and you worked to solve that problem." A paraeducator named Sara offered to start:

> I can bring up something. Paras are pulled to cover classroom after classroom, but we aren't compensated. If it's a full day we are compensated, but an hour here, hour there– We filed a grievance, went in front of the school committee, and kept fighting. We went to arbitration… now we are compensated for it. That's one way we didn't give up–we kept fighting.

Rosa asked her to describe how she had gotten people together, and she shared how they met to talk about the problem, and then documented the work they were doing because "in the administration's eyes, we were just babysitting." They filed a collective grievance, and "kept fighting," eventually winning in arbitration (NEEA workshop, 7/14/20).[42] This began what Rosa called the "long conversation" where participants shared experiences they had had trying to address problems in their workplaces.

The questions facilitators started off with also gave participants the space to reflect on their struggles within their unions. For example in the Educators' United workshop, after George's prompt asking people about "efforts that you have taken or have seen other people take to create a space for greater participation," Eric talked about how he had participated in the union's summer organizing campaign to knock on members' doors and get them involved in the union. He had found that people were reticent to get involved because of fear of their administrations and being overwhelmed by their workloads, but said he also heard many "horror stories" about how members "didn't get a lot of support from the union." This experience had led him to get more involved because "something needs to change in order for people to feel they would want to be a part of it" (Educators United workshop, 11/17/20).

These experiences showed how participants utilized the open space to share their struggles and successes on two fronts: first about what they needed at work, and second how to make their union receptive and open to these needs so they could be addressed. Via, a Mandarin

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[42] A grievance is a multi-step complaint process for union members to resolve violations of their union contract, often ending in binding arbitration.

language high school teacher who before the workshop had felt hesitant to trust anyone at school about her issues at work, articulated this when she said in one interview after the workshop that, "I feel this is a safe environment–I don't get punished just by sharing something against the school or something we feel but dare not to speak up in the school setting. In the school there is always cautiousness–you have to think three times before you speak." In contrast, she said, the workshop allowed participants to share their "true voice" and she realized that " if everyone else can share in their true voice, then I should [too]" (interview, 8/17/20).

The autonomous space that had been created made it possible for participants to openly share the full range of their experience, as opposed to what their school administrations, hospital management, or even union leadership might expect them to say. For example, in one of the healthcare caucus workshops, a participant expressed exasperation with politicians being believed over healthcare workers about the lack of PPE:

> One thing that worked against us is the politicians, so many in office [were saying] "There is no reason they shouldn't have enough PPE; we sent all the supplies." People are getting two sides of the story–while most people want to listen to the frontline workers because we are in the thick of it, so many listen to those in office… To this day we still don't have enough PPE, enough supplies to go around. (CHW workshop, 11/9/20)

And Charity, an instructional aide in the Educators United Caucus shared that,

> Life skills is what I do; I'm a one-on-one teacher. My kid doesn't wear a mask due to his behavior. I have to run after kids. From the instructional aides life skills population, that's our main concern–not having enough PPE. We didn't have enough then, how is this going to work? That's kind of what I'm scared of. Everyone is scared and nervous. And my classroom doesn't have windows–so how do you deal with that? Before COVID [it was already bad]–so now it's just insane. (Educators United workshop, 12/8/20).

The *workers'* side of the story was what the opening questions brought out, giving participants the opportunity to hear from each other what was really happening in their workplaces and unions, and what they were doing about it.

Learning From the Stories.

After participants shared initial stories about their experiences at work and in their unions, facilitators encouraged them to collectively reflect on what they could learn from these experiences. Philip explained this when he said, "We want to hear your stories but we also want

to hear what you learned. The story is real important but it's an old organizing adage–you don't learn from the action; you learn from analyzing and debriefing the action… (Educators United workshop, 11/17/20. Through dialogue the facilitators worked to help participants become attuned to the collective knowledge of their own experiences about how to solve problems. This knowledge constituted what Worthen (2014) calls the "forbidden lessons" of labor education, because it was the knowledge that would help participants understand and better access their own collective power: "If this knowledge was just about producing a better product, management might welcome it. But since it is also about making a bad job into a good job… it is rarely welcome" (p. 14). Naomi said she thought of this process as helping participants identify "the conflict between hegemonic narrative and lived experience" (personal communication, 12/29/21).

To elicit this analysis, facilitators listened carefully and asked very specific questions to pull out how participants had taken action in each situation, for example Rosa asked Sara, "Who was we?" and "How did you get people together?" (NEEA workshop, 7/14/20). They also encouraged participants to ask questions of each other, as Philip did in the first session of the Educators United caucus workshop when he said, "I invite you to be curious also, to ask questions of your colleagues, once again to practice assessing the balance of power. What do you hear? What do you want to know more about in this story?" (Educators United workshop, 11/17/20). Facilitators elicited this knowledge from the group and added their own, when applicable, to expand the collective counter-hegemonic wisdom available to participants. Some of the "hidden lessons" that came out of the workshops were for participants to *act on their values, not act alone*, *listen for common issues*, *use their own power*, and *not give up*.

The principle of *acting on values* came up most strongly in the first of the two healthcare workers' workshops, when Naomi asked the group to reflect on a time that they had had to act with some courage. Nancy, an operating room nurse, shared a story about having been asked to "manipulate the system to discharge a patient" which she said was "essentially insurance fraud"

and could have resulted in her losing her license. She refused, and said she "was so upset" that she was "in tears." Others too shared stories about having to push back on management in order to do what they professionally felt was best for the patients. Jen, an occupational therapist, said,

> I'm choosing on a daily basis to follow my own values, to push back to make sure as a team we make the right decisions for patients. [Management is] always looking at the business end of things and we are pushed to do things that are not the most ethical for the patient getting the best care or meeting their needs in the best possible way… Or trying to change things based on insurance. It's always a struggle. (Interview, 9/11/20)

Other participants then talked about how hard it was to do what was right in an environment where management was focused on "the bottom line;" for example Diandra, a nurse in a long-term care facility, said that the "culture in the organization is not one of honesty and integrity… It's difficult to work for an employer that lacks the same values." Naomi used these comments to connect their stories back to what power looked like in their workplaces, posing back to them that this was the "reality of working for an employer whose motivation is different from your motivation as front line care workers… Do you agree with that? The bottom line is…" Diandra responded, "Money," and others echoed, "Money." Naomi asked, "Do you think that's a problem?" Diandra replied, "Huge." Naomi reflected back to them, "They are following the bottom line; you are following values for patients" (CHW workshop, 7/29/20). In her response Naomi validated their lived experience and helped them to connect that experience with the need for organizing to assert their values, saying this was "why it's so important to come together with coworkers to reassert your intelligence, your ability to solve problems. You can't look to the employer to recognize those things, only to each other for recognition and encouragement. This organizing training is to strengthen that muscle–how we support one another" (CHW workshop, 7/29/20).

A second organizing principle that facilitators elicited from participant experience was to *not act alone,* reflecting Worthen's (2014) argument that "individuals fighting alone have very little chance of winning" due to the "inequality of power in the workplace" (p. 5). At various times during the workshops, participants suggested speaking up individually about concerns in

their workplaces. Facilitators tried to help participants recognize that to take action on their own could make them vulnerable and was likely to be less effective: For example Philip said to the Educators United caucus, "We have at our hands immense power. When you do things by yourself you are doing a favor to the administration" (Educators United session 3, 11/24/20).

This lesson came out during the last session of the Educators United caucus when the group was planning a meeting around the district's plan to move from remote to hybrid teaching. Vanessa, who had arrived late to the session, suddenly jumped in about the need to address the racism in the school district around hiring, treatment of staff, and curriculum. She said, "I feel like there is a sense of urgency. I don't see it, don't see anyone doing it–in this way, calling it for what it is." Yolanda, one of the primary organizers of the caucus, took offense: "I need to disagree with you. You are saying people are not doing the work. [The caucus] is doing the work." Vanessa replied that, "Everything that you have done is fantastic," but that there hadn't been enough progress. Philip validated Vanessa's frustration, saying, "We know the whole issue of race, for me anyway, it's part of everything," and then asked the group if they thought "this [union] leadership is ready to move in that direction yet?" Heather suggested they needed to win on something small in order to have successes they could build on. Vanessa resisted this approach: "I don't think small is good enough. The issues we are facing today need to be addressed head on." Naomi said, "I am guessing everyone would agree with you. The question is, do we think that just because we think it's wrong, is it enough to accomplish it?" She asked Vanessa how she could get together a "group big enough to fight for these things." Vanessa began to slow down: "That's part of the process. I'm not blind to that…no way I would walk into his myself without others on board." Eric suggested she talk to people one-on-one and then "get a couple of people involved even on a short-term scale." Finally, it clicked for Vanessa:

> Listening to you talk, Eric, it made me think of, you need to get people on board before you roll out an agenda, before you just–it is a lot. And I understand that, and I do think that is important. I know I might sound like a rebel warrior when I talk about it, but I do understand the value of having a solid team when you do something this big. (Educators United workshop, 12/15/20)

Through the respectful support for Vanessa's underlying mission while encouraging the organizing principle of not acting alone, the group was able to bring out Vanessa's own understanding of the risks of acting as a "rebel warrior" to address issues and the need for a "solid team" to address issues when such a significant power imbalance existed.

To have this solid team, another lesson that came out was to *listen for common issues* with coworkers. Instead of focusing on individual problems, or on issues that the union leadership had already prioritized, the focus of the workshops was on listening attentively to people's concerns so as to identify what issues mattered most to them, and then to find common ground through a democratic process. For example, after hearing a para tell a story about how she brought other paras together, Rosa said, "I'm inspired by [your] story… back to the beginning of your story–everyone felt alone, isolated. You said, 'Let's bring people together.' I want everyone to notice that what she did first is go and listen to people" (NEEA workshop, 7/14/20). Andrea explained this principle in one interview when she recalled a Workers' Dialogue she had observed where teachers were focused on having enough copy paper:

> People felt strongly about that. That was their issue. Maybe not a big thing for me coming from a school where copy paper wasn't rationed, but… it was important to them. Like Philip said, "What is the issue that is most important to you and who else feels just as strongly about that issue?" (Interview, 12/29/20)

Facilitators asked questions that would encourage participants to consider what these shared issues might be in their workplaces; Rosa said in one session that they were trying to help them to "identify a good unifying issue so that it's broadly felt, lots of people really care about it, deeply care about, and it's something we can win" (NEEA workshop, 7/21/20).

This lesson came up in one of the healthcare workshops when the group was discussing whether to file grievances alone or as a group. Naomi asked, "Why would we want to amplify the grievance procedure by bringing in more people as opposed to just one by one?" One participant responded that, "The more people you have, the more momentum–the louder your voice will be. Then you can get more people involved for future actions, more people can get on board." Another then shared that she and co-workers had been "doing COVID patients non-stop, but we

weren't getting COVID pay" and so they asked for and received COVID pay; "The more people you have, the more times you ask, the more you see results" (CHW workshop, 8/12/20).

A fourth organizing lesson that facilitators brought out from the stories was for participants to *use their own power* as workers instead of relying on their administration, politicians, lawyers or even their own union leadership to fix problems for them. For example, in one of the hospital workers' union workshops, participants brought up the management committees that were created for staff input. At first they described the committees as legitimate ways to participate, but Naomi urged the group to "be very cautious when management sets up committees and task forces–be really cautious. They are not oriented to get your input, to have respect for workers. They are getting you to buy into their plan." This resonated for Carrie, who said that she had just been in one of those committee meetings, and that there were "no cameras on, you can't see anyone's faces when they're talking. It was awkward. They do all the talking." She said, "Out of an hour we talked for three minutes; they talked for the rest." Naomi brought this back to autonomous organizing, saying, "In an issue campaign, if management wants to start a committee, don't agree to join, don't waste your time–start your own discussion" (CHW workshop, 10/26/20).

Similarly, in the workshop of Southern educators, a participant described how in her district, administration told virtual teachers they could stop turning in lesson plans. She had felt grateful until a coworker told her she had already stopped making lesson plans because she "couldn't possibly do all of that." Another participant in the group noted that "if everyone weren't doing it anyway, they have the power to say, 'We're not doing it.'" Naomi reflected back,

> You now have some insight into the balance of power, namely that if you stop doing things, management has no choice. That's the point about labor organizing: stop doing stuff, they have no choice. Stop doing stuff and they have no choice. But don't do it as isolated individuals, do it as a group. Do it with however many people you can get to do it. (SSCORE workshop, 10/11/20)

The workshop space encouraged this kind of independent action so that participants could remember what was in their *own* power to do.

A final lesson that arose in the sessions repeatedly was for participants *not to give up,* or to maintain the attitude that, as Naomi said in the Southern state educators' workshop when the group expressed discouragement about how to move forward on COVID safety against intransigent administrations, "There is always something we can do": "Our rule of organizing–don't forget this: There is always something we can do… Some people say there is nothing you can do–but you did something.… That's why you have a caucus" (SSCORE workshop, 10/18/20). This emphasis resonated with participants; for example in the Educators United caucus, Vanessa had expressed frustration about how hard it was to get people involved in organizing because of the fear and hopelessness in her school, particularly among educators of color, as a result of retaliation from the district and corruption in the union. Heather shared a story about slowly building a culture in her school over a number of years, where people were no longer as afraid to speak up. When Philip asked what people heard in Heather's story, Vanessa responded, "She didn't give up, she was persistent. She was a positive influence that was consistent, and she didn't give up. That's what I'm taking away from what she just shared" (Educators United workshop, 11/17/20).

Similarly, in the Southern state educators' workshop, a kindergarten teacher named Emily reported back how an effort to share teachers' COVID concerns with their administration had fallen on deaf ears: "We ended up attending a meeting with the administration and sharing concerns, but it was not acknowledged. It was not an awesome ending." Naomi responded:

> Okay. But this is not unfamiliar. People express concerns; it doesn't change things–that's why there is a second, third, and fourth phase of organizing.… Can I push you a little more to ask you–now that you have been through this, you compiled a list of concerns, brought them to the administration collectively. You went through the phases of organizing, but now in the evaluation stage, the outcome wasn't awesome. What attitude do you think you need to cultivate for yourself to keep going? Stage four is to evaluate and start again. What attitude would be helpful?

Emily replied, "Resilience–we are not going to win every step of the way, we can look to other examples of successful organizing like the Civil Rights movement; most of the time, you are not

going to win, but to keep going" (SSCORE workshop, 10/4/20). Where Emily's initial impression of the situation was that they had failed in some way, the workshop helped her to normalize her experience so that she could see it as a necessary part of organizing.

While facilitators in many cases helped to crystallize the learning, these lessons did not come just from the facilitators but from each other. Rosa reflected this point back to one group:

> I want to raise up–a number of you said this directly–you learned from each other. You came, you shared ideas, questions, things you had done, hadn't done. By talking to each other, each of you moved to a different place [nods in the group], got courage and inspiration, some basic ideas of good things you could do. This is what a good organizer does–you do what we did here. (New England Educators' union workshop, 7/28/20)

By talking to each other, participants were able to place greater value on their own collective knowledge and be strengthened in their convictions and capacity to organize with their coworkers.

"If You Mix Certain Colors": Finding a Platform for Collective Action

In some cases the lessons described above set the groundwork for turning the workshops into brainstorming sessions to identify common issues to unify around–a platform for collective action. Sometimes this was support for individual participants; in other cases, if participants worked for the same employer, facilitators walked the whole group through a brainstorm for what they could do collectively in what Naomi called "strategy sessions."

If a participant was the only one at their workplace and had a particularly acute workplace problem, facilitators helped them to think through what steps they could take, with the help and feedback of the other participants. For example, in one of the statewide New England educators' workshops, Micah, a community college counselor, shared that front line staff at the college were being asked to return to work the following week. She said they were concerned about COVID safety and that, "We are trying to figure out a strategy to articulate common demands, maybe a little late in getting going. I have a lot of questions about how to have any influence over that process at all." Rosa used this as an opportunity for a group brainstorm session, starting with the questions, "Give us a sense of who's we? What are some

steps you've taken?" Micah described how union members had started to develop a list of questions for management but that after their last staff meeting with management, "People came away feeling worse, really scared. No one really cares about our safety." She expressed skepticism that anything could be done: "If we had a collective refusal it might have had to happen several weeks ago."

Rosa was not deterred, asking her who else she could reach out to and what could be the unifying issue that she could organize around. Micah replied that the front-line staff was being asked to return without a policy on masks, but were expected to be able to "de-escalate" issues around mask-wearing. More ideas and suggestions came from other participants, as well as encouragement that it wasn't too late: Michael said, "You say you could have refused to go back–the ship has sailed. I don't agree. The ship has never sailed, it's always in the harbor." Rosa encouraged her to think about "what your common ground is. Pull in the people most affected–can we help you think through how you might do that?" This led to Micah starting to think about what the staff wanted, saying maybe they could "start to articulate what people think a safe reopening could look like for us… Where we would draw the lines?" In the next session, Micah reported back that she had gotten together with the other advising staff and they had written "a strong letter" with demands for returning to work, stating that they were "willing to go back if safety precautions clearly in place." She said to the group, "You were all pushing–rather than looking to management to come up with solutions, to articulate our own vision or demands for what we wanted to see happen" (NEEA workshop, 7/28/20). The brainstorm and support from the group helped her to identify common issues and a way to take action.

In workshops where all participants worked for the same employer, facilitators helped participants look for common issues to organize around. For example, in one of the healthcare workers' union workshops, an intense discussion about testing came up in the third session. Naomi had started as she often did by asking if anyone had anything they wanted to share, and someone commented casually at the beginning of the session that a few people were "out with

COVID." Naomi asked if staff was alerted when someone tested positive, and Diandra said that she "just happened to hear." Someone commented that football players were being tested daily, and Naomi asked if people agreed that the testing protocol was inadequate. One nurse said that in long-term care they were tested every week, and another said that in the hospital testing was available but not routine. A nurse named Aliyah said she thought testing should be mandatory, and Naomi asked the group if they agreed. Tanya, an LPN, said she disagreed because the hospital let people work even if they tested positive due to staffing shortages (as long as they were asymptomatic), and that she didn't think she should have to share private health information with her employer. This led to an intense discussion about the right to privacy versus safety, with diverging views in the group. At this point Naomi said,

> Okay. I'm gonna step back from this conversation for just a minute to see how this task relates to our task in the group, which is how to become organizers, how to bring people together around a common concern, and once we do that, how we take collective action around a common concern. This conversation shows us how difficult it is to come together around a common concern.

Through reflecting back to them what they were doing in that conversation (looking for a common concern), Naomi normalized the disagreement and acknowledged the validity of different views. She then noted that they had not yet come to a "shared concern" in the group, which meant they needed to keep asking questions.

Aliyah, who had earlier argued testing should be mandatory, now said she understood " all the points" that people had made and that "Tanya doesn't like people in her business, myself either." She suggested that maybe a compromise could be found. Naomi suggested that before looking for compromise,

> Is there agreement in the room that COVID is seriously contagious and a serious illness? [Thumbs up] That you can have the virus, and not be symptomatic? [Nods] That you can be asymptomatic, still be a carrier, still spread the disease? [Nods] Is there agreement in the room that you can't get this contained 100%, that you are all going to work, that you are among the most vulnerable front line workers in the country, the people working in hospitals? Aliyah said, "We can't not live." Would there be agreement in room that people have to keep living their lives? [Nods]. (CHW workshop, 8/12/20)

Naomi told me afterwards that what she was looking for was a *foundation* for the group to stand on based on their shared agreement that they could then use to identify a common issue around testing. She said in that session, "People won't come together in the group when they feel they have sharp disagreements with each other…We cannot do it unless we are listening carefully to each other and allowing our ideas to change" (CHW workshop, 8/12/20). Recognizing there was not agreement in the group, she suggested they go back and ask coworkers about their own feelings about testing protocol.

The group did not find common ground on a fair testing protocol during that workshop: "Everybody had their own opinion; we didn't come to agreement" (interview with Aliyah, 8/25/20). But the experience of looking for a shared issue helped them to listen to each other. In reflecting back on this particular session, Aliyah described how she experienced this process:

> I think she first gets the questions out there, asks everybody's opinion, and if everybody's opinion is not the same, that's where she's looking for–to see if we are all on the same page. When she sees got one or two people are thinking differently, she wants to know why they think this way, why others think that way, so that way she can find that common denominator… I love that approach. 'Cause at the very end you go, "Hmm, I didn't think of it like that…" She makes you sit back and analyze other people's opinions without taking it in a negative aspect… turning it into something bad, you know because that's how we always do. If I'm thinking it's blue, you're thinking it's purple. Mmm, it can turn to purple if you mix certain colors. (Interview, 8/25/20)

Aliyah experienced hearing divergent points of views not as a problem but as necessary to find an *authentic* unity.

This process resulted in the group successfully coming together around a different issue in the final session, when Diandra brought up the planned closure of the long-term care facility where she worked. She said that management had announced the facility was for sale but so far there was no buyer. She said morale was low because "people are terrified" of losing their jobs, leading many to preemptively leave for other jobs, those positions not being filled and the existing staff working "shorter and tighter." Aliyah, who had been through a previous Workers' Dialogue and then been part of successfully fighting the closure of a hospital cafeteria, said they

had to find a way to "put some bumps in the road" so that at least staff could find other positions at other facilities. She said, "They can't just sell it, put tape up and throw us out… We gotta find something." Naomi responded, "That's what this group is about, bringing people together around a shared idea. Aliyah's idea is fantastic–slow it down and you can win something" (CHW workshop, 8/19/20). This led to a follow-up meeting to help Diandra brainstorm ways to put the "bumps in the road," including working with the union caucus to organize a protest at which Diandra agreed to speak. From strong disagreements over testing, Naomi had waited patiently to find a common issue the group could unite around.

"We Don't Have to Be Afraid": Walking Through Fear and Retaliation

The third way that the Workers' Dialogue supported praxis and democratic participation was through its approach to addressing fear. During the six workshops I observed, fear was a central theme: fear around COVID risks, in addition to the fear of retaliation for speaking up about COVID safety or other workplace concerns. For example, Aliyah said in one of the healthcare workers' workshops, when she had urged other workers to speak up to management they would say, "'No, no, no, I don't want to start trouble, they'll give me a bad shift, they'll retaliate'" (CHW workshop, 7/29/20). And Yolanda said of her district, "I've never seen a district that is so divided. It's frustrating–even though we have powerful people, it's the fear" (Educators United workshop, 12/8/20). Instead of allowing fears to stifle conversations or shut down organizing plans, facilitators encouraged participants to work through their fear so that it didn't paralyze them. As with finding a platform for collective action above, Naomi and the other facilitators used fear to "workshop" the situations participants were facing so that they could, as Michael described it in one interview, "walk through the fear together" (interview, 8/10/20).

In the educators' workshops, participants had faced retaliation for speaking up around issues of COVID safety, as well as against racism in the schools and corruption in their own unions. Vanessa summed up the pervasive environment of fear for educators of color in their district when she said,

> All I get is fear from my friends in [our district], because they know there are repercussions for things you do. They have had their issues where they have had to fight for opportunities… where people have had to protect themselves. They don't want to be a target– they just want to pay their bills. They just want to do their jobs, work hard, so [the district] won't look at them as troublemakers… The fear is real, and sometimes there is nothing you can do. (Educators United workshop, 11/17/20)

Vanessa and the rest of the caucus had confronted the fear and powerlessness among members in the district head on when they took on the entrenched white union president in August 2020. In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement challenging police abuse in communities of color, the president had made a public statement that "most teachers" in the district supported having police officers in schools. For the first time that members had stood up to union leadership, this group brought together sixty educators to sign a petition demanding he retract his statement, and subsequently set up a Zoom call with the superintendent to talk about racism in the schools. But in a retaliatory move, the union president secretly posted the group's petition, including all of their names, on the police union's Facebook page. This "tactic of fear," as Yolanda described it, led to what organizers often call a "chilling effect" where members became more hesitant to speak up.

This history surfaced in the workshop, in the context of a conversation about what the caucus could do about the district's sudden plan to move from remote to hybrid teaching while there was a 20% positivity rate in the county. Philip and Naomi were encouraging the group to reach out one-on-one to coworkers about their concerns and get a meeting of their co-workers together so they could push back on the hybrid plan. Heather said they could use the experience they had from organizing the Black Lives Matter action, and that "we can learn from where we've been, we're not starting from scratch. We can take a stance, and not be afraid to send a message to people who were involved before… that we don't have to be afraid." Yolanda was not convinced, suggesting that it might be better to act "as educators, not as union members," because of the ways they had been attacked by their union leadership. Naomi cautioned Yolanda that the union was "the only protection you have," and asked why they couldn't act as the caucus. Heather agreed:

> Right, and if we are going to take our power back, then we can't let [the union president] have the only say over what is [the union]. This is our union, not his. I absolutely feel you Yolanda, we have been so harmed by [the union] but if we don't stand up for it, people will leave it… If we have people leave, especially minorities, we won't have collective bargaining rights–we will be so screwed. So we have to fight for this vehicle. (Educators United workshop, 12/8/20)

Instead of giving in to the fear, Philip, Naomi and Heather were encouraging Yolanda to have the courage to face it by reclaiming the union as theirs. This led to the group refocusing on the details of how to keep moving forward with their planned member meeting about reopening; they were able to face the fears they had about being attacked by the district and union leadership instead of backing down.

In the Southern educators' caucus, which was made up of veteran organizers who had pulled off a historic strike just two years prior, there was similarly the need to walk through the fear again and again. In the second session, one teacher mentioned in an off-hand way that three other teachers had been suspended for posts they had made on their own social media accounts criticizing their county's reopening plans:

> I am really proud of our local union, even though so far three people have been suspended without pay in our organization, we're still pushing ahead and we're still fighting. It's getting ugly, but we're going to keep going 'cause it's all about not compromising our own values.

Naomi asked what they were doing in response to these retaliatory suspensions, and she replied that they had written letters of support but that "everyone is so scared right now of being a target" that they were "trying to stay out of the crosshairs." She said, "At first I was really frustrated by that because I don't know how we can let that happen to our brothers and sisters, but I also understand people are scared of losing their jobs." In response, Naomi asked if they could "have a minute of conversation about how we help people get over fear at a moment like this," saying that, "When we talk about steps two and three–how we get people together around a common goal and how we help people take collective action–these steps would be very easy except for fear."

This opened the floor for others to share experiences about how to address fear. Jesse jumped in to share an experience he had after his district reopened suddenly–"We did blended [hybrid] for all of one day before our school board decided to send us back for all five days." He said teachers collectively wrote a letter expressing their anger–they did this as a faculty senate because their union was what Naomi called "old guard" and unresponsive to the membership. Teachers then wanted to send the letter to the press; as faculty senate president, he was nervous but agreed "because so many people came up to me and said 'We agreed on this together! We've got your back! Don't worry.'" When a TV news reporter showed up at school, he agreed to talk to them and the story went out on two news stations, and "I'll be honest I was kind of… sweatin' it a little bit like oh god, I'm really gonna be in the crosshairs"–but "nothing happened." He related this back to the fear Julie was facing, saying the experience of having so much support made him "a lot more confident about saying, 'Alright, I'll put myself out here for you guys.' Just knowing you've got that support really makes a big difference."

As the session was ending, Julie shared how the ideas and encouragement helped her to have a renewed commitment to keep going:

> Thank you so much for all the great feedback and great ideas, because I… have a goal in my mind but I don't know how to say it. All the great feedback from everybody is very affirming and motivating too, so I now have a renewed sense of, alright let's get back to this conversation with everybody and see how we can support each other and unify to change the balance of power. So thank you, thanks for those words, they're helping. (SSCORE workshop, 10/11/20)

In the last session participants reported back that progress had been made. Members had spoken up to the union president saying, "You should do something." As a result, the union president–who according to Naomi had before this been unwilling to "defy the superintendent or ever go to bat for the members, she was too close to the superintendent"–then "went after" the principal at a town hall for not backing up the suspended teachers. Naomi reflected that this shift might have happened because by standing up to the governor and to the superintendents, the caucus had modeled for the union president a "different way to get things done, that it was not the right way to be" (personal communication, 10/26/20). The Workers' Dialogue workshop

supported this different way by modeling dealing with the risks of organizing head on, and providing collective encouragement and support to do so.

Tensions

Facilitation "Forcefulness"

As described in the introduction to the findings, the structural tension between the hierarchical nature of power structures and the democratic needs of people at the grassroots sometimes showed up as tensions inside the programs despite the free space they had cultivated. In the Workers' Dialogue this showed up as a tension between the radical democratic vision of the facilitators and what the participants were prepared to do. As described above, while participants' own experiences were the content of the workshops, facilitators didn't pretend to be neutral in the workshops. They were transparent about having particular values and capacities that they wanted participants to take away, yet they worked to bring out participants' own collective analysis and decision-making. For Rosa this meant that "the facilitator clearly is grounded in an analysis of power, but the participants *find* that." This facilitation style was rooted in the "confidence that we will be able to figure shit out. The expertise in the room is so clearly with the participants" (interview with Rosa, 9/21/20). Facilitators worked attentively to facilitate in a way where they were not attached to a particular outcome, but still able to use organizing values to help participants develop as bottom-up organizers. As Andrea said, facilitators "have to really be comfortable with not knowing where the Workers' Dialogue is going to go… your agenda cannot override the people in the room" (interview, 12/29/20).

There were times when facilitators were forceful in making suggestions, particularly when they were focused on helping participants find a platform for collective action, either for a particular person or the whole group. Naomi said that when she was doing what she called a "strategy" session that it was "not at all unusual" for her to be "very directive… directive isn't the right word–forceful in saying this is what you need to think about." But she said she only did

this when she felt the group was on the "firm ground [of] mutual respect," at which point she was "not worried being too strong" because she assessed it was "okay to make explicit suggestions with the knowledge and confidence" that they could simply ignore her advice if they didn't agree (interview, 6/22/20). For Naomi, it was the relationship of respect and equality she built with participants that made it safe to offer her opinion without worrying her advice would undermine participants' own authentic decision-making process.

While Naomi was confident about this process, Rosa was more cautious about overriding participants' own learning process. She said, "The facilitator has to have a sense of confidence, has to have a worldview, has to have an analysis, but can't insist on that analysis above and beyond people's own experiences, and their articulation of those experiences" (interview, 9/21/20). She said that this different perspective led to slightly different facilitation styles between her and Naomi, where Rosa was more likely to stay with participants' focus for longer before trying to help them move forward. She said,

> I think Naomi gets worried that I assess [what's happening in the group] too honestly. I can be very empathic about how awful it is. My sense is she gets anxious I will stay there too long. I think it matters that people feel really understood in their position, [and then] you help them to move them from that position carefully.

She then said, "Sometimes I might move too slow, sometimes Naomi might move too fast. Her inclination is to go faster, mine to go slower. But I think we're both sort of trying to figure out how much of this [movement] do we need" (9/21/20).

There were times when both Naomi and Rosa may have moved too quickly for participants, particularly around school reopening. At the end of July, when districts were still deciding whether to stay remote, the New England educators' union held the largest meeting in its history with 10,000 members in attendance to vote on a resolution stating that "the districts and the state must demonstrate that health and safety conditions and negotiated public health benchmarks are met before buildings reopen." It then described the disproportionate impact of COVID on communities of color, and stated that wealthier districts would be "better suited" to meet these benchmarks. It ended with, "Until the point when districts and the state can meet

these criteria, we will refuse to return to unsafe school buildings." 80% of the 10,000 members on the call voted yes on the resolution, and 40 local unions endorsed the position within a day. Rosa shared this news in the last session of one of the New England educators' workshops, reporting that,

> They voted to say, "No, we won't go back." That's power. How are we going to show power? If we propose a solution, we have to organize around a solution. I'm interested in hearing from some of you, all of you, how is that playing out in your local, what conversations are you a part of, are you instigating. I'm hoping we can get some updates from folks about that. (NEEA workshop, 8/4/20)

By reporting the statement, "We won't go back," Rosa made it clear her position was that locals should be prepared to strike for health and safety standards in the schools. Similarly in the Educators United workshop in October, when the group was expressing reservations about outreaching to members about the district's plan to move from remote to hybrid, Naomi spoke forcefully, saying, "It's not easy, but is there anything more important than trying to prevent this plan?" (SSCORE workshop, 10/18/20).

Some participants and their locals were in agreement; for example Brad shared that his district's bargaining team had created a petition with specific demands, which were approved by an all-membership meeting. He said his local was prepared to walk out over their demands, and that, "Public officials should be in public view–if they are going to put children and teachers in danger, we want to make sure the public knows about it." And Roy shared that he had

> used one of those lines we talked about in one of our meetings, you know our "inside voices," and said, "Let's talk about it as a group." And once I sort of opened that door a little bit - lots of people started saying, "Yeah I'm concerned about this, or I'm concerned about that." Just all the massive amount of safety risk; it doesn't make sense, the buses, ventilation systems, it goes on and on. (NEEA workshop, 8/4/20)

For some participants, particularly by using the tools they were learning in the program, they were finding unity around reopening demands.

But even among participants who wanted to keep schools closed, not all felt prepared to take the collective action necessary to force this through a strike. Micah reflected on this after

the last session when Rosa "was really trying to push people" to think about what it would it look like to say, "We're not going back":

> And that's–it's a huge leap. Even though I completely agree with her ideologically, I was just like, that's just so hard and trying to actually think through–it feels like we're so weak in a way, and everyone's jobs could potentially disappear, that we don't have the strength to strike, that the members are not there. I felt sort of sad, like damn, that's where I wish things were at. But even just doing it from my tiny little corner, I just feel like we're so vulnerable… It just feels like yeah she's totally right, but how do we get there? (Interview, 9/3/20)

Rosa noted this difficulty for participants, saying in one Workers' Dialogue that she was surprised how hard it was to find common ground, "even though COVID is one of most unifying things we could imagine for all workers" (NEEA workshop, 7/21/20).

Not all participants were finding COVID to be a unifying issue with their coworkers, reflecting the national political divisions; for example Kate shared that, "A large part of the issue here is that we have a lot of people who believe the virus is not real and that it's a political tool. Trying to find common ground in safety isn't working because they don't think it's unsafe to begin with" (NEEA workshop, 8/4/20). Even veteran organizers like Jesse who had helped organize the 2018 Southern state strike expressed not being sure how to move forward with so much division: "Within teachers in general in the state there was a pretty big split–some thought it was okay to go back, others did not, and with parents too." He said that there was "much more of a split than I thought there would be, and that has made it tricky to know what to do" (interview, 11/23/20)

Reflecting back on this tension, Rosa said that, "One thing I've learned through this pandemic is that… my sense of what was possible wasn't possible. I at some point had to let go of what I wanted it to be, and it took me time to do that. I would say I did push too hard initially." She said that for many people on the left, there had been "this sense of crisis of opportunity" where "there was such an expectation that the unifying themes of crisis, economic and healthwise, and the ways they are both connected to racism would somehow bring people

together around more militancy." She referenced Arundhati Roy's article in April 2020 that "the pandemic is a portal" (Roy, 2020). Rosa said, "The truth is we're going through the portal. This is the portal. And we could be in this portal for another five years" (personal communication, 10/8/21). At times facilitators' own assessment of what collective action was necessary in a particular moment may have overshadowed participants' own process of praxis and democratic capacity-building. This may demonstrate how even for facilitators who are highly skilled in facilitating these conversations, the liberatory aims of popular education are not easy to carry out and require a reflective practice on the part of facilitators as much as participants.

Teacher-Parent Coalitions

Facilitators' vision of workers organizing to build their own autonomous power also led to their discouragement in the educators' workshops of participants reaching out to parents to build solidarity until they had built their own internal strength in their union. At many points in the conversations, participants brought up the role of parents; the word "parents" came up a total of ninety times in the four Workers' Dialogues I observed with school staff. Participants shared stories about how in some schools parents were supportive of school staff but in others they were very critical and undermining, and how principals and superintendents intentionally tried to divide them from parents. Michael expressed this as one of the things he learned from other teachers in his first Workers' Dialogue: "They're…taking away or blocking the communication between parents and teachers to keep us from coming together around common problems" (interview, 9/2/20).

When participants raised wanting to reach out to parents to see if they could find common ground, facilitators often redirected them back to how they could organize with co-workers. In the Educators United caucus workshop for example, in a brainstorm about how to take action around COVID safety, Yolanda said, "I think we need to reach out to the community. A lot of community organizations are working very hard… We need to tell our stories. I don't know how to tell our stories, where to tell our stories." Heather agreed, suggesting they bring

back together a group of parents and teachers who had been meeting before the pandemic. She said, “If we could start having small conversations, start by listening to parents, not just sharing our stories, but hear their stories; and a lot of teachers are parents too so there are a lot of ways to relate to each other.” Yolanda added they could also access data from other districts, for example in the largest city in the state where “7 of 9 kids said no, we’re not coming back.” Philip directed them away from this line of thinking, replying that in Boston the teachers had first rebuilt a top-down union and then connected with the community. He said,

> The thing that is going to sustain changing the face of the union is developing our base among our colleagues in the classroom. Even as we are talking to parents, our base of power lies with our colleagues. So what is our plan, even as we talk with parents, what is our plan with colleagues?

Naomi said, “I think Philip’s direction is absolutely right,” and then moved on to asking questions to help them develop a plan to unify with their coworkers (Educators’ United caucus workshop, #3).

Facilitators made it clear that they redirected conversations in this way because they had seen union members hiding behind parents instead of building their own power. For example, when one teacher in West Virginia shared that three teachers had been suspended for criticizing the district’s reopening plan on social media, Naomi asked if the union had taken some action to respond. The teacher replied that they had written letters of support but that because “everyone is so scared right now of being a target,” they were hoping for a protest to be organized by parents and other community members, not other teachers. Naomi suggested that instead they take the time to talk one-on-one to other teachers, and compared the administration’s actions to school bullying: “You all are teachers: What's your attitude, what do you help your students do when they face bullying?” She then said,

> I think it's great to go to parents, that's fine, and you'll get some parents to turn out for you, but that won't change – it really won't change how teachers will feel. They're still gonna feel like, “They came after me again,” and then the mom goes and talks to the bully. That's not really much better. (SSCORE workshop, 10/11/21)

Naomi's emphasis was on the direct collective action of the teachers to overcome the fear, which from her experience could not be substituted by support from parents.

Rosa had a different approach in the first session I observed her facilitate. When Kate shared how critical wealthy white parents were of teachers in her district, Rosa replied that in the "more privileged districts" there was more of an expectation that the schools serve the individual needs of families and students than in working class districts with more families of color, where "they have not found the power structures of schools as places they count on and trust." She said, "This does present a real challenge for those of you [in districts] where there is more of a sense of entitlement," but that,

> Maybe I'm being naive in this statement, tell me if I am–that if educators and parents are in the same room, that you might discover shared interests… I'm wondering about a formation that invited some parents into a discussion, not about taking positions, but hearing from each other. If there's a place that there could be more unity than it feels like right now. (NEEA workshop, 8/4/20)

Rosa was inviting the group to think about what it would look like to reach out to parents to have similar conversations they were having in the Workers' Dialogue where the emphasis was on listening to find common concerns. Brad then gave an example of this working when a few years prior the district had put forward a plan called "TK Goals" that had forced teachers to spend hours on individual assessments and data recording. The union held a forum about the program, and by the end, "Parents were organizing to end TK Goals. Teachers didn't have to say, 'End TK Goals,' they just said, 'This is what it's like.'" (NEEA workshop, 8/4/20). Rosa's feedback and Brad's example provided Kate with concrete encouragement about what possible ways to engage in authentic coalition-building with parents.

In a different Workers' Dialogue, Rosa expressed more concerns about reaching out to parents. She had asked participants what a reasonable demand about what a school day should look like related to synchronous/asynchronous teaching;[43] a middle school teacher responded,

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[43] Synchronous learning means the teacher teaches in real time on an online platform such as Zoom. Asynchronous means the teacher assigns students work to complete on their own schedule.

> The other part of the whole equation is, what about students? Parents? Is anyone talking to them? We talk to teachers–we have to teach in a way that works for you. But if it doesn't work for students there is no point. [Parents] say the only place [their child] can use the computer is in a closet… The family does matter.

Rosa agreed but said the question was "where do we start." She said, "We have to start with workers–the people in front of us where we work," because "too often we don't say to educators, 'What is your work life like?" She argued that first parents needed to come together, and "then part of the plan can be let's talk to parents" (NEEA workshop, 11/19/20).

In the four Workers' Dialogues I observed with educators, participants were searching for ways to talk with and find common ground with parents on the life or death issue of COVID. The facilitators wanted them to see they could not hide behind other groups in the community or give up their own needs to serve the needs of others; the Workers' Dialogue was about recognizing and accessing workers' own power without turning over their power to lawyers, administrators, politicians, or even parents. At the same time, by not discussing when or how the step of solidarity-building with parents could be taken, facilitators did not engage with participants on this generative issue that participants were raising.

Given that teachers, particularly in the New England districts, were often white and the communities they served were more often working class families of color and immigrant families, there was a particular benefit for educators to find out what the experiences of families were as a way to build cross-race coalitions. Also, wealthy white parents had mobilized across the country in support for reopening, overpowering both teachers' unions and communities of color who have consistently had more concerns about COVID safety in schools. As Naomi told me about a group of educators in another state that she had been working with, even when local unions are well-organized, parent groups can undermine that power: union members had done effective organizing around a basic set of COVID safety demands, which the school board agreed to. But "a week before school started, right-wing parents assaulted the school board and they collapsed, and the district ordered them back to school" (personal communication, 9/29/20). By

building solidarity with the working class families of color, could these educators' unions have more effectively stood up to the neoliberal and white supremacist pressures to reopen without strong safety measures and better protected themselves and the communities they served? While facilitators were not discouraging participants from doing this work on their own, I wondered whether they might have helped them think through how to do it in a way that developed participants' own self-determination while tying that self-determination to a broader social justice vision.

Discussion

By creating a trusting space where participants could engage directly with each other as peers facing common struggles, a greater solidarity came out of the Workers' Dialogue that represented "emergent oppositions to the individualism of American culture and the atomization and acquiescence often held to be characteristic of the common, everyday existence of American workers" (Fantasia, 1988, p. 228). The Workers' Dialogue process reflects very closely the peer learning process that Myles Horton describes using at the Highlander School:

> The one thing they know is their own experience. They don't need to homogenize it with other people's experience. They want to talk about their own experience. Then other people join in and say, "Ah ha, I had an experience that relates to that." So pretty soon you get everybody's experience coming in, centered around that *one* person's experience, because that's an *authentic* experience not a *synthetic* experience. Authentic. And everybody recognizes authenticity.... After everybody had the benefit of hearing everybody else's problem discussed, we would ask on the basis of what you've learned that you knew–and on the basis of your fellow workers' experiences, now how do you think it will be best to deal with these problems? It was so enriching, you see, to have a person learn that they knew something. Secondly, to learn that their peers knew something, and learn that they didn't have to come to me, the expert, to tell them what the answers were. Then they planned: here's how we'll deal with this problem when we go back home. (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 168)

Similar to Highlander's process, through the sharing of participants' authentic experiences and the collective process, the workshops drew out the collective knowledge of the group in a way that strengthened their democratic capacities.

Through this process, the practices of the Workers' Dialogue reflected prefigurative politics in their efforts to democratize power relations. Boggs (1977) argues that the

prefigurative tradition has three concerns: 1) not reproducing hierarchical authority relations, 2) criticism of political parties and trade unions "because their centralized forms reproduce the old power relations in a way that undermines revolutionary struggles" and 3) a commitment to "democratization through local, collective struggles" that are able to "anticipate the future liberated society" (section 2). By emphasizing participants' autonomous dialogue and localized collective action, the Workers' Dialogue gave them practice creating this "liberated society."

The program also challenged participants to access their deeper collective knowledge by identifying the "hidden lessons" of labor education (Worthen, 2014). As described in Chapter I, Mansbridge and Morris (2001) explain that, "Inequalities in power have their most insidious effect when the dominant group has so much control over the ideas available to other members of the society that the conceptual categories required to challenge the status quo hardly exist" (p. 3-4). By eliciting and adding to organizing lessons rooted in democratic and collective sensibilities, facilitators helped participants to recognize "the conflict between hegemonic narrative and lived experience" (Naomi, personal communication, 12/19/21).

Unlike the GEL program, the workshops consistently encouraged participants to directly challenge the authority of anti-democratic structures, including hospital and school administrations, local and statewide governments, and even their own top-down bureaucratic unions. Because participants experienced these institutions as rarely listening to front line workers about how to run the hospitals or the schools, the emphasis of the program was on helping workers to identify and take action to stand up for their values and shared issues. Confrontation was not shied away from, and seen as often necessary in order to make workers' vision of ethical, safe workplaces a reality.

As with the GEL program, the structural tension between the hierarchy of the structures they functioned in and the democratic needs of the participants at times generated tensions around praxis and democracy in the Workers' Dialogue. Pedagogically, at times facilitators had a vision of what was possible that participants were not ready for. These tensions raise questions

around what it means for a popular education program to support participants' democratic participation. Facilitators did not claim to be neutral or to provide an immediately democratic space, but instead looked to increase participants' democratic *capacity*. As Naomi said in one conversation, the workshop itself "is not democratic, just the telling of stories." She said, "The facilitator has an idea about what they are doing" in always trying to attach the content back to the organizing framework of the four organizing stages (personal communication, 4/2/21). This framework was designed to make the democratic power of workers *possible*.

In the situation of school reopening, facilitators' political vision may have gotten ahead of what participants were prepared for. Myles Horton reflected on something similar in his experience facilitating workshops at Highlander:

> You stay within the experience of the people, and the experience is growing right there, in what I call a circle of learners, in a workshop situa-tion... but if you break the connection between the starting point, their experience, and what they know themselves, if you get to the place where what they know can't help them understand what you're talking about, then you lose them. (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 151-52).

Because they were committed to moving participants to reflect on their own experiences vis a vis the "hegemonic narrative" and take action to change it, facilitators walked a fine line, working to both respect a democratic process (participants' own autonomous decision-making) while encouraging new democratic possibilities (the right of workers to make decisions to protect their own health and safety as well as of the communities they served). Mostly this tension was invisible because they were able to stay with participants, but when it became visible, it showed how holding a particular vision while staying with participants is a necessary but also challenging part of popular education pedagogy.

In its approach to praxis and democracy, the Workers' Dialogue in many ways provides an example of pure popular education. It maintained a strict focus on providing a space for dialogue to support participants' honest reflection and autonomous collective action. By creating spaces where workers could come together around common issues and learn from each other and facilitators how to address common problems–without the coercive influence of their

employers or union leadership–participants were able to bring their new knowledge back to their workplaces to apply the principles in action. This approach acknowledged that, as Fletcher and Gapasin write, "[Union] membership education is not value neutral, but it needs to encourage the dialogue and debate necessary for participants to take ownership of the ideas that emerge" (2008, p. 207). In this way the Workers' Dialogue returns labor education to its more liberatory roots:

> Labor education programs hold classes in which people intentionally, directly teach and learn how to take advantage of their rights at work and improve and protect their jobs and the jobs of others. In these classes, they talk and listen to each other. That is, they conspire. (Worthen, 2014, p. 33)

The Workers' Dialogue created this space where participants were able to "conspire" by sharing their "true voice" and then planning collective action in order to shift power relations in their workplaces.

CHAPTER VII: WHAT MOVES PEOPLE TO ACTION? PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In the previous two chapters I described the case study programs from the lenses of praxis and democracy; in this chapter, I focus on how these approaches moved participants to collective action–from their own perspectives–using the lens of critical consciousness. The purpose of using the lens of critical consciousness is not that it is the *goal* of popular education, but that from a popular education framework, it is necessary to support transformative action. Despite the extensive differences between the two programs, I bring the findings on critical consciousness together in this chapter because the commonalities in what participants described about how the programs impacted them were striking, and offer insights into what critical consciousness can mean when developed in the context of community and labor organizing work.

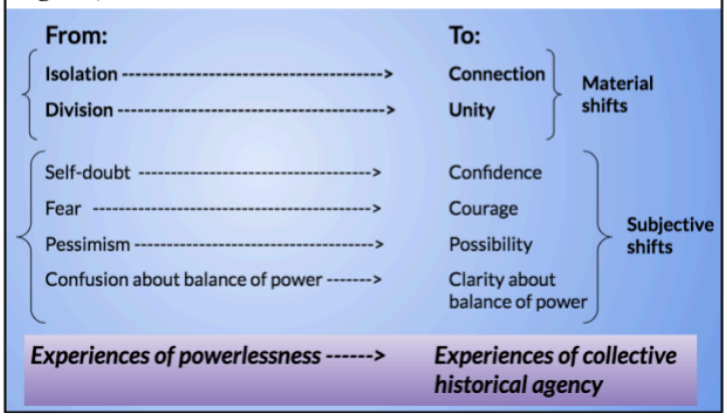
Before conducting this research, I had thought of critical consciousness as purely a cognitive shift, a disembodied and ahistorical *analysis* of reality that then leads to action. This may have reflected my own Western bias towards the value of mental over experiential and embodied knowledge in determining people's actions, and also perhaps the same bias in some of the literature; for example Sheikheldin (2017) writes, "As Paulo Freire, the renowned adult educator, explained, critical consciousness is about becoming aware of the structural sources of oppression in society" (p. 234). But what participants described moving them to action–or sustaining their action–were shifts in experience that were as much affective, embodied and relational as cognitive, and this was true for both programs.

Shifts in Experience

As will be described below, participants in both talked about both objective and subjective shifts they experienced (see Figure 7). The objective, material shifts they experienced were from 1) isolation to **connection** with others who shared similar circumstances and struggles, as well as to organizations that were working on these struggles, and 2) division to **unity** with others who shared related problems, but from whom they had been divided based on

race (e.g. Filipino v. Black) or job hierarchy (e.g. RNs v. LPNs, teachers v. paras). These material shifts led to four more subjective shifts: 3) self-doubt to **collective confidence** in their ability to be a part of community or labor organizing work; 4) pessimism about change to a greater sense of **possibility**; 5) fear to greater **courage** to take action despite the risks, and finally 6) confusion to greater **clarity** about the balance of power and their role in changing it. All of this contributed to a more fundamental shift: from the experience of powerlessness to an awareness of their **collective historical agency.**

Figure 7. Critical consciousness shifts



"I'm Not Alone": From Isolation to Connection

The primary theme that participants returned to repeatedly in their reflections on the two programs was the importance of the organizing connections they made, both to others in their neighborhoods and workplaces, and to larger group efforts or organizations that were addressing problems they faced. As Naomi said of Rosa when Rosa first became president of the New England educators' union, "She didn't know why at the time, but she knew people needed to be talking with each other" (interview, 9/16/20).

Connection in the GEL Program.

In the GEL program, participants described the connections they developed through the building of relationships and networks with others in the program and neighborhood who were doing community organizing work. This was especially important for participants who had been isolated based on their experiences with poverty, homelessness, and addiction. For example, while residents had numerous problems with landlords, as Shannon said in one project group, their isolation kept them from seeing the *systemic* nature of the problems: "There are a lot of

issues going on in the buildings, [but] people feel that 'I'm the only one with this issue'" (Housing sustainability meeting, 9/22/20).

A profound reflection about this isolation came from Nubian. She said that when she moved to the Tenderloin she saw a lot of "social problems" and that although she was "the kind of person that wanted to do something about it," she didn't know how to connect with people who were doing work in the community:

> Feeling inept, feeling powerless is a heavy feeling to walk around with, and seeing it and talking about it to other people who are also aware of it. And so it's sort of this thing that is hanging in the air. So what I tried to do or wanted to do, I started getting connected with more people in the community… trying to get rid of this feeling of powerlessness. I did not know how to connect with other people. (Interview, 7/22/20)

She said that being in the GEL program "helped me to find a place where I can participate" (interview, 7/22/20). Similarly, June described how both the CCDC organizing division and then the GEL program helped her overcome the isolation she had experienced after being homeless: "[M]y network has fallen away…but with the support of community organizing division and programs like this, they've helped me to keep on doing" (interview, 8/20/20). As Alim described this process, the program helped to "get folks plugged in, get people cross-pollinating" in their work in the neighborhoods (Graduation class, 11/21/20).

While participants often described connection in the GEL program as linking up with political and community work, in some cases they also expressed the importance of developing personal relationships with others in the program. Sunshine for example described how she, Lina and Nubian gave each other both emotional support and organizing help outside the class that helped her continue the organizing work and sustain her through the program. She said, "I call Lina crying; I have had bad nights. I talk to her every day; she is very supportive. That bond I value a lot. We have the same goals; I'm sure we will work together." She contrasted the relationships in the class to a traditional classroom "when you just sit in a chair and watch the teacher talk; you don't have that chance to interact with each other and get to know the needs of

each other." She said this was different in the GEL program because of working on common projects with other participants:

> Because we exchanged numbers, and we worked together, we were doing things together… we had to call each other, or Zoom each other, and that's the support we had because we had to get the work done for the program–so that put us in a position where we had to talk to each other. We had to do it so it benefitted us all. (Interview, 11/28/20)

Similarly, Reynardo said that one of the things he liked about the program was that "we developed into a family… we all know each other so well" (interview, 10/2/20).

Participants shared that the way these connections were cultivated in the GEL program had a profound impact on them. Mahjawe said during the graduation that,

> It was a very valuable lesson for me that the relationship and trust you build with people, and community is more important than getting a b c d done on a project. Paying more attention to relationship building and the relationships that I have are at the center, at the core of our organizing and all of our movements. (Graduation class, 11/21/20)

And Nubian said in one interview that "when things in society started really blowing up" after George Floyd's murder, class facilitators checked in with her to see how she was doing:

> That encouraged me beyond measure. It reinforced that human beings, we help each other, we look out for each other. And that's the cavalry. People are always looking for, I used to look for, "Why don't they help us?" We're the they. We're the they. This is real– we are human beings, real caring human beings. (Interview 7/22/20)

The human connections Nubian experienced were critical both to her continuing in the program as well as her conviction about the central values of the program, that people can and do care for and look out for each other, and together can make the change they need.

Connection in the Workers' Dialogue.

While in the GEL program personal relationships were an important part of the connection that participants experienced, in the Workers' Dialogue, which only lasted for a month and only two hours a week, in most cases there wasn't the time to build the same depth of relationships. Still, their experience of isolation and the benefit of connecting with other participants was one of the most frequent themes in interviews.

Isolation was something that Workers' Dialogue participants brought up repeatedly; for example a paraeducator in one educators' workshop shared how she got paras together to talk about issues because they said "they felt alone" (NEEA workshop, 7/14/20). Participants from the Educators United caucus also described this isolation. Heather, who had attended an in-person Workers' Dialogue in 2015, described her experience as a new teacher:

> At the first [Workers' Dialogue] meeting, I broke down and cried. I was working 13, 14, 15 hour days trying to be a good teacher and do everything I do. I was doing a bunch of after-school clubs with kids. The reason I got into education… was that I wanted to empower my students to be able to make the changes in the world that they wanted to make. [But] I was just feeling so run down, and so abused and so helpless, and isolated. My school had done so much to keep people isolated and separated. (Interview, 12/8/20)

While she had become an educator to empower her students to "make changes in the world," she found herself unable to do the same because of the isolation she was experiencing as a new teacher. Vanessa explained the impact of this isolation for educators of color in the district: "When people are traumatized… isolation is what maintains the status quo. When we don't talk about it, it's like a cancer that grows in a system" (Educators United workshop, 11/24/20). Isolation prevented them from talking about and coming together around common issues, which Heather identified as purposeful on the part of the district to keep them from engaging in union organizing, where educators had been "scared and punished out of doing that work" (interview, 12/8/20).

As in the GEL program, what participants described most valuing in the Workers' Dialogue was the opportunity to overcome this imposed isolation. Part of this process in the Workers' Dialogue was finding out through other participants' stories that they were "not alone." For example, Emily shared that she

> found it so valuable to have a check-in with folks going through the same kinds of things to hear what they were up against, to hear that I'm not alone. It reminded me how important it is to connect with other teachers–the content was super important, and the process, and just the experience of connecting with other teachers. (Interview, 11/2/20)

Mira, an occupational therapist and chief steward for the healthcare workers' union, described how participating in the Workers' Dialogue with people from all the different facilities and job titles helped her to realize how much more support there was for the union's organizing work:

> At the beginning [the union] was just people in my bargaining unit at my facility, and now I see that there is support from other places. And the more people you know in the union and you talk to, the more people you have to support you and help you.

Similarly, Michael said about an in-person Workers' Dialogue he participated in 2017, that while the "framing" of the issues by Naomi and Philip was helpful by describing "the 40 years of neoliberalism that helped lead to this moment," what most impacted him was "hearing these experiences" from other participants "that I thought were so terminally unique to my district. I thought everyone else's district had their shit together and it was my shitty local, my racist president." From the Workers' Dialogue, he found out that "it was *everybody*, *everybody"* experiencing that their administrations

> weaponize the evaluation system; they're trying to undercut us at every contract. They're trying to take away our autonomy. They're standardizing everything, they're… taking away or blocking the communication between parents and teachers to keep us from coming together around common problems. You know, like understaffing us across the board. Everyone was experiencing some degree of these problems. And that literally changed everything. (Interview, 9/2/20)

While for Michael the insights provided by the facilitators were helpful to frame the issues he was experiencing, it was learning from other participants that his material experiences were not his alone that had the most profound impact on him. Danny, a teacher at a vocational technical high school, similarly said that the workshop helped him see that "everyone has such valuable input… the chances are one of us has gone through whatever the issue is and so you are able to get the support or get the advice, and learn." He recalled that, "How many times did some people talk about experiences and someone else is like, 'You know what I would do…'", and this helped him to realize that, "It's so important to know that like anything else, you're not alone; there's support everywhere you turn. You just have to recognize it's there" (interview, 12/10/20). For these participants, while the content or knowledge they took away was important, it was

these new or strengthened independent links with coworkers that most supported their organizing work.

Participants also shared how the workshop cultivated these same connections across worksites and job classifications. For example, Mira, an occupational therapist and chief steward in the healthcare union who had participated in both an in-person Workers' Dialogue before the pandemic as well on-line, said that the overall impact of the workshop on her union was that

> it brought us closer together–all the sites. Normally if we have issues, it's broken up into an RN group, a technical group, a professional group, and we tend to stay in those groups. And then those are even broken up into facilities. This way we all work together–[at the workshops] there was someone from every hospital, every long-term care facility, and there was someone from every job title. (Interview 8/28/20)

And Jen, who worked for the same employer, was newly involved in the union and attended the same workshop, said that what she liked most about it was that, "I feel like I got some sort of connection with others from different sites, because it's such a large employer. To get some connection with that… I felt like, you know, not alone." And later in the interview she said that, "I felt… a little bit of a camaraderie with everybody, and like we can actually do something" (interview, 9/11/20). Similarly, Maya, a union steward at a community college, explained her expectations and then reflections on the program:

> Maya: I thought, hey, I can meet some other people and see what they're doing. 'Cause sometimes I wonder if I'm doing the right thing…. I want to hear from other people, and see if we're doing something similar or not, if we have the same struggles.
> Tenaya: And what did you find out?
> Maya: We're all the same [laughs]. I was surprised to see that we all have the same battle. (Interview, 12/3/20)

For these participants, finding out other workers had similar circumstances contributed to their ability and willingness to engage–or to continue engaging–in organizing work.

Participants shared how this learning helped them to think differently about their roles in their unions. Via, who had talked about how her experience was so different from others, said that the program shifted how she thought of leadership. Whereas before she had thought being a leader meant "serving people and having a good heart," now she thought it was important to

"make yourself capable of reaching out to people, make connections with people and be able to organize activities to get people involved. That's the biggest thing for me to learn" (interview, 8/18/20). And a participant in one of the New England educators' union workshops said that she learned that "coming together as a group and talking to all of the members is so important." She said it was not something they had been doing at her school, "so I loved that idea of creating those connections– finding out if one person has a problem, it may not be an isolated incident; it can be helpful to talk" (NEEA workshop, 11/19/20).

"We Were All Fighting For the Same Goal": From Division to Unity

Closely related to the shift from isolation to connection, a second material shift that participants described was from the many forms of division they experienced to experiences of unity. This reflects Freire's (2000) view of the role of division and unity in building organization:

> As the oppressor minority subordinates and dominates the majority, it must divide it and keep it divided in order to remain in power. The minority cannot permit itself the luxury of tolerating the unification of the people, which would undoubtedly signify a serious threat to their own hegemony. (p. 141)

This shift thus presented itself as a distinct shift from isolation to connection–participants experienced not only being separated from each other but being at odds or in conflict with each other based on race, language, status or job divisions. In both programs, participants experienced finding common ground and unity across these divisions through the dialogue, relationship building and the collective action that the programs cultivated.

Unity in the GEL Program.

In the GEL program, participants described the experience of unifying around particular issues and around the work they were doing in the project groups. For example, Mahjawe talked about how differences of perspective in his project group were able to be brought together while brainstorming ideas for the street fair for the neighborhood: "Even though we might have had different perspectives sometimes, it just all seemed to fit. I think that might be just because everyone is passionate about it, and we're kind of all on same page." He said that "even though it

might be a different perspective or different approach, it's like, oh, I can see how that really fits with the overall picture. So it's expanded me, because I'm usually really rigid" (interview, 8/28/20). Instead of a competitive approach where participants had to compromise or overpower each other, Mahjawe described a more organic and collaborative process where participants brought their ideas together to create something new. Celia echoed this when she reflected back on the program, saying in the evaluation class,

> It was just so empowering hearing everyone working on the same thing together–and everyone has different ideas, coming from different cultures and diversities, how they all intertwine. How we can learn from another in the community, how much we all have in common. (Evaluation class, 11/16/21)

Similarly, in one interview Sunshine talked about how working on projects together had helped them to come together. She said this happened because "the program was about equality," where

> we were all fighting for the same goal overall. We had that in our head already, so we knew, all this crap, all the barriers, leave them outside–because in order for it to work we have to be hate free and accepting of one another or we won't be successful in our projects (Interview, 11/28/20).

From Celia and Sunshine's perspective, that the program brought them together around a common goal of bettering the neighborhood motivated them to put aside their differences or prejudices to work together. In one interview, Alim likened this collaborative approach to the Power Rangers, where "you're the left foot and I'm the right foot; it's the whole team that will ensure the success of the project" (interview 11/30/20).

As described in Chapter 4, this sense of unity around common goals had not come easily. Celia had expressed frustration not only with white people taking over POC spaces but also with the way non-Black POC groups who did not experience racism the same way Black people did nonetheless benefited from anti-racist policies; and Sunshine had almost dropped out because of Celia's comments. This difficulty in building trust across race came up frequently in interviews, and participants described how the program helped them to develop a stronger faith

in each others' commitment to shared goals. In the same interview when Celia had said that Filipino participants "feel exactly how I do," she also reflected that

> I can see that people really do want to change and people really do want to be more understanding of each other. And… how important it is for everyone to be heard, everybody, every single person has a right to be heard… We just all have different beliefs but we can get past that if we're all working toward the same change, social change to better ourselves, or better the community. (Interview, 11/2/20)

June summed up this value when she said that there had been a change in the community where now, "We work together; we may have differences, but we come together across all of our experiences, income, whatever we have experienced in life, and put it aside to work for what we need as a group" (Elections class, 7/11/20). For participants to find out that they could work on common goals across differences–race in particular–was a significant experience that built more unity and solidarity among them.

Unity in the Workers' Dialogue.

There were numerous divisions that Workers' Dialogue participants described experiencing in their workplaces: for example, divisions between paraeducators and teachers, where they had bargained separately which weakened the paraeducators' power, and between vocational and academic teachers at a vocational technical high school; divisions over testing that came up in the healthcare union workshop, and what a safe school return looked like or whether it was possible in the educators' workshops; and divisions around race and racial justice work in the unions.

As Parker & Gruelle (1999) argue, some of these conflicts may have been rooted in deeper divisions around the way job classifications and work were structured, so that workers often did not see themselves as having common concerns they could unify around. For example, in one workshop Micah shared how working conditions for part-time adjunct faculty and professional staff were so different from full-time faculty, yet union meetings were "dominated by full-time faculty and their concerns, and everyone else feels marginalized or like the union isn't for them." Via, a Mandarin immersion teacher from China, said she felt similarly to Micah,

and that she didn't go to union meetings because even though she was a teacher, "I feel like I'm so different from other teachers. If I go to the gathering, I have my special issues which wouldn't be the same as the majority" (8/4/20).

Over the course of the workshops, participants described how this division was countered by the unity that came from the workshop process: In Micah's case, through the encouragement in the workshop she was able to bring her coworkers together around common issues. And Via came to see the value in supporting her union's shared reopening demands even though they didn't all apply to her. Participants also described the unity that came through the process of coming together to support one group of workers that was being threatened. Aliyah, a nurse and chief steward, said in an interview that during an in-person Workers' Dialogue she was part of, the group had come together at the end to support participants who worked in a cafeteria that the hospital was threatening to close. After her experience of helping get different departments together to protest the closure, Aliyah said she realized that people "have empathy… you realize people have a heart. They don't just care about themselves. They care about others." But not all of the workers in her department felt the same way; she recalled that when she had asked coworkers to sign a petition for the cafeteria workers, some had said, "I don't have anything to do with them…. Why do I need to?… I have to worry about what's happening here." And she had responded, "Because if anything was to ever happen to us, we need the numbers, we need them to help us also." She said in the interview that she "understood that they focus on their own department. But if you don't have numbers then you don't–you might have nothing" (interview, 8/25/20). Her experience in her first Workers' Dialogue led her to know and act on the potential of different groups coming together to support one group of workers.

In other cases, participants shared how this experience of unity came through listening to different perspectives, even when those perspectives didn't necessarily change. Danny, who had recently helped to organize a union at his vocational technical high school and who had

attended a Workers' Dialogue along with the rest of his union's bargaining team, talked in one interview about how sharing his feelings as a person of color (he is Cape Verdean) about George Floyd's murder led to greater solidarity with other, mostly white, bargaining team members. In a session that took place the week after the video of Floyd went viral on social media in May 2020 and protests erupted around the country, Naomi had asked if anyone had thoughts about the previous week. In an interview, Danny, co-president of the union and one of the only people of color in the group, recalled the level of tension in that session because he knew that another teacher in the workshop had "a position on this because her husband is a cop." Danny reflected that, "I couldn't sit in that room and say 'Oh, fuck cops' and, 'This was bullshit,' because that wasn't the space." He said, "It came to a point where… my hands were shaking–and I was just like, you know what? There's nothing wrong with me talking." He did speak, sharing with the group how Floyd's murder affected him, in part as a father of a teenage son who he "worried for" every time he left the house. Soon after that session, the union treasurer, a white woman who he didn't know well, approached him at an action they organized to protect one of their vocational shop programs that the principal was threatening to close:

> Carolyn came up to me when we were just about to finish up, and she said, "I know we're not supposed to do this but I just need to hug you." So she gave me this big hug and we chatted it up. It's funny because just that moment sort of built this relationship between Carolyn and I. I don't think my friendship with Carolyn would have happened if it was not for that moment. (Interview, 12/8/20)

While this was a moment of personal connection, it was also a relationship based on a deeper form of solidarity, because this group had a common mission to unite for their jobs and their students. Danny said in the interview that building these kinds of relationships was "super important" in his organizing work because "you're hoping that we can all see we how we can benefit from banding together" (interview, 12/8/20).

"I May Be One Little Person…": From Doubt to Confidence

A second shift that participants described in both programs was from doubt about their ability to participate in organizing work to a sense of confidence that came from discovering or

being reminded that together with others they could be a part of making change.

Confidence in the GEL Program.

In the GEL program, some participants described having a strong initial sense of doubt about their capacity to be successful in the program or as organizers; they shared that they felt that they lacked the experience, knowledge and skills necessary to be a part of community work. For example, Nubian told me that initially in the program

> I had some concerns because… I'm a recovering addict, you know. So even though I have some professional skills in my past, it was new for me to re-enter social groups and projects. And so I was a little bit apprehensive about my own skills and abilities. (Interview, 7/22/20)

And in our class evaluation Lina said that she entered the program "feeling very vulnerable" (evaluation class, 11/16/20) because she did not have a background in political work. And Sunshine said, "I didn't think I could do this work… now I'm learning these skills" (Land-use organizing class part two, 8/24/20).

As the program progressed, by being involved together in the project groups and the classes, participants came to develop a greater sense of self-esteem, responsibility and confidence in their ability to do the work. June said the program helped her to "keep on recognizing and reassuring that I am important. I may be one little person, but we can work together and I can help other people" (interview, 8/20/20). In the final evaluation class, in response to the question, "What values have you learned from the program?" Lina and Sunshine responded:

> Lina: Confidence… even though I have done community work… I can take this further, it's not something as intimidating to me. I can find out more.
> Sunshine: Confidence, more of a team player; I'm open to different people and diversities. And I can take more responsibility. (Evaluation class, 11/16/20).

And Nubian said, "Everything I do is in a spirit of love, but this program gave me the opportunity to bring it from the inside to the outside. At the beginning I had very little confidence. A lot of desire but little confidence" (Evaluation class, 11/16/20).

Participants said the experience of *practice* in the program was part of what gave them

more confidence. Nubian shared that the practice of doing outreach for the street fair helped to develop more confidence. She said, "It gave me the confidence to put myself in different situations," including talking to "the coffee guy" about being a vendor for the street fair, as well as another local merchant to ask for help getting a city permit. While the outreach for the permit didn't work out,

> Something else worked out. Having that experience for me–when one door closes, another opens. To not put all your eggs in one basket, see there are other opportunities, other options. I won't use the word fail–but it's part of the learning curve too. (Interview, 11/10/20)

Having the opportunity to practice in a situation where there was space for things not to pan out gave participants the chance to keep trying and develop confidence that they could be effective. The *continuity* of the relationships and work over an extended period of time also contributed to this greater confidence. In our graduation class, Lina said, "The bond that I've gained just listening to you, sitting in and learning, it's something that gives me confidence and security. I know I'm gonna see you guys out there. The work is gonna continue" (11/21/20).

Confidence in the Workers' Dialogue.

The perception that participants lacked the knowledge or skills needed to get involved in organizing was also frequently brought up in the Workers' Dialogue as an obstacle to participation in the union. For example, in the same discussion described above about why people didn't get involved in the union, Rosa asked if it was apathy, or something else. One teacher said, "I didn't know the rules. I figured there was a curriculum for the union. I didn't realize it was just people who want to do right by the school. I wasn't apathetic–it was my own misconception that the union was only for certain people." Another replied that she had also thought "the union didn't pertain to me," but that uniting with coworkers around COVID concerns helped her realize she had as much right to get involved in the union because "I'm no better or less than anyone else." And Kate, the special education teacher, said that, "I had that fear," but that after joining the bargaining team, "sitting through that process made me more confident… I'm no better, no less; I can jump in and figure it out" (NEEA workshop, 7/21/20).

Similarly, Charity from the Educators United caucus said in one interview that "all these people [in the workshop] have all this experience." She said that the facilitators "want me to bring two people to a meeting–I can't bring even one person" (interview, 12/15/20). And Jen said that before the healthcare union workshop, she had believed she had to be loud and "outspoken" to be involved in the union, which was intimidating to her because she had a "quiet personality" (9/11/20).

As in the GEL program, participants in the Workers' Dialogue described how the program helped cultivate in them a sense of greater confidence to participate in organizing work. At the end of one New England educators' union workshop, after Rosa asked participants to share one idea they were taking from the workshop, one participant said that "anyone can participate in union meetings, you don't need any credential to speak. You are enough." Jen said that from discussions in the workshops about one-on-one outreach she realized "you don't need to make this huge statement; even if you're just talking to one or two people, you can affect one or two people" (interview, 9/11/20).

This sense of confidence strengthened participants' organizing work. Maya, who had struggled with getting people to be involved in the union at her community college, said what she had gotten out of the program was that:

> It gives me the courage to go ahead and do the things. And the fact that I saw that many, many other people were thinking the way I am. So I guess I am not doing something wrong. Because at some point when you don't get the result you want, you are wondering, geez, should I change something or do something else? (Interview, 12/3/20)

For Maya, hearing the experiences of other people helped her to see that her own struggles did not mean she was doing anything wrong, which gave her the confidence to keep trying. Similarly for Carrie, a lab tech at the hospital and a union steward, the program increased her confidence as a shop steward: "Going through my [graduate school] classes and this experience, I have gotten a lot more confident." She said this confidence came from "hearing other stories that other people are going through the same things. 'Oh! I'm not imagining it, they [management]

are really doing this stuff.'" She said that without that validation, "you're just carrying it all yourself." It helped her to know that "there is a union there that does have my back, that we can work on this together" (interview, 10/12/20).

As James, a teacher who had helped organize one of the wildcat strikes in the South, described, this cultivation of confidence came in part from the approach in the program that centered and valued participants' lived experiences. Describing the sessions he had been in with Naomi, he said,

> The thing that I really like about it is that she is pulling from people's individual experience; there's no set story, it's not some canned thing– "I'm going to tell this funny story about something I did." She's just pulling from people in the group their own lived experience. And I think that's very powerful and valuable. Because of that people seemed to respond really well because they felt valued, they felt like their experience was important. They didn't come into it feeling like "Oh, I don't' know enough," or "I haven't done enough." I think everyone felt like "Oh! I can easily be a part of this." It's not that "I'm not experienced enough in the union" or something. (Interview 11/23/20)

James observed that his coworkers' lack of knowledge about the union was not an obstacle to their participation; that their experiences–whatever they might be–were valued enabled them to feel confident about their participation in the group. As Philip said, part of what made the Workers' Dialogue effective was that, "The skills we are exposing them to are built on things they do every day in lived experience (interview, 11/16/20)

So it was not just that participants *felt* their experience mattered; unlike some trainings where facilitators ask participants to share, just to move on to the main content of the class, their experiences *were* the content in the class. As Naomi said, "Everything that everyone says has meaning, has value" (personal communication 6/22/20). The emphasis on sharing experiences as important data to analyze and understand was directly tied to the building of participant confidence. They did not have to feel they needed some specialized knowledge to participate, and the knowledge that they did bring was utilized and built upon to create new knowledge and develop the community organizing work.

"Let's Give It a Try": From Pessimism to Possibility

Participants also described a shift from a sense of hopelessness or pessimism to having a greater sense of possibility that collectively they could have an impact to make needed changes. "Possibility" describes this shift better than "hope" which can be interpreted as abstract, idealistic, or passive; what participants described was an awareness that collectively they had the *potential* to make change. Freire (1998) wrote that,

> It needs to be clear that the absence of hope is not the "normal" way to be human. It is a distortion. I am not, for example, first of all a being without hope who may or may not later be converted to hope. On the contrary, I am first a being of hope who, for any number of reasons, may thereafter lose hope. For this reason, as human beings, one of our struggles should be to diminish *the objective reasons for that hopelessness that immobilizes us*. (p. 70, emphasis added)

Participants described shifting from hopelessness to possibility as a result of a shift in "objective reasons" for their sense of hopelessness.

Possibility in the GEL Program.

During the GEL program, participants often described the severe hopelessness that existed in the neighborhood. For example Reynardo said that,

> Outside I see hopelessness, I don't know what to do about it… I would like to help, want to know how to help people in that condition. Some people are so stuck in that place, it would take a miracle of mind and heart… to better themselves. They are satisfied smoking pot on the street, getting drunk on the street, talking to themselves. (Interview, 12/15/20)

Reynardo and other participants were acutely aware of the hopelessness that existed in the neighborhood; as Gabriela expressed it, "I walk everyday, pass along especially the homeless; I see them. I can't control my teary eyes looking at them." But instead of just feeling sorry for people, Gabriela's reaction was to then think, "How can we help these people find a place for them for shelter, and not always living along the streets?" (Interview, 7/16/20). Participants were aware of the misery on Tenderloin streets; yet they were not satisfied accepting it. For Gabriela, this was a long-term view; she said that the process of change "needs time… needs patience in the street… so that if this generation will not enjoy, maybe future generations will

enjoy the progress in that community" (interview, 7/16/20).

This sense of possibility was tied to a greater faith in other people and the potential for collective work across different experiences. Celia said that, "It really reinforces what can be done in the community if we work together. Really everybody, almost everybody… can add onto something, even if you don't really believe that they can." She said, "We just all have different beliefs but we can get past that if we're all working toward the same change, social change to better ourselves, or better the community" (interview 11/30/20). For Celia, as described in Chapter 4, this sense of possibility came from experiencing people from different races in the program show commitment to addressing common issues. June echoed this when she said in one class that, "We may have differences, but we come together across all of our experiences, income, whatever our experiences in life, and put it aside to work for what we need as a group" (June, class 9, elections). And one participant wrote in an anonymous final program evaluation, "In all my life I never knew that ordinary people together can make a difference. I speak as an African American living here in the U.S." (Written evaluation comment, 11/2020).

Some GEL participants used the word "hope" to describe this shift. For example Nubian said that because of the work on the street fair, the group felt a "sense of pride" from what they had accomplished so far, and that "when I go out and talk to people in the neighborhood, it's an opportunity to pass on that spirit, and good works… it translates to people's hearts. Our mission is genuine." She said the spirit she was passing on was "the spirit of hope. The spirit of community. The spirit of, 'I believe that this is a possibility'" (interview, 11/10/20). Similarly, June described the difference in the neighborhood over the previous few years:

> Eight or nine years ago, we didn't talk about affordable housing or food justice. [We thought] Why vote? They're not going to pay attention to us. But now people see the change–"I can speak too." People have hope. You can see just in last 5-6 years… I feel like people are coming together… (Elections class, 7/11/20).

For June, this shift was also a shift in expectations; she compared 6th Street to "Union Square or Santa Barbara" where she said, "I'm sure it's not filthy–going to a park it's not filthy. It's kept

up… We need to bring possibilities to 6th street. Why do we have to be in essence a containment zone and have to put up with it?" (Interview, 8/20/20). In an environment of despair and complacency, the collective work in the project groups, as well as other organizing work they were connected to, provided participants with direct experience and *evidence* that change was possible.

Possibility in the Workers' Dialogue.

In the Workers' Dialogue, participants shared sentiments that were less hopeless than in the GEL program, but also demonstrated a level of pessimism about the possibility of change and the role they could play. Tamara, a bus driver who had organized a rally for COVID safety on the buses, said that coworkers were cynical that the rally could make any difference: "Some of the employees have been there thirty-something years. When I talked about the rally, [they said] 'Oh no, it's not going to turn out, we've tried it before'" (Tina, 11/17/20). Kate described this attitude among coworkers as "the feeling that nothing will change… there is so much change we need. That it will take so much–how is my presence going to help?" (NEEA workshop, 7/14/20). And Michael explained that, "For a lot of working people, they have no faith that the system can change; they have no hope things will ever get better no matter what they do" (interview, 8/12/20).

While in some cases participants were describing coworkers, in others they expressed their own pessimism. In one interview that took place before the Southern state educators' workshop, Emily, a kindergarten teacher, said that what she most wanted from the workshop was to "get to a better place as far as my level of hope about the potential to organize and make change." She said that she was "so demoralized right now" that she was "questioning whether or not I want to stay in the teaching profession or not, which was something that had just been a given even just a few months ago" (interview, 10/4/20). This was October 2020, when her district had told teachers they would be a part of reopening plans, and then suddenly opened schools. After the Workers' Dialogue workshop was over and we talked again in November, she

told me that her experience in the workshop had motivated her to take initiative on a COVID survey for the union membership:

> … hearing other people [in the workshop] describe how hard it was to get people in their local motivated or willing to take action… gave me a little extra kick in the pants to think that you know what? For a myriad of reasons there are so many teachers who… are just not feeling up to the challenge of taking on one more thing. And so… I think it just kind of energized me to realize that. And it gave me a push and so I just offered to the executive committee–"I'll do it! I'm happy to do it." And, "Does anyone object to us doing it?" No one objected. And I'm like, oh yeah, people are just frigging tired! (11/2/20)

Emily's feeling of demoralization shifted to possibility and then action from hearing that others were struggling in their organizing work also and that she could contribute to making change happen.

Aliyah, the nurse and chief steward, talked about this sense of possibility when she described how her experience helping a group of dietary workers in a previous Workers' Dialogue impacted how she responded when she heard about the long-term care facility closing. While coworkers felt there was nothing they could do, for Aliyah it "brought back memories of everyone helping out dietary over at [the hospital]" where initially dietary employees were "saying the same exact thing, 'They're closing down, they're not gonna budge, they're all about money.'" This experience led her to speak up in the current Workers' Dialogue about the possibility that they could have an impact: "I was like, 'Let's give it a try, I mean it's a group of us, why can't we?'" Aliyah knew they might not be successful, but she had the attitude that

> at least we can say we tried this, we tried that, as opposed to just letting it happen… Let's try to ruffle the feathers of our administration. Walk over there and sit down outside their door. There's always ways to do things. (Interview, 8/25/20)

For Workers' Dialogue participants, the stories, struggles and successes they heard about from each other as well as direct experiences of success through collective action helped them to develop an attitude that change was not guaranteed, but worth trying for, reflecting Freire's admonition that, "Maybe I won't change [reality], but *at least I need to know that I could change it and that I must try"* (2014).

"My Brothers and Sisters Are Next To Me": From Fear to Courage

The theme of fear in both the GEL program and Workers' Dialogue was related to material threats: in both programs, participants shared the fears they and others had of speaking up about their living and working conditions as a result of the real retaliation they and others had faced for organizing. These concerns about risk and retaliation were more of a central theme in the Workers' Dialogue, and only in that program did participants repeatedly talk about how the program gave them a greater sense of courage to organize around these issues. However, there was evidence that the GEL program also supported participants in developing more courage to address housing violations.

Courage in the GEL Program.

In two of the GEL program project groups, participants talked about fears that tenants had related to speaking up around housing issues. In the housing sustainability project group in particular, fear came up in the context of conversations about addressing problems faced by SRO residents. The larger group that included Cassandra, Erin and Lefett was working on two efforts to address abuses that SRO residents faced: a tenants' circle to talk about housing issues and an oversight and accountability board that could keep SRO landlords accountable for their housing conditions. Both efforts were designed in part to address the fear of retaliation that residents in SROs faced; as Erin explained in one meeting about the oversight board, "If we had the oversight and accountability board, we could fight for people who are having problems with management or other tenants, so they wouldn't face retaliation" (8/18/20). Previous tenants' circles had been held in person as part of the Tenderloin Community Association prior to COVID, and the group was working to get them going again online during the shelter-in-place. By bringing people together in a safe space where what they said would not be reported back to landlords, the tenants' circle was intended to give residents support to speak up about and address their housing issues.

The need for a safe space to address these fears came up in one housing sustainability meeting when Leffet, who was new to the group, asked why there were only nine people in the meeting when so many people lived in SROs. Erin responded that that was why they had started the tenants' circles, because "a lot of people will not talk. People are fearful. To get people… is difficult. People are scared because they will lose these places." Reynardo explained how the tenants' circle approach addressed fear: "We invite people to the tenants' circle, do some hand holding, have a little coffee, a little cake, have a conversation, see what's going on in their buildings, and get some ideas" (9/13/20). Erin said, "I think we just need people to be coming forth with problems and not be afraid. I hope… we can gather residents together in a safe place, so they feel safe sharing their stories" (housing sustainability project meeting, 8/17/20).

In some cases, participants themselves talked about their own fears of retaliation; for example Leffet talked about fears she had about speaking up about her son paying 65-70% of his income instead of the 30% that the company advertised, saying, "I'm afraid to voice my concerns about why he's paying more than what they say on mission statement, because I don't want to make waves" (8/17/20). Through the meetings and the naming of fear by others in the group, Leffet came to see how important organizing was to deal with the fear: "Our main issue is fear; we need to organize with numbers. We need to spread the word about what's happening in the community, know who are our allies and how to go forward" (housing sustainability meeting, 9/13/20).

In the electoral project group also, Faith talked about the fear and retaliation that tenants on Treasure Island faced for speaking up about the poor housing conditions on the island.[44] In an Open Hour session set up to provide support for Faith's organizing work, she

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[44] The level of retaliation faced by Treasure Island residents was described in this summary from a local Black-owned Bay Area newspaper:

> As the powers-that-be forge ahead relentlessly to realize this architect's rendering of Treasure Island that will enable mega-developer Lennar Corp. to house and entertain millionaires and billionaires with fabulous views, these wealthy, connected politicians are fully aware that the current residents stand in the way of their vision and enrichment. John Stewart's working class market rate renters as well as subsidized at-risk-for-

shared how prior to the issues they faced during the pandemic, she and other residents on the island were dealing with moldy apartments, as well as toxic chemicals that residents had testified to in previous years and been evicted for speaking up. She said, "We hadn't know how to organize ourselves; we tried, and we faced retaliation." During the pandemic when residents were experiencing power outages due to an old and failing electrical grid on Treasure Island, Faith "got some residents together" to write a demand letter to TIDA (the redevelopment agency that was responsible for services on the island) to provide back-up batteries for families. While Faith said that, "A lot of residents are afraid to sign anything," she also described how a small group of "those of us who are unafraid" marched, blocked traffic for half an hour, and presented their letter to TIDA (Open Hour, 10/30/20).

While participants in the GEL program didn't speak directly in interviews or the group sessions about the program helping them develop more courage, there was evidence from the examples above that the program did support them in facing the risks of speaking up. For example, Faith said during the graduation that, "I have to say that I'm nothing without any of you guys" and then reported that, "Because of this work, I'm excited to say at the last Board [of Supervisors] meeting, they were talking about a temporary solution [to the power outages]. The push, the phone calls–we now have the push for them to address it seriously" (Graduation class, 11/28/20). In the face of evidence that Faith could face eviction or other retaliation as others had, the group had provided both encouragement and material support for her to keep fighting.

Courage in the Workers' Dialogue.

As discussed in Chapter V, participants in the Workers' Dialogue spoke repeatedly about

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> homelessness folks have few resources. Some have become the canaries in the coalmine, sick from the radiation and other deadly toxins that may never be removed. Their swift punishment for speaking out is engineered by the movers and shakers who fear they'll alert potential buyers to the chemicals and radiation lurking in the groundwater under the luxury condos soon to be built. (Harvey, 2016)

More about this history can be found in Harvey (2016): https://sfbayview.com/2016/07/treasure-island-whistleblowers-face-immediate-retaliation-from-power-broker-consortium/ and Lash (2020): https://thefrisc.com/treasure-islands-toxic-legacy-spawns-2-billion-lawsuit-2ddd82428d77

concerns. The word "fear" came up almost 150 times in the six workshops; participants talked about fears that management would retaliate if they or their coworkers spoke up by giving them worse shifts in the hospitals or changing their schedules in the schools, or actually fire them for their union activity; despite being illegal this fear was described as pervasive in many of their workplaces. It was also not unfounded, as in the case of the participants whose jobs were threatened for criticizing their district's reopening plans, or teachers who participants described having been moved out of their grade level as retaliation for filing grievances. Via described this fear when she said, "In the school there is always cautiousness, you have to think three times before you speak" (interview, 8/17/20).

In one of the healthcare union workshops, the way fear impacted organizing work was evident when Naomi asked participants to do a role play to practice one-on-one outreach. Brianna, a hospital therapist, was given the role of the workplace organizer, and Nina, an LPN, was playing the uninvolved co-worker. Brianna started by bringing up how short-staffed they were, which Nina agreed with. After a brief conversation about the short-staffing, Brianna tried to get her involved to do something about it:

> Brianna: Don't you feel like something should change?
> Nina: Maybe, but I don't like getting involved in controversy. I want to keep a low profile.
> Brianna: Do you think you might get burned out?
> Nina: I'm burned out now. Adding controversy only makes it worse.
> Brianna: Don't you want to be a part of a change? If we start with two people, then add a third and fourth–things don't change unless we try.
> Nina: I've seen people do it before; it doesn't make a difference–it just puts a target on your back. (CHW workshop, 10/19/20)

The combination of pessimism about the possibility of change described in the previous set with the real fear of retaliation contributed to participants wanting to keep their heads down.

In the face of these pervasive environments of fear, in both interviews and in the workshops participants shared how the program helped them to develop the courage to speak up and keep organizing despite the risks. For example Jen from the healthcare union said about the workshop, "I think it made me realize a little bit, you don't need to be scared if you have a

group of people fighting for what you believe together" (interview, 11/20/20). Similarly, at the end of one of the New England educators' workshops Via, who had never been involved in the union before, said she was thinking of asking her union representative to meet with her and some coworkers about their COVID concerns. She said she "wasn't sure it's a good idea" because "it's my first time doing union work. I was expecting to be a learner, listener, now I have to get involved." Rosa responded, "Yeah–the courage it takes. [To say] I'm going to be the one to bring people together." And Via said, "After listening to the stories, it gives me courage" (NEEA workshop, 8/4/20).

Participants also talked about learning how to minimize the risks they faced by acting collectively. Carrie, the lab tech, said that what she learned in the Workers' Dialogue was that for resistance to management to work, "You definitely need to do it together. Don't do it alone, put yourself in danger. You don't want to do that" (CHW workshop, 10/12/20). And when Rosa asked participants in one of the New England educators' workshop sessions to share one idea they were taking from the workshop, Kate said that she realized that "it takes more courage than a lot of people think they have. Our job is to help build courage up in each other" (NEEA workshop, 8/4/20).

While they recognized that by acting collectively they could reduce risk, participants also recognized the need to act even if risk wasn't eliminated. At the end of one educators' workshop, Maya said that one thing she was taking away from the workshop was that, "Fear will always be there, but we have the right, and we deserve respect." In response to another participant who had been told she would be fired for organizing around COVID concerns, Maya said, "I feel like she is afraid to step up and fight for these people, but we have to do it. And if we lose our jobs, at least we know we did our best and we tried to help them" (NEEA workshop, 11/19/20). And in an interview, Michael said that the program helped "inspire some hope inside people" to counter what presented as apathy but was actually "fear–fear and hopelessness" (interview, 8/10/20). He continued that,

> You're not supposed to *not* be afraid. What you need to do is look left and look right and if your brothers and sisters are with you, you walk through that fear together. Like it's okay to be afraid. You should be afraid. You're dealing in power, right? And that's going to be a scary situation. I remember being so scared, but just thinking, "My brothers and sisters are next to me, my brothers and sisters are next to me." (Interview, 8/10/20)

These participants were acknowledging the reality of risk in workplace relationships of unequal power, but also their greater capacity to take action as part of a larger group that had more power than they had on their own.

"You're Able to Name It": From Confusion to Clarity About Power

The final shift that participants in both programs talked about, and the only one that they described as a cognitive shift, was from having an intuitive understanding of power structures to be able to name what they knew: for example Michael said that the Workers' Dialogue "helped me name things that I knew but I had never truly consciously conceptualized because I didn't have the names for it" (interview, 9/2/20). This was a process of moving from confusion to greater clarity to "connect the dots" of how power structures impacted them, and reflects the commonly understood meaning of critical consciousness: Sheikheldin (2017) writes that, "If large social aggregates can reduce clarity in relations of marginalization among members of that society… conscientization is the process by which this obscurity is unveiled and demystified" (p. 234). While this shift was not the most significant that participants described moving them to action, it helped participants crystalize what they were fighting for and against, as "understanding structural sources of oppression in society does not necessarily mean that one will seek to combat them… but we should be mindful that any genuine care is unlikely to happen *without* that understanding" (p. 235) In both programs, this shift was about validating and adding to their own knowledge.

Clarity in the GEL Program.

In the GEL program, participants described how the program helped them to better understand problems in the community and their role in addressing them, not necessarily through learning something *new* but as validating what they had already experienced. Nubian

articulated this when she said that, “Seeing all of these different things that were going on, I don't have necessarily a formal way to explain it, the injustices that I see, or how to fix them,” but that “being able to be a part of this class and discussion has helped me to put more form to what I see and helped me to find a place where I can participate” (interview, 7/22/20). Similarly, in answer to the interview question, “Was there anything in the class that influenced how you see things?” Reynardo replied,

> Well, not necessarily. What happened was that when they would mention something, in my mind I had already seen that, I might not have expressed it to no one, or necessarily seen it physically for myself, but I know about it. All it did is it gave me more comfort in my considerations because they seemed to be talking on the same thing I'm talking about, or know the same things I know. (Interview, 10/2/20)

For example, discussions in his project which focused on housing sustainability reinforced his view that developers should not be able to “just come in and buy houses, because it’s displacing a lot of people, and forcing people into the streets, and people living in dire straights in the cold and the rain or whatever goes down–that’s wrong” (interview, 10/2/20). For Reynardo, this conviction he already had about what kinds of policies *should* be in place as well as who was responsible for the current policies was strengthened through the program.

Participants said that particular concepts they learned in the program helped them to crystallize and make sense of their own experiences and what they wanted to see in the future, particularly around housing, quality of life in the Tenderloin, and racial justice. For example, Iris talked about how learning about the idea of the city and housing developers “weaponizing housing against the people” resonated for her. She said that she already “kind of suspected that housing is used as a weapon against folks,” but that in her experience this wasn’t always the case; she remembered “San Francisco when people were paying $200 for a two-bedroom apartment” (evaluation class, 11/16/20). And Nubian said that the class helped her to think about things “I've always sort of thought about,” for example “that money isn’t everything–and what success really means in life, and the quality of life.” She said that her project group “started talking about what it means to survive versus thrive in these neighborhoods” and how “these

multinational corporations that have no investment in the community–it's just taking from the community, whether it's space, bringing an element of greed, that this is not conducive to a healthy, human flourishing blossoming society or neighborhood" (7/22/20).

Other participants talked about concepts they learned that helped them to see and think about race. June said that learning about the concept of "systemic racism" was "something I've always believed in, I've always tried to explain, but I didn't have the right words for it." She said that the GEL class analyzing different forms of racism was helpful because "you're able to name it; you're able to have deeper, more meaningful, and sometimes on purpose conversations about things instead of trying to going around it in a roundabout way" (8/20/20). These conversations enabled her to acknowledge that "even inside me, I do have my prejudice and so forth" and the class helped her to "understand it, and take the time to reflect upon it–how I can change to be more conscious" (8/20/20).

Gabriela also said the class on racism had an impact on her and "fighting for the rights of people who are being abused." She said that after the class on racism, she was "studying the situation;" she said that while she did not "favor" any particular racial group, that watching the video of George Floyd, "you can see how Floyd was being held. He was not able to breathe because he was locked like that." She named the racial aspect of it, saying, "He's Black–the police were all white. The two policemen were just watching. They should be 'Oh, no, hey! Stop it. That's enough!' No, they just let it go! They just kept on watching! For me it's inhuman" (7/16/20). In a later interview she said that the class helped her to be understanding of "different people in different walks of life, especially meeting different colors, considering differences and different cultures… and helping their rights" (interview, 11/20/20).

Participants described how what they learned helped them to shift blame away from individuals–both themselves and others in the community–for systemic poverty and discrimination. June described this shift when she said that "the conversation has definitely changed over the last 5-6 years," where before then, she felt that the prevalent attitude was,

“Well, you gotta pull yourselves up by your bootstraps, get up yourself, gotta take the initiative inside, and if you can't do that, don't want to do that, too bad!” She said through the community organizing work, the mindset had changed where “now it's more helpful. It's not just housing, it's in terms of food, in terms of racial injustice. The conversations have just opened up” (8/20/20). Part of this process was, “Let's look at what the root of the problem is, and then see the various solutions that might be possible.” Instead of feeling a sense of shame about community struggles, she felt a shift to focus on deeper sources and collective solutions.[45]

This shift to place responsibility for problems on larger structures also helped participants to clarify the deeper purpose behind their projects; talking about the alternative economy project, Mahjawe said that the GEL classes “helped a lot in terms of giving the framework and the focus, some of the underlying core purposes” of why they were doing the street fair, in particular that it was “a way to develop an alternative economy and take back the power that big corporations and tech companies and regentrification has tried to take away from us, or has taken away from the community or the neighborhood” (interview, 8/28/20). By recognizing the *dis*empowerment of the community by corporations and tech companies, Mahjawe was able to place greater value on their work to take back some of that power.

Clarity in the Workers’ Dialogue.

In the Workers’ Dialogue, participants also described how the program helped to clarify their experiences related to power, either by helping them name things they felt intuitively or by validating what they already had been able to articulate but felt alone in their analysis. Andrea, who had participated in an early Workers’ Dialogue before becoming the education director for the New England educators’ union, said that what she loved about the Workers’ Dialogue model was that “really people already know what to do but don’t know how to do it, how to activate it.”

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[45] This emphasis on the underlying causes of poverty represents a shift away from the welfare reform arguments beginning in the 1980s that termed the "underclass," a term that separated the poor from the working class and blamed them for their poverty (Zweig, 2000).

The workshop was "about respecting the participants of the Workers' Dialogue that they hold their own answers, but haven't had the process of connecting the dots" (12/29/20).

Part of how the program helped participants "connect the dots" was through enabling them to consciously name the ways their administrations intentionally or unintentionally prevented them as workers from having more power. Michael from the New England educators' union talked about this when he shared how his first Workers' Dialogue impacted him:

> What was so amazing about that experience for me was it helped me name things that I knew but I had never truly consciously conceptualized because I didn't have the names for it. I knew my bosses were purposely keeping us divided, right? You know what I mean? I knew in my core but I wasn't consciously aware of it until that [training]. (Interview, 9/2/20)

The workshop helped him to make meaning of important aspects of his own experience with his administration, to validate his own intuitive understanding that they were intentionally keeping workers from coming together. Similarly, Via, the Mandarin immersion teacher, said that the training "makes things clear to me that maybe the administrators are trying to make their language confusing to us" so that "we don't know how to react, to make us feel like we don't know what to do; we are not capable of thinking like administrators." She said that sometimes she would read messages from the administration that she didn't understand, and that "before I would blame myself. I would say, 'Oh, my English is not good.' Now I can say, 'Oh, maybe that's a strategy they use'" (interview, 8/17/20). This process of shifting responsibility for her confusion from her own English skills to an intentional strategy of her administration was a way of not only externalizing her experience, but of seeing her interests more aligned with her coworkers and less with management.

Carrie, the lab tech, described a similar shift when she said that her experience in the training "makes me not trust leadership as much." She said that while she "didn't trust them before, now I feel more like they are an enemy almost." At first she was "hesitant to buy into that–I feel like it shouldn't always be us versus them, because I always feel like we shouldn't be putting barriers between us." But she came to see these barriers as created by management:

> I think that their system of leading is putting barriers between the employees and administration, whether they intend to do it or not, they're doing it… By reducing staff, we have less time to talk with each other, and increasing stress, and then we tend to take it out on each other. Whether they intended to do that or not, it's happening. (Interview, 10/12/20)

As for Michael and Via, the program helped Carrie to place responsibility on management for her experiences of short-staffing, increasing stress, and conflict among coworkers.

For Workers' Dialogue participants, there was the development of a sharpness in their clarity about power. As Rosa described it to participants in one workshop, this was clarity about "how to recognize and move the center of power from outside of ourselves, from looking up, to think of power as something we share when we act collectively; from looking up for power to looking across for power to each other" (NEEA workshop, 7/21/20). The shift to clarity was not only about learning to recognize the reality of oppressive power, but also the true source of their own power–each other.

Bringing It All Together: From Powerlessness to Collective Historical Agency

In their focus on shifts from the disempowering experiences of isolation and division, as well as doubt, pessimism, fear and confusion to empowering experiences of connection, common ground, confidence, possibility, clarity and courage, participants demonstrated that what they most valued was how the programs helped them shift from experiences of *powerlessness* to *collective historical agency,* or what Freire (2000) called the "historical nature of humankind" (p. 84) where, "a deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to ap-prehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transfor-mation. Resignation gives way to the drive for transformation and inquiry" (p. 85). Participants became conscious–or it renewed or strengthened a consciousness that they already had–that they might be able to intervene to change the trajectory of their collective experience in their workplaces or neighborhoods in a fundamental way. Yolanda from Educators United articulated this view when she said that, "One of the things I think is so important, especially with the Workers' Dialogue, is to bring that power back to us, but also create a support system with each other."

She said that, “What we go through at the local is ridiculous, disgusting” but that, “We have to make a change today for those who are going to come after us” (Educators United workshop, 11/17/20).

This perspective was voiced repeatedly by participants in both programs in a way that encompassed the other shifts described above. In the GEL program, it was expressed as a relationship to what happened in the community that was not passive or accepting but where participants saw themselves as having the ability to collectively contribute to impact the status quo in their neighborhoods. For example, as described earlier, Nubian experienced a shift from powerlessness after moving to the Tenderloin to an experience of being able to create something important in the community with others. She said there had been a “natural negativity that kind of penetrated my thinking” because “initially I had some of that… feeling that if I asked people to join me, they wouldn't want to. Why would they want to?” But she said that “what stuck with me” in the GEL program was that, “If you believe in something and you're passionate about something, people will join you based on your personality and your passion and your ability to share your vision” (interview, 7/22/20). And Reynardo said that what he got out of the GEL program was “the opportunity to design and think of ways to make a difference.” He said that the reality in the Tenderloin was that, “We have very little political power and clout; we don't know the right people, we aren't connected with this or that. So we have to struggle much more than those who have the easy street of doing things right” meaning the mayor or city agencies that have “the power, the legalities to do things.” He then said that despite these limitations,

> We can make some kinds of strides within our groups, building confidence within our groups, building confidence with the people who are working with us, and taking what we can from each group, from each person, and applying something to something we feel we can actually do, and get *done*. (Interview, 10/2/20).

For these participants, they did not have illusions about how fast change could happen, but they had been activated in a way where they were willing to put the work in to see what they might be able to accomplish together. Nubian crystalized this view when she shared in one interview that,

"People are always looking for–I used to look for, 'why don't they help us.' It was a they, you know. We're the they" (interview, 7/22/20)

In the Workers' Dialogue, participants similarly described how they felt a stronger sense of agency through being able to come together with their coworkers to make change. For example, in describing what she got out of the Workers' Dialogue, Jen said that, "If we stay all together and stick together, you can't ignore us. You can't ignore a louder voice. I definitely felt charged with that" (interview, 11/20/20)." And Kate said that "a shift in attitude was a big piece" of what she got from the program, and "hearing that word power over and over, that we actually do have the power" but that "it takes actual purposeful work to try and make the difference." She said it was not that her perspective had "necessarily changed," but that it had "grown and been more solidified that when we all join together we can do something. I always thought it was a pipe dream that that could happen" (interview, 8/7/20). As in the GEL program, this did not mean that participants believed their actions would necessarily bring about change, but they had a sense of determination that they needed to at least try. As Charity said, "It has to start somewhere, otherwise change doesn't happen. That's what I got from today's session" (Educators United workshop, 12/1/20).

Facilitators in both programs were aware that they were supporting this shift for participants. For example, Armand said about GEL participants and others in the community,

> Participants and community leaders have been traumatized for so long. Many of them are formerly homeless, couldn't get support–it took them years to get support, to become whole again and get housing. Those traumas for years and years, they become hopeless. But this experience actually creates those passions and realization that *actually we can make [change] faster, we can make it bigger for other people, if we do it collectively*. That's the realization–rather than one person at each time, we can do something [together] for the greater good. (Personal communication, 4/26/21)

Rosa said she wanted to support participants in "shifting perspective" in a way that would allow them to "understand power, understand their own agency, understand they aren't alone" (interview, 9/21/20). And Philip said that through the Workers' Dialogue people begin to "realize they aren't the only ones; they start to realize the balance of power *and their role in*

that" (interview, 11/16/20; emphasis added). Naomi described the process as a way in which participants

> can understand themselves as part of a dynamic process that started before, continues after, includes others but that they can see themselves not as passive, not as victim to that but with a potential purposeful intentional action with others to effect the direction of where things are going, to change history, to affect the outcome. (Personal communication, 5/5/21)

Facilitators knew that they were not simply teaching skills or abstract analysis, but supporting a more fundamental and collective shift that could enable participants to be active participants in shaping their collective histories.

Participants made it clear that this was not a fixed shift that was accomplished once– even union and community activists with years of experience expressed becoming discouraged and hopeless at times, and for them the programs often helped them to recommit themselves to the difficult struggle. Tamara expressed this after she successfully organized a major rally of bus drivers around COVID safety, but then had difficulty getting people to continue speaking up. She said that although she felt like "putting my head against the wall and smashing it trying to get people involved," that the program reinforced that, "We have to continue fighting, continue organizing, continue talking, that's the thing, talking and standing together to become one united front. A wall isn't made overnight, it's done with pebbles" (interview, 11/17/20).

Discussion

Participant experience in the program challenges a view of critical consciousness as abstract knowledge, in which, as Acevedo (1992) argues, the "notion of critical consciousness is understood more as a criticism at the level of broad categories, not as an explanation of the problems under scrutiny, and even less as an attitude applicable to social relations in daily life" (p. 72). Participants in this study pointed to an understanding of critical consciousness that is contextual and linked to motivation to act: "The people must be convinced that another world is indeed possible and is worth the investment of their time, material resources, hope, sacrifice, and aspirations for a better tomorrow" (Truscello & Nangwaya, 2017, p. 21). In both the GEL

program and Workers' Dialogue, what participants described most valuing *included* a cognitive understanding of structures of power; but it encompassed much more than that through moving from experiences of powerlessness to an experiential understanding of their collective agency that came through connection, unity, confidence, possibility, and courage. These shifts were not just mental but *material* and experiential, as Rosa described in one session:

> People feel deeply disrespected. Part of how we overcome that is that we bring people together, hear from each other, and they experience each other as not alone. I use the word "experience" intentionally. We are not trying to persuade people that they are not alone. It's not a five-paragraph essay–it's the experience of being with other union members in a way that says, that brings forward, "I am not alone." Our job as organizers, one of our first jobs, is to create that opportunity for people. (NEEA workshop, 7/14/20).

The shifts participants described reflect Freire's (2014) conception of solidarity, that "solidarity has to be shaped in our bodies, in our behaviors, in our convictions" (p. 46). And they reflect what Worthen (2014) calls "readiness," or "a state of being prepared, awake and aware, fully equipped, in touch with one's allies, ready to go, ready to fight if necessary" (p. 16).

Participants' emphasis on their experiences in the two programs mirrors Rosa Park's description of her experience at a workshop at the Highlander School before her refusal to give up her seat on a segregated Montgomery bus:

> It was my very first experience in my entire life going to a place where there were people of another race where we were all treated equally without any tension, or feeling of embarrassment, or whatever goes with artificial boundaries of racial segregation… [It] did give me my first insight on the fact that there were such people who believed completely in freedom and equality for all. (Terkel, 1973, 10:31 min.)

And Horton recalled that in Rosa Parks' reflections on Highlander, "She doesn't say a thing about anything *factually* that she learned." Instead, "She says the reason Highlander meant something to her and emboldened her to act as she did was that at Highlander she found *respect* as a Black person and found white people she could *trust*." Horton argued that the lesson from this was that "you speak not just by words and discussion but you speak by the way your programs are run" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 153; emphasis in the original). This view highlights how significant group experiences are in an educational setting that could otherwise be valued

only for specific skills or knowledge that participants take away. This reflects a different understanding of the counter-hegemonic role of education: "'If hegemony is the result of lived social relationships and not simply the dominance of ideas, then *the experience inherent in educational situations… is as significant as the purely intellectual content*" (Youngman, 1986; as quoted in Wiggins, 2011, p. 105; emphasis added).

This understanding of critical consciousness emphasizes people's *relationship* to structures of power, which in these two programs participants came to see as changeable as a result of their collective intervention through what Huey Newton (1973) called "a resolute determination to bring about change" (p. 6). It reflects Freire's belief that,

> To achieve humanization we must struggle to change reality, instead of just adapt ourselves to reality. I always say that I personally did not come to the world in order to adapt myself to the world; I came to change. Maybe I won't change it, but *at least I need to know that I could change it and that I must try*. (2014)

Thus critical consciousness develops from and contributes to people's actual participation in collective struggle. It is not an end in and of itself, nor can it arise by itself.

Critical consciousness in the two programs therefore encompassed much more than a critique of systems of oppression–it also encompassed a critique and rejection of the *belief system* imposed by those systems that *oppressed people are powerless*. Participants' new or revived consciousness enabled them to reject the fatalism that Freire (2000) talked about in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: "It is necessary that the weakness of the powerless is transformed into a force capable of announcing justice. For this to happen, a total denouncement of fatalism is necessary. We are transformative beings and not beings for accommodation" (p. 56). The programs strengthened participants' ability to reject fatalism because they had the opportunity to link up in a *meaningful* way with organizations and people already engaged in struggle–they were activated, or reactivated, with an experiential understanding of their collective historical agency.

Tensions

While there were many similarities in the shifts that participants experienced in the two programs, there were also some differences between programs for the last two shifts, from fear to courage and from confusion to clarity. In the GEL program, there was evidence that the program supported greater courage among some participants, but it was not a central element of what was meaningful to them about the program overall. Meanwhile, fear was a central theme in the Workers' Dialogue and participants repeatedly expressed valuing the way the program helped them to face the risks of organizing.

Confusion to clarity also seemed to be a stronger shift in the Workers' Dialogue than in the GEL program. In the GEL program, participants developed a more conscious awareness that they and each other were not to blame for their problems, which was validating and empowering on its own. They also developed a bigger picture understanding of the general role of governments and corporations in undermining grassroots power, but were fuzzier about who was specifically responsible for the conditions they faced. For example, while concepts like the "weaponization of housing" and "systemic racism" were meaningful to them and validated their own experience, they didn't say the program helped them to articulate the specific mechanisms, people or institutions that could be held responsible for how these concepts played out in their neighborhoods.

In the Workers' Dialogue, by contrast, participants were explicit that the program had helped them develop clarity about the role of their school boards, principals, hospital administrators, and in many cases also their own union leadership; the program helped them to crystallize the imbalance of power between workers and management, and to identify who exactly had power over specific decisions so that they could impact those decisions. These two differences point to a difference in approach between the two programs, where the GEL program intentionally avoided conflict unless necessary, while the Workers' Dialogue viewed it as necessary to build power. I will return to this tension in the final chapter.

Conclusion

Participants' reflections on their experiences in these two programs provide evidence of how shifts from powerlessness to collective agency can happen. As Mansbridge (2001) argues, a conscious awareness of structures of oppression, or even an opinion about the importance of changing them, is not enough:

> Being "for" something in the sense of favoring it does not automatically lead one to act to defend it. Moving from recognizing the need for collective action (and thus favoring it) to being willing to act on its behalf requires something else inside the heart and brain. (p. 243)

In the GEL program and Workers' Dialogue, this "something else" was people's *changed relationship to each other* in the context of larger collective struggles, where they went from the isolation and division endemic to their workplaces and neighborhoods to a new collective experience of solidarity where as Naomi described it, "Something happens when we become the powerful for each other" (interview, 9/16/20). This has important implications for the relationship between critical consciousness, praxis and democracy that I will explore in Chapter VIII.

CHAPTER VIII: DISCUSSION

As described in Chapter I, the purpose of this study was to understand how two U.S.-based popular education programs contributed to the building of democratic grassroots social movements. The findings chapters described the context for each case study through the lens of social movement free space, analyzed each program in depth in terms of what they each *did* through the lenses of praxis and democracy, and finally compared how the programs contributed to participants' greater engagement in organizing through the lens of critical consciousness. These chapters show how by creating relatively free spaces, the programs were able to apply the democratic principles of popular education in the context of larger organizing work and social struggles. By cultivating connections and solidarity among participants, the programs supported their shift from powerlessness to a sense of collective historical agency, that as Jen said, "we can actually do something." The findings also showed how the structural tension between participants' democratic needs for greater agency and the hierarchies they functioned within resulted in organizing and pedagogical tensions that in some cases may have interfered with participants' collective agency. In the discussion below, I consider these findings through a comparison of the two programs in the context of existing literature.

Discussion: Comparing the Programs

Comparing the findings between the two programs points to a shared approach to popular education as well as a significant point of divergence. Considering the guiding research question–*How did the two programs contribute to democratic grassroots social movements*?–both programs contributed to democratic grassroots social movements by enabling *changed social relations*: first between participants and facilitators, then with each other, and finally, to varying degrees, with larger structures of power. These changed relationships enabled participants to "enter the historical process as responsible Subjects" (Freire, 2000, p. 36). But the two programs also had a fundamental difference in strategy, particularly in their approach to conflict; this section explores the significance and implications of both the commonalities and

this strategic divergence.

Changed Social Relations

Through a comparison of the two programs, the findings show how by using popular education principles in the context of broader social struggles, popular education can contribute to *changed social relations.* Cadena (1984), Jara (2010), Wiggins (2011) and others highlight the prefigurative role popular education can play in changing social relations: Wiggins (2011) argues that "popular education allows participants to experience *changed social relations* and thus come to a different understanding and expectation of reality" (p. 44; emphasis added). Cadena (1984) writes that, "The new society is not only a goal for the future. Popular education seeks, in its daily work, to implement *the new social relationships* suggested by the principles of an alternative society" (p. 34; emphasis added). The findings show how the programs made these changed social relations possible first through a changed relationship between facilitators and participants, *among* participants, and vis-à-vis institutions and people that held power over them *outside* the educational space.

Changed Facilitator-Participant Relationships.

In their efforts to change broader power relations, program facilitators first challenged the hierarchy of traditional teacher-student relations by using the free space they had created to cultivate relationships of equality and respect between themselves and participants through what Payne (2008) calls "the radical affirmation of students' dignity" (p. 3). This reflects a Freemen approach to popular education, where educators work to develop a "horizontal pedagogic relationship between the educator and the educated" (Jara, 2010, p. 292). Without the pressure to carry out a pre-packaged program, facilitators were free to *respond* to participants. Naomi reflected on how important this was:

> The way to take people who have come out of a workplace where they are mostly dehumanized–Freire's word–and try in a short period of time allow them to feel they can be human, to rediscover something about their humanity–how are you going to do that right away? You can't tell them. The way I do that is you listen carefully, you show

> respect. For me that's how you introduce a counter-hegemonic culture. (Personal communication, 4/2/21)

The beginning of showing respect was that the content of both programs was "the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (Freire, 2000, p. 95). In line with Freire's rejection of banking, facilitators did not impose their knowledge and instead entered into *dialogue* with participants, where the construction of new knowledge was a collective process. This was in sharp contrast to most social movement education programs that "take 'short-cuts' and transmit information deemed to be necessary for members' engagement in public struggle–without leaving much space for critical engagement" (von Kotze et al., 2016, p. 105).

While rejecting a top-down banking approach, these programs also challenged a superficial understanding of participation, instead emphasizing the centrality of praxis and democracy: "Almost every [popular education] program claims to use participatory methods… very few, however, ask questions like: participation by whom?, for what?… what are the possibilities and limits for participating?" (Acevedo, 1992, p. 73). In some popular education programs, as noted in the literature review, the participatory aspect can be limited to generating a positive feeling in the group, instead of using the new knowledge for action (Bartlett, 2005). The GEL program and Workers' Dialogue practiced a deeper form of participation, where participants had a significant role in shaping the *direction of the conversations and the organizing work*. As Philip said of the Workers' Dialogue, "It's obvious from the get go that it's not about the people facilitating, it's about you [the participant]… We have values, skills that people need to learn to bring equilibrium to the balance of power. But this is your journey" (interview, 11/16/20). As Philip and other facilitators often told participants, they were not telling stories to tell stories but to learn from those stories to plan future action. In the GEL program, Armand's focus on participants' development–so that they could take on more responsibility for the neighborhood organizing work–showed a respect for participants' capacity and "right to participate in history as Subjects" (Freire, 2000, p. 36).

In order to create these conditions, the facilitators guided the process; these were not consensus-based organizing meetings but pedagogical spaces designed for collective learning and growth. They reflected Jara's (2010) description of a popular education process where "the teacher is more of a guide, monitoring a process in which the group tends to have an increasing autonomy" (p. 292). Facilitators demonstrated a deep respect for participants' *existing* knowledge and experience, and also helped them to develop *new* knowledge and experiences that could be liberating. In this way, facilitators modeled a commitment not "just to what people are, but to *what they can become"* (Payne, 2008, p. 62; emphasis added). In *We Make the Road by Walking,* Horton reflects that,

> To me it's essential that you start where the people are. But if you're going to start where they are and they don't change, then there's no point in starting because you're not going anywhere… if you don't have some vision of what ought to be or what they can become, then you have no way of contributing anything to the process. (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 99)

And in *A Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire (2000) advises that "the point of departure must always be with men and women in the 'here and now'" and that "only by starting from this situation… can they begin to move" (p. 85). Facilitators encouraged participants to view their experiences as changeable through their intervention, and knew how to "introduce a different note, where to put the tension that might spark a collective learning process–and when to stay quiet" (Nunes, 2021, para. 13). They used their power to facilitate a liberating *process,* recognizing that there was a power differential between themselves and participants inside the program, and using that power to cultivate democratic possibilities.

This approach calls into question traditional notions of democracy, in which it might be considered anti-democratic for facilitators to direct a process at all. Nunes (2021) calls this an "impoverished notion of democracy:"

> If the movements of the past decade were so allergic to leadership, it is because they did not think that it could also mean this [collective learning process.] As a consequence, they were often left with an impoverished notion of democracy: one that made it into an arena for the expression of individual differences treated as absolutes, rather than a space for mutual influence and exchange–in which people enter to change others and be changed in turn. (para. 9)

While facilitators did not talk about their role in terms of leadership, they were taking a form of leadership that does not reflect a traditional top-down view, but does reflect Freire's. Nunes (2021) argues that from Freire's perspective, leadership is not something that belongs to any particular group–"the vanguard that knows better than others in every situation and department." Instead, it is "a function that can be exercised by anyone who, in a given context, possesses a knowledge differential that makes them capable of triggering a collective learning process" (para. 10). Veteran organizers in the GEL program and Workers' Dialogue did not see themselves as knowing better in every situation, but recognized that they had a knowledge differential about *organizing*, and they used that knowledge to trigger a collective learning process among people who wanted and needed to learn how to change power relations.

Through this collective learning process, facilitators were able to move people without imposition or banking education. They recognized that "it is by starting from existing differences, but without giving up on dialogue or resorting to manipulation and imposition, that an emancipatory process can take place" where popular educators can "point a direction which others regard as valid, useful, important… through open dialogue, reciprocity and persuasion" (Nunes, 2021, para. 11-12). They respected participants' autonomy while at the same time pointing to the direction of organizing practices that could build more power. They followed the approach of the Citizenship Schools, where as Citizenship School teacher Septima Clark reflected,

> I found out that you don't tell people what to do. You let them tell you what they want done and then you have to have in your mind certain things that you feel they need to do. And so you get their thoughts and wind your thoughts around [theirs]… but if you have a cut-and-dry program for them, you'll lose out every time. (As quoted in Levine, 2008, p. 35)

Changed relations between facilitators and participants in the GEL program and Workers' Dialogue did not mean that facilitators abdicated their own vision of what was possible or necessary–they were not neutral facilitators carrying out a neutral process. To the contrary, they

used their vision of a new world based on equality and respect to create the conditions that could enable participants to help make that world come about.

Changed Relationships Among Participants.

While the GEL program and Workers' Dialogue carved out more autonomous spaces through changed relationships between facilitators and participants, what that space in turn cultivated was a changed set of relations *among* participants and also with their peers outside the program. As described in Chapter VII, what participants found most significant about the programs was how they influenced participants' relationships to *each other*, where they went from isolation and division to connection and the experience of finding unity around common goals. They learned, consciously or intuitively, that they *needed and could rely on each other* to make changes they needed in their neighborhoods and workplaces.

In both programs, facilitators intentionally contributed to these changed relationships by modeling respect and equality: "What we try and do is both model and talk about and convey that there is a different space created when you are all lateral" (Naomi, personal communication, 4/2/21). By experiencing the facilitators model the "radical affirmation of students' dignity," participants affirmed their own and each other's dignity, and began to undo the isolation, division, and competition they experienced in their neighborhoods and workplaces by cultivating relationships based in mutual respect, dialogue and cooperation. The programs provided what Myles Horton called "a climate which nurtures islands of decency" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 133), and participants responded by being decent to each other.

By having the experience of being listened to and heard by facilitators, they were empowered to listen to each other; by having space to get to know each others' struggles and successes and provide mutual support, participants were able to build empathy, trust and solidarity. For example, as described in Chapter IV, Nubian's desire to support Faith's organizing efforts on Treasure Island came from hearing about her struggles first-hand in the context of a program that encouraged mutual aid. As described in Chapter VII, Danny's

experience in one of the workshops helped him see that "everyone has such valuable input… the chances are one of us has gone through whatever the issue is and so you are able to get the support or get the advice, and learn." He recalled that, "How many times did some people talk about experiences and someone else is like, 'You know what I would do…'" (Interview, 12/10/20).

As it was for Rosa Parks at Highlander, the cultivation of solidarity across race was essential in both programs. This was especially true in the GEL program, where Armand intentionally brought participants together from different backgrounds, which made possible a shift from mistrust to a deeper experience of commonality in a shared struggle. Without this process, the divisions among participants and with peers outside the program would have made it impossible for them to carry out their coalition-building work that led to a stronger grassroots power base. The Workers' Dialogue also supported cross-race unity-building: One of the very first Workers' Dialogues came out of efforts by the new leadership of the New England educators' union to build involvement and leadership of educators of color, and the workshop itself led to the statewide Educators of Color Network with chapters throughout the state. The mixed-race Educators' United caucus had also come together around racial justice issues for staff and students, and Danny, a teacher of color at a vocational high school, described how having the opportunity to share his honest reflections about George Floyd's murder in a mostly white educators' workshop led to a deeper experience of solidarity with white coworkers. Given the significance of divisions that participants described in interviews, this kind of cross-race solidarity was a necessary part of overcoming isolation and division to experience connection and common ground.

Cultivating connection and common ground across race and other divisions did not mean the absence of conflict or different views, as the tensions related to race in the GEL program and different views on testing in the Workers' Dialogue show. Both the GEL program and the Workers' Dialogue acknowledged and made space for these differences, unlike some

interpretations of popular education where agreement is assumed or imposed–instead of built–which "may obscure or deny conflict and risk among participants, two essential components of deeper learning and understanding" (Choudry & Bleakney, 2013, p. 570-571). As a result, the GEL program and Workers' Dialogue avoided the "mystification of all things 'popular':"

> Adding to the problem [of how popular education is applied] is the attitude of many intellectuals, which translates into a paternalistic and permissive mystification of all things "popular," into avoiding confrontation and sidestepping the explanation and open discussion of divergent positions. All of these factors collude in limiting problem-posing to a superficial exercise which neither impacts on ways of thinking nor leads to a meaningful analysis and change of daily and political practices. (Acevedo, 1992, p. 72-73)

In the GEL program and Workers' Dialogue, facilitators made space for divergent views because they were looking for participants' real lived experiences and perspectives in order to find authentic common ground. This made it possible for participants to *learn from each other* through dialogue, a necessary part of praxis and meaningful democracy. Participants started out with different views on COVID testing, school reopening, and police brutality–sometimes these different views were reconciled through the dialogical process, and sometimes they weren't. But through hearing each others' experiences and views, and working together on common goals, participants were able to become humanized and humanize each other in a profound way, reflecting Freire's view that, "The pursuit of full humanity… cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity" (Freire, 2000, p. 85). As Rosa had realized, participants needed to "talk to each other."

These types of peer interactions in both programs contrasted with traditional educational programs where students engage only with the teacher and/or are encouraged to compete with each other (e.g. for grades) in ways that undermine their potential solidarity. Rushing (2008), writes that liberatory education can help people to,

> in conjunction with others, transform oppressive relationships into liberating ones… we must eschew homogeneity, individualism, and teaching methods that deny the right and abilities of students to identify society's problems in favor of a pedagogy of group relationships, goals, and solidarity. Only then can they be real social change agents instead of purveyors of individual achievement, reaffirming a hollow and fallacious meritocracy (p. 99).

This type of group learning was similar to what Horton found in his early experiments with popular education in the rural South, where people "gained a great deal from hearing that others had similar problems and finding out that they could help each other solve some of them… The people needed a place where they could overcome their individualism and the isolation that resulted from it, and begin to work together as a community" (Thayer-Bacon, 2004, p. 10). Both programs emphasized the *collective* empowerment of people at the grassroots level, where "the inherent social character of each individual is integrated with the common belief, aspirations, and goals in a community setting" (GEL internal document, "Empowerment Based Organizing: A Transformational Organizing Model," n.d.).

Because both programs were directed towards organizing, the relationships based on mutual respect and equality among participants translated to the same qualities in their relationships with peers (neighborhood residents and union members) outside the workshops. The design of the GEL program led to participants intentionally reaching out to and involving community members in the projects in a reciprocal way, bringing in their knowledge and ideas to grow the projects. In the Workers' Dialogue, as described in Chapter VI, participants took their new knowledge about bottom-up organizing back to their coworkers, initiating one-on-one conversations and meetings to *listen* to people's needs, concerns and ideas, and to plan together.

In developing these organizing relationships, the two programs contributed to what Fantasia (1988) calls *cultures of solidarity,* which are "created and expressed by the process of mutual association" (p. 17). Through their changed relationships to each other, they prefigured relationships of a new and more egalitarian society:

> Whether or not a future society is consciously envisioned, whether or not a 'correct' image of the class structure is maintained, the building of solidarity in the form, and in the process, of mutual association can represent a practical attempt to restructure, or reorder, human relations. (p. 11)

These changed relations are particularly essential in the larger economic and political context because "our relationships are deeply affected by the power dynamics of capitalism and hierarchy" (Sitrin, 2006, p. 3). Heidemann (2019) argues that one of the results of creating a

free space is that it allows for "interpersonal ties based on communicative openness and trust" as well as "mutual recognition of interests" that are necessary for social movement-building (p. 314).

In the context of movement building, the significance of this shift in social relations cannot be understated. Grassroots movements rely on the unity of the people because, by definition, they do not have the money or connections to those in power that more mainstream political efforts have. Employers, landlords and other power-holders not only know this, but look for ways to keep people isolated and divided; for example in addition to controlling working conditions inside the workplace, Parker & Gruelle (1999) argue that, "Management operates inside the union, too, by its power to divide workers by favoring one group or individual over another whether its through distribution of overtime or race discrimination" (p. 19-20). Freire (2000) recognized this need for unity and why it is so dangerous to the status quo:

> As the oppressor minority subordinates and dominates the majority, it must divide it and keep it divided in order to remain in power. The minority cannot permit itself the luxury of tolerating the unification of the people, which would undoubtedly signify a serious threat to their own hegemony... Concepts such as unity, organization, and struggle are immediately labeled as dangerous. In fact, of course, these concepts are dangerous—to the oppressors—for their realization is necessary to actions of liberation. (p. 141)

Freire (2000) believed that "as long as they [the oppressed] are divided they will always be easy prey for manipulation and domina-tion" and that "unity and organization can enable them to change their weakness into a transforming force with which they can recreate the world and make it more human" (p. 145). By cultivating a culture of solidarity among participants and their peers outside the programs, the GEL program and Workers' Dialogue contributed to their humanization and their ability to "re-create the world."

Changed Relationships to Structures of Power.

While changed relationships among poor and working class people is necessary for greater power, Freire (2000) consistently argued that these new relationships must be applied to changing unjust social relations in society: "Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination *must fight for*

their emancipation" (p. 86; emphasis added). The changed relations inside the programs were not an end in and of themselves, but applied to changing the social relations *outside* the educational space, between participants (SRO residents, healthcare or education workers) and those who held structural power over them (government officials, developers, landlords, employers, and sometimes union officials). Macedo (2000) argued that Freire's "radical pedagogical proposals… go beyond the classroom boundaries and effect significant changes in the society as well" (p. 19). As noted in the literature review, Miller and VeneKlasen (2012) argue that over time the interactive learning methods of popular education have been separated from the "explicit political objectives and organizing strategies that are vital to popular education theory and practice" (p. 2). Because these programs were linked in a meaningful and intentional way to existing social struggles, they gave participants opportunities to apply their new learning and relationships to ongoing organizing work that had more power to alter power relations in society.

These findings reflect Kane's (2000) analysis of popular education in Latin America, that it was most effective in the context of social movement organizations, where "the demand and infrastructure for collective learning already existed" (p. 46). Participants were able to take what they learned and immediately and directly apply it to structures of power outside the educational space because of the larger organizational contexts both programs worked within. Because of these contexts and through the development of changed social relations inside the programs–which led to increased knowledge and confidence–they were able to take steps that many of them had never taken before to assert their common needs to those in power outside the programs. The shifts described in Chapter VII, which led to participants having a sense of solidarity and collective historical agency, contributed to their willingness and capacity to work for these changed social relations.

As discussed in Chapter V, the GEL program intentionally made possible experiences where participants used the collective strength they had built in the community to engage

directly with politicians and developers to press their own grassroots agendas. The electoral project committee met with District Supervisor candidates and their current District supervisor to discuss community issues, and the Alternative Economy and 6th Street project groups met with a local developer to negotiate over a community benefits agreement. The project groups always went into these interactions collectively, with thoughtful planning beforehand, and often in coalition with other groups, so that they could have the strength of a larger group in these situations of unequal power. While in most cases these were collaborative and non-confrontational interactions, they gave participants the experience and expectation of relating to people and institutions with significantly more power as equals within those spaces.

In the Workers' Dialogue, as discussed in Chapter VI, facilitators also encouraged participants to engage with power-holders directly, but did not avoid confrontation. As a result, participants from the educators' caucus workshops organized with coworkers to present collective COVID demands to their school administrations and spoke out in support of coworkers who were being retaliated against. Participants from the healthcare union caucus helped plan and spoke at a rally opposing the potential sale of a long-term facility, and provided support for a strike at a sister hospital that won significant staffing ratios. By being linked to the caucuses and the unions, the Workers' Dialogue gave people experience confronting unjust power and a meaningful way to participate in organizations that were engaged in the work of transforming power relations on a larger scale.

While both programs contributed to changed social relations in the three ways described above, the tensions that arose in each highlight different views about the role of *conflict* in their broader organizing strategies to challenge unjust power. The Workers' Dialogue's more confrontational approach to power and the GEL program's more collaborative approach highlight different approaches in popular education to addressing the fundamental tension between the democratic needs and sensibilities of the base and the hierarchical structures they engaged with.

Considering the Tensions: The Role of Conflict in Popular Education

Despite their different contexts, the GEL program and the Workers' Dialogue both gave participants the experience of changed relationships of power, first with facilitators, then with each other, and finally with people and institutions with social and economic power in society. However, when those in power didn't respond as equals–didn't listen or engage in dialogue–an important question is, what strategies did programs encourage participants to use then? The structural tension between the democratic needs of participants and the hierarchical structures they were engaged in described in the previous chapters show up here; comparing the differences between how the two programs responded illuminates the significance of the role of *conflict* in changing power relations.

Participants' experiences set an expectation of the right to be heard, the right to enter into dialogue. They brought this horizontal approach to their work outside the program when they worked to actually make concrete changes they needed, but often found that landlords, employers and government officials were not interested in dialogue. After trying to start a resident association and a union for CCDC employees, Armand, Reynardo and resident leaders found that CCDC was not interested in hearing the authentic residents or staff voices. Teachers like Emily found out that their administrations were unresponsive to educator views on COVID safety protocols, and Carrie, the lab tech, found out that hospital management-led task forces and committees were not really designed for employee input or solving problems. These experiences represented a disconnect between participants' needs for democratic decision-making and the reality of systems that did not function democratically.

The two programs responded to this tension in similar but also very different ways. They both recognized the tension and worked to create autonomous spaces because of it–the GEL program outside of the control of city-funded non-profits, and the Workers' Dialogue outside the control of both employers and top-down unions. But in order to change power relations outside the programs, they still necessarily had to come up against these power structures. In

the Workers' Dialogue, participants were encouraged to not stop organizing when they came up against these walls: for example Naomi encouraged Emily to not give up when her school administration didn't respond to staff concerns, and suggested to Carrie that instead of participating in management committees to "start your own conversation." Facilitators encouraged participants to walk through their fear and to overcome risks through their greater solidarity as workers.

By contrast, in the GEL program, Armand and resident leaders did not keep organizing when CCDC shut down the resident association; instead they began new efforts that were less confrontational. The GEL program focused on developing participants' capacities in supportive spaces and strengthening the relationships and networks in the neighborhoods; participants learned to engage in deep grassroots community building across race and other group divisions, but also practiced civic engagement mainly through legitimized political mechanisms that didn't require any significant conflict.

In this way, the programs showed how they influenced participants' approach to conflict with those in power through the available *repertoire of collective action,* or particular strategies and tactics that they used to successfully make demands of powerholders (Tilly, 1978, p. 23). While participants were free to organize in different ways outside the programs, the programs were not neutral; they pushed participants towards certain strategies and tactics and away from others. Horton (1990) reminds us that "there can be no such thing as neutrality," and that neutrality is just a "code word for the existing system" (p. 102). By having a vision of and particular approach to social change that countered the status quo, they necessarily influenced participant praxis.

People learn what they practice–for example in the GEL program Sunshine practiced electoral politics, and so as described in Chapter V that became the "repertoire of collective action" that was available to her when thinking about how she could organize the trans community. From a Freirean perspective, people need experience challenging oppressive power

to be able to build their own power. As Freire (2000) writes, "The oppressed must see examples of the vulnerability of the oppressor so that a contrary conviction can begin to grow within them" (p. 65). Seeing this vulnerability is part of Freire's conception of praxis: When people facing oppression have the opportunity to initially wield some small amount of collective power, they then discover from their own experience that the employer or politician is actually not omnipotent, and that the people do have power if they act collectively. From this new knowledge, they can then come to "perceive their state not as fated and unalterable, but merely as limiting—and therefore challenging," strengthening their commitment to keep trying (p. 85).

For this reason, Freire (2000) described not just reflection but *critical* reflection as a necessary part of praxis: "When the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection" (p. 66). The Workers' Dialogue encouraged participants to critically reflect on what they had done in order to then plan based on their new learning; in the GEL program, reflection was more technical about how to carry out their plans as opposed to whether those plans were meeting their larger goals; participants were not asked to critically reflect on their own project work in a way that might have allowed for a change in direction.

This may be why, as discussed in Chapter VIII, GEL participants rarely described the program as helping them develop the courage to stand up to power–they didn't need courage because the program's strategy didn't encourage them to take this kind of risk. It may also be why they developed less clarity about exactly who the powerholders were in their neighborhoods. Piven and Cloward (1977) write that, "Power is rooted in the control of coercive force and in the control of the means of production. However, in capitalist societies this reality is not legitimated by rendering the powerful divine, *but by obscuring their existence*" (p. 2; emphasis added). While the Workers' Dialogue encouraged participants to identify the specific people and processes that held power over them and then take action to bring some balance to that relationship of power, GEL program participants didn't engage in this kind of power

analysis or practice. Goldberg and Alzaga (2020) argue that "Popular education helps us to develop clarity about our shared enemy, a crucial aspect of building meaningful solidarity" (para. 7)–Armand avoided making any institution or person the "enemy," which enabled a more supportive and less stressful program environment but also may have prevented more effective action against the injustices participants wanted to change.[46]

The same structural tension between hierarchy and democracy showed up in a different way in the Workers' Dialogue, which encouraged conflict as a necessary part of changing power relations. Facilitators encouraged participants to build their own power without relying on politicians or even parents–as part of this approach they pushed educators to use their power to keep schools closed and discouraged them from organizing with parents before getting organized themselves. When participants struggled to move forward with these suggestions, in this case the structural tension showed itself as a conflict between participants' need and desire for democratic decision-making over school reopenings, and the top-down pressure to reopen schools without regard for the opinions or needs of school staff. Because the Workers' Dialogue organizing strategy encouraged risk-taking as a necessary part of changing relationships of power, this created a pedagogical tension between the action the facilitators believed was needed and what the participants were ready or able to do at that moment. On the one hand, if facilitators had not been forceful, they may have missed opportunities to help participants develop the courage and strength to take risks necessary for real shifts in power relations with their employers: as von Kotze et al (2016) argue, part of popular educators' job is to help people imagine "what might be possible" (p. 103). On the other hand, by being too far ahead of participants, "what might be possible" wasn't always accessible to participants in these

[46] While it might be argued that the program necessarily used a less confrontational approach given the greater structural disempowerment of SRO residents compared to relatively privileged healthcare and education worker, historical examples actually show that often the opposite is true: for example Payne (2008) notes that in her work with the NAACP, Ella Baker critiqued the organization for being "overly concerned with recognition from whites, overly oriented to a middle-class agenda, unaware of the value of mass-based, mass-based, confrontational politics, not nearly aggressive enough on economic issues, and too much in the hands of the New York office" (Payne, 2008, p. 888).

moments. This may have reflected Myles Horton's experience that if you "don't get beyond participants at any one step, you can move very fast to expand their experience very wide in a very short time" but that "if you break that connection, it's no longer available to their experience, then they don't understand it, and it won't be useful to them. Then it becomes listening to the expert tell them what to do" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 152-153).

The Workers' Dialogue's discouragement of organizing with parents, although intended to support participants' capacity to change power relations directly, meant that the program did not support a cross-race coalition-building outside of the unions. While it was evident that avoiding conflict by hiding *behind* parents could not strengthen workers' autonomous power, I wondered whether being more open to participants' desire to communicate with parents about shared needs in order to find common ground, as Rosa suggested at one point, could have been generative and also strengthening of participants' internal power if done right.[47]

These tensions show some of the challenges in the pedagogy and political practice of popular education when it is used not only to change social relations *inside* the classroom space but vis-a-vis larger institutions. That facilitators in both the GEL program and Workers' Dialogue were committed to these transformed social relations meant that they were experimenting and looking for ways to create environments of more autonomy and more effective pedagogical practice, an ongoing process as they engaged in their own political praxis.

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[47] This question relates to an organizing approach now known as *bargaining for the common good,* where unions work with community groups to identify and then bargain for common issues. While this approach contributed to successful strikes of the Chicago Teachers' Union in 2012 (Inouye & Potter, 2021) and the United Teachers of Los Angeles in 2019 (The Forge, 2020), there are questions about what it means for unions to negotiate for community interests. On the one hand, as Reddy (2021) argues, workers organizing in their own interests *is* a common good. On the other hand, bargaining for the common good can challenge what labor considers its own interest in order to build a more radical vision: "By choosing to co-construct interests with community groups, common-good unionism does not rely on a presumed convergence of interests; it builds it…by recognizing that through broader solidarities, workers and community groups can facilitate structural change that redistributes wealth and power more widely than traditional unionism" (Reddy, 2021, para. 20). Related to this, Goldberg and Alzaga (2020) note the role popular education can play in bringing educators and parents together to identify the deeper structural causes of the problems facing public schools and their common needs. While they describe many of the elements of popular education considered here, they do not discuss the role of acknowledging and reconciling divergent views, an important aspect of solidarity-building as described in this study.

Implications

The role that popular education can play in contributing to changed social relations has many implications–I will highlight three. First, this research challenges a prevalent view that oppressed people don't rise up against unjust power, either because they are apathetic, or because they don't understand that the power structure is working against their interests (Truscello & Nangwaya, 2017). From this perspective, political education needs to *tell* them the reality of their experiences, which they don't grasp clearly (see for example Perlstein, 2008), and to push them to take action that they would otherwise not take.[48] The findings of this study point to something different. Participants and their peers in both studies *did* take action, often to find they did not have the tools they needed to make the changes they sought; or, they wanted to take action but didn't have a meaningful place to participate–this was Nubian's experience before joining the GEL program.

In the context of the coercive and exploitative nature of capitalism and white supremacy, what these findings point to is that people facing oppression do not need *more* coercion or pressure, but opportunities for connection, solidarity, and democratically planned action. Popular education can provide all these things. This is not to say people don't *also* need a clearer understanding of how their own oppression is tied to larger structures, but this understanding can arise through a pedagogical process that relies on relationships and respect:

> If you believe in democracy, which I do, you have to believe that people have the capacity within themselves to develop the ability to govern themselves. You've got to believe in that potential, and work as if it were true in that situation. (Horton, in Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 131)

This highlights the importance of free spaces where educators and organizers are able to

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[48] Ironically, this approach misuses Freire's concept of false consciousness to justify a banking approach to education. An overemphasis on false consciousness risks replicating dominant groups' paternalistic and dehumanizing view of people at the grassroots through the traditional banking model of education: "Freire asserts that banking education is focused on changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them… the paternalism of banking education expects that students be passive and willing recipients, accepting and altering themselves to whatever is presented as 'truth'" (Darder, 2018, p. 109). As Fred Hampton's character said in *Judas and the Black Messiah* about his experience in prison, there were "two thousand brothers who know who the enemy is. Who don't need the contradiction to be heightened. Because in Menard, the contradictions don't get more black and white. I mean, a lot of these brothers came here politicized, too. They just need organizing" (King, 2021).

respond to and engage in dialogue with people in order to trigger a "collective learning process" (Nunes, 2021). A faith in people's capacity to transform their own conditions may support that transformation, while an overemphasis on "false consciousness" may undermine the democratic vision of popular education.

A second implication is the limitation of education that focuses simply on "winning," as discussed in Chapter V. In that chapter, a Workers' Dialogue participant contrasted a workshop run by labor organizer Jane McAlevey with the Workers' Dialogue, saying that McAlevey "is trying to win," and that the Workers' Dialogue was more focused on internal union democracy, which he felt was sometimes "at the cost of winning."[49] From the perspective of changed social relations, *what* is being won is the question: Naomi reflected that, "Is that a win, if you settle a contract that includes some [good] language but the union has not built itself and the capacity of members to be brave enough to go enforce that language because they are scared to ever talk back to their principal or boss?" (Personal communication, 5/20/21) Without changed power relations between poor and working class people *themselves* and those who wield power over them–if people don't develop the ability to stand up to unjust power–a victory on paper does not necessarily translate to greater agency:

> We sometimes say it's about changing the balance of power, but it's way more fundamentally about people…coming to see themselves as enfranchised in their own lives, certainly in their work lives–to have opinions, to have aspirations, to be able to freely express them, to be able to freely organize around them, to know that that organizing could and should lead to changes in the workplace and in actual conditions and that that's very different from just saying, "I just want to win." (Naomi, personal communication, 5/20/21)

The two case study programs show that social transformation can begin with people's own changed relationship to those in power, and that skipping this step may mean taking a short-cut

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[49] The recent union election loss at the Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama highlights the significance of this question. McAlevey (2021) emphasizes the mistakes she believes union organizers made on the Amazon campaign that in her opinion led to the 2 to 1 loss: not doing house visits (unannounced visits to workers' homes by organizers) not having an accurate list of workers, using messaging that presented the union as a third party, and a lack of public majority support. While these may all have been relevant to why the workers lost the election, McAlevey doesn't say anything about the experience of the workers themselves and what capacity they might have built internally that could enable them to change the relationship of power between themselves and Amazon in the long term.

that doesn't translate into actual power for people at the base. Payne (2008) argues that whatever tactics organizations use, "over the long haul, concessions from the power structure are ephemeral. If ordinary people aren't capable of standing up for their own interests, whatever concessions are won today can be withdrawn tomorrow" (p. 57). This is why both programs used issues not as the final goal but as a tool to develop the collective capacities of the participants. It is also why electoral politics may be limited in its ability to transform social relations: as Ella Baker's biographer Barbara Ransby (2003) describes Baker's view of electoral politics, Baker saw "voting, lobbying the corridors of power, and getting favored candidates elected" as "secondary considerations" to getting people "in motion in a committed and sustained mass struggle" which would bring the politicians to them (p. 370).

Third, the findings point to the need for popular education spaces that are both *cross-race* and *class-based*. Participants' focus in interviews on the disempowerment of the racial divisions they experienced and the significance of finding common ground–and shared humanity–highlighted for me how essential it is in the United States to build authentic organizing relationships across race, as difficult as this is. Without an explicit *cross-race* orientation that centers racial justice, a right-wing populism–or what Truscello and Nangwaya (2017) call *authoritarian democracy*–can "lay claim, quite explicitly, to the popular will, to the interests of the poor and working classes, as against a corrupt, venal, and decrepit establishment" (p. 7). In the era of Trump, it seems evident that when members of the white working class are not brought into the solidarity-building projects of what Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) call *consistent democracy*, they are more available to the growing right-wing white supremacist movements.[50] Movements like the alt-right that claim to be counter-hegemonic actually reinforce existing power structures; popular education needs an explicit racial justice orientation in order to provide an ethical and consistent alternative to a white populism that is

[50] James Baldwin noted in 1964 that, "Two world wars and a worldwide depression have failed to reveal to [the poor white man] that he has far more in common with the ex-slaves who he fears than he has with the masters who oppress them both for profit." (Baldwin, 1964, p. 9-10)

unifying rather than divisive.

At the same time, without an explicit *class-based* solidarity, programs can be pulled into alliances with power-holders who do not seek to fundamentally change social relations.[51] Participants recognized that they needed *each other*–their peers who were in the same structural position vis-a-vis power. For Freire (2000), critical consciousness is also a *class* consciousness: "Since the unity of the oppressed involves solidarity among them, regardless of their exact status, this unity unquestionably requires class consciousness" (p. 174). Darder (2018) argues that Freire saw a class-based solidarity as essential within an economic system rooted in domination and exploitation:

> [Solidarity is] rooted in our human existential need for community and belonging, as well as the historical necessity for class struggle. Solidarity, then, is a key principle of praxis if we are to, indeed, transform the culture of domination and capitalist mode of production that fuels our estrangement from one another and the world. (p. 125)

Thus as Kendi (2019) and Peck (2020) argue, neither the history or current realities of capitalism and racism in the United States can be separated from each other, and so as Kendi argues, "to truly be antiracist, you also have to truly be anti-capitalist… And in order to truly be anti-capitalist, you have to be antiracist" (Kendi, as quoted on Democracy Now, 2019). As discussed above, popular education programs are not neutral; facilitators carry particular values and a vision of the world that they want to contribute to. In the United States context, recognizing how race can divide or unify class-based movements and working to challenge the roots of those divisions is essential for building democratic grassroots social movements.

These three implications: people's need for connection, solidarity and democratically-

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[51] While the GEL program was more obviously focused on racial justice and the Workers' Dialogue on class justice, they were both intersectional in their practice. A class-based solidarity was particularly evident in the Workers' Dialogue, which encouraged participants to name and act collectively to address the balance of power and inherent structural conflict between workers and employers. But in the GEL program as well, the approach was not on "helping" low-income residents, but instead enabling them to build a broad unity to change the society instead of accepting the logic that blamed them for their conditions. They were thus challenging *both* the conservative narrative that blames poor people for poverty, and also the liberal narrative that the poor need charity to make it within a system that otherwise functions as it should (Zweig, 2000). Zweig (2000) argues that both liberal and conservative approaches avoid acknowledging the *class context for poverty*, which "leads to a variety of programs designed to change the poor" instead of changing the society (p. 85).

planned action; the limitations of focusing on "winning" because it doesn't center people's agency; and the necessity for education that supports cross-race, class-based organizing, all support an approach to popular education that encourages people, as Ella Baker did, to "wrap themselves in a different culture, not as an escape but as part of their re-envisioning and redefining a new form of social relations that prioritized cooperation and collectivism over competition and individualism" (Ransby, 2003, p. 365).

Recommendations for Practice

The findings point to some specific recommendations for popular education practice:

1. ***Link education and organizing, and organize with the organized:***

To support the liberatory goals of social movements, *organizers* can look to create spaces that are not just for winning short-term organizing goals, but also for people to have space to reflect with others in a dialogical way that can contribute to more democratic and powerful long-term movements. At the same time, to support the liberatory goals of critical pedagogy, *educators* can look for ways to support students in collective action, because spaces for collective learning are most effective when they are tied up with larger organizing projects and movements that have the capacity to change the oppressive conditions people face. These findings confirm Wilson Gilmore's (2020) advice to "organize with people who are already organized" like trade unions; popular educators do not need to reinvent the wheel of organization, but instead can connect with *and democratize* existing efforts, where "the demand and infrastructure for collective learning" already exist (Kane, 2000, p. 46).[52]

[52] In this vein, Nygreen (2009) shares how her "private hopes" for a participatory action project she facilitated displayed "an embarrassing lack of understanding about how movements are built and how social change occurs." She questions "the education field's heavy emphasis on small-scale, participatory-inquiry projects as a primary strategy for structural social change, noting that projects like this lack a viable way to "scale up" their impact (p. 23). By being tied to larger movements, popular education can solve this problem without sacrificing the commitment to student agency.

2. ***Look for or create (relatively) free spaces, and then work to change power relations inside and outside of these spaces:***

   These findings show that popular education spaces may have their most powerful effect when they are *linked to, but not controlled by,* existing large-scale organizations or movements. Popular education programs can act as free spaces when they are able to connect people's real concerns–what Freire called the generative themes of their lives–to "counter-hegemonic educational projects that tie up with the emancipatory agendas of broader-level social movements" (p. 315). Educators and organizers, as well as workers or community members, can use these spaces to make possible 1) a more horizontal relationship between teachers/organizers and the people they work with, 2) relationships *among* people at the grassroots level that are rooted in authentic mutual solidarity, and 3) people's changed relationships to political and economic power, so that they can be Subjects instead of objects of social change.

3. ***Focus on peer connection and solidarity before "correction" of people's consciousness:***

   These findings show the possibilities of focusing less on teaching people what they don't know, and more on helping them overcome the objective, material experiences of isolation and division from their peers–as well as the subjective states that arise from that isolation and division–through building solidarity and engaging in collective praxis. Greater clarity and opportunities for political education can come organically from that process. We can learn from Myles Horton: "It took me a long time to get comfortable with being free to respond to people….we still made the mistake of imposing with the best of intentions because that's all we knew. We came out of this academic background and we were still within this orbit of conventionality in education" (Horton & Freire, p. 55). With the support of free spaces, popular educators can resist the pressure to impose on or pressure people, and focus on building authentic solidarity among them. New

content or ideas from facilitators can be *added* to the process as an essential part of dialogue.

4. ***Find common ground, *and* practice consistent democracy:***

   The findings here point to the transformative potential of using popular education spaces to find authentic common ground that can unite people in collective action. At the same time, while finding common issues across race and other divisions can be effective in building unity, also identifying issues that disproportionately impact people of color may build a deeper form of long-term solidarity. Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) call this *consistent democracy,* where "race and gender are not sideshows to the alleged real story of class" which is "itself too often understood in narrow terms" (p. 179). Instead of focusing on narrow common economic interests through a form of *color blindness* (Bonilla-Silva, 2007), which may actually be divisive, popular education can promote engagement in antiracist practices by looking for opportunities to respond to generative themes raised by participants of color. Themes like racism in hiring, that white participants might not consider on their own, point to structural inequities dividing poor/working class people from each other and can be the basis for dialogue.[53]

5. ***Recognize that not only veteran organizers/educators can do this work:***

   The principles of popular education "can be exercised by anyone who, in a given context, possesses a knowledge differential that makes them capable of triggering a collective learning process" (Nunes, 2021). What matters, as Philip from the Workers' Dialogue said, is to create "spaces where people can talk to each other about fear, about action" (interview, 11/15/21). Because it may be challenging for most educators to teach without structure, it's possible to use any structure one has and find ways to adjust it so that one

[53] While it was not the focus of this dissertation, there was evidence from the findings that this may be especially challenging–but also especially important–in all-white spaces, which are not neutral but racialized spaces where racial assumptions, prejudices and practices can be reinforced if they are not examined (Bonilla-Silva, 2007). In the majority-white Workers' Dialogues, issues around race were not brought up, despite racial divisions being relevant in both the educators' and healthcare workers unions.

can weave in the underlying principles described in this study, including having deep respect for people's capacity, holding a vision without being attached to a predetermined outcome, and focusing on the collective processes of peer learning and solidarity-building.

6. ***Attend to the tensions:***

   Those committed to an authentic popular education process can benefit from a reflective practice that acknowledges the real tensions in the work. This study identified structural, organizing and pedagogical tensions that highlight the real-world challenges in applying popular education principles in practice. Popular educators can maintain Freire's liberatory commitment by engaging in our own political praxis and recognizing, as Freire and Horton (1990) did, that none of us have all the answers, we are all always learning, and "we make the road by walking" (p. 6).

Recommendations for Research

While this study looked at many of the possibilities and tensions in popular education work in U.S. settings, more research is needed to understand it in its actual lived contexts: How is popular education understood and practiced in different environments, both its organizing strategy and its pedagogical practice? In what ways is it linked to social movement building? What kinds of environments place limitations on this work, what do these limitations look like, and how can they be navigated? What environments best cultivate popular education principles? What pedagogical practices appear to be most effective, and what practices undermine agency and solidarity? How can popular education support anti-racist, consistent democracy both in mixed race spaces and in all-white spaces? It is my hope that we are seeing a resurgence in popular education practice in the United States that will be followed by research that honestly and critically examines its potential and its challenges.

Closing Reflections

As I finish this dissertation in San Francisco in February of 2022, it hasn't rained in two months here despite being our rainy season. Considering the role of popular education in the years and decades ahead, I am sure that one of the most significant threats grassroots movements worldwide will have to confront is climate change. Participants in both programs experienced the effects of climate change directly: Tenderloin residents faced excessive heat waves[54] as well significant smoke from the climate-fueled wildfires that kept them inside for much of September and October. COVID itself, which impacted and continues to impact participants in both programs in ways that are still hard to comprehend, has also been directly tied to climate change and habitat destruction (Gupta, Rouse and Sarangi, 2021). At a time when communities feel helpless to change the overwhelming reality of an increasingly uninhabitable planet, popular education will have to grapple with how it can help to link people in a meaningful way to the growing movements for climate justice.

As capitalism has shown itself during the pandemic to render human beings disposable, whether they are homeless or frontline workers, so it renders the earth disposable. Arundhati Roy (2020) wrote at the beginning of the pandemic that, "In the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normalcy" (para. 46). Instead, as the true emergency becomes clearer, our capitalist economic system only speeds up its extraction of natural resources for profit. In this context, in the same way we need transformed relationships with each other, rooted in dialogue and solidarity, so we need a transformed relationship with the earth.

I believe the only power capable of changing course in such a fundamental way is the same power that has brought governments from South Africa to Argentina to their knees– grassroots movements of people in growing solidarity. During protests at the U.N. Climate

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[54] Erin reported in one housing sustainability meeting that there had been "over five deaths due to heat in SROs, three that I know of [directly]" (GEL project meeting, 9/8/20).

Summit in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2021 that drew over 100,000 people (see Figure 8), climate organizer Asad Rehman described this growing solidarity:

Figure 8. U.N. Climate Summit protest in Glasgow, November 5, 2021 (Image credit: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP via Getty Images)

> We're uniting trade unions and Indigenous, women and students, young and old. And we're building the movement that is needed. We know that this change will only happen when we, as ordinary people, lead this change and force our governments to act in our interests. (Democracy Now, 11/12/21)

And in a speech at the Glasgow climate protests, young Jamaican climate activist Mikaela Loach declared, "The antidote to despair is not to run away or ignore the realities.... In the face of this violence and despair, we cannot give up. We cannot be overwhelmed. We must act... We have to believe that we can achieve it" (Democracy Now, 11/8/21). Rehman and Loach's determination reflects what I saw in participants who had developed a *wisdom* about the historical potential of people at the grassroots when they are united in common goals.

Thanks to the 50+ interviews I was able to have with participants from so many different backgrounds during the pandemic–from nurses to bus drivers and special educators to low-income SRO residents–I saw their humanity as they struggled to make meaning of what was happening and to make a better world for themselves and each other. Because of this experience, I am more confident about the capacity of regular people to be agents of their own liberation, and that it is not apathy that prevents people from acting but the need for tools, meaningful ways to participate, and opportunities to collectively reflect and learn in the struggle. I continue to be guided by a basic faith in people, and a commitment to the kind of change that enables all of us to develop our full humanity. This basic faith is at the core of popular education because it is about believing in the right of all people to be free. I think this is what gives popular education its power, and why it continues to be used around the world as a tool for collective liberation and radical social change.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Case study program comparison chart

Table 1: Case study program comparison chart		
	Grassroots Empowerment and Leadership program (GEL)	**The Workers' Dialogue**
Sponsoring organizations	Collaboration between the *Pinay Neighborhood Development Program* (a new Filipino community organization based in SoMa), the *Central City Development Corporation* (a low-income housing provider with community organizing department that runs leadership training classes in the Tenderloin), and the *SoMa Community Association* (an unincorporated neighborhood organization)	*The Labor Network*, a labor-based non-profit that maintains a network of rank and file labor activists and runs organizing training programs in collaboration with local unions or union caucuses for rank and file activists.
Location	Geographically-based: Tenderloin and South of Market neighborhoods in San Francisco	National. The classes I observed were run in collaboration with an educators' union in New England, a hospital union in upstate NY, and an educators' union caucus in a Southern U.S. state.
Goal	Power for low-income city residents; resident-led community development of the Tenderloin neighborhood of SF	Rank-and-file development, strong democratic and militant unions to build working class power
Political orientation	Progressive	Left
Membership base of sponsoring organizations	Low-income residents: mainly Filipino, Black, and white	Rank-and-file workers; often white but increasingly workers of color
Program structure	Nine-month program: Bi-monthly classes combined with community development and political organizing projects that met weekly. Total of 14 participants. All sessions were moved	Month-long, 2 hr/week discussions on Zoom with 8-15 participants. Program pre-COVID was a full weekend (Friday night and all day

	to Zoom after the shelter-in-place which started after the first month.	Saturday and Sunday).
Popular education approach	Political education class using participatory activities, guest speakers, and discussion AND community organizing projects meant that organizing work was part of the program, with a facilitator for the project groups helping participants develop their capacity to initiate grassroots projects.	No curriculum or lesson plan, but instead used participant experience as the basis for dialogue; guided discussion on organizing strategy and values focused on the experiences of workers' at their jobs. Focus was on bringing workers together to assess the balance of power in their workplaces, identify common issues, and consider how they could take collective action around those issues. Organizing work was independent of the program.
Educational program goal	Develop grassroots organizers to build the power of poor and working class people	Develop grassroots organizers to build the power of poor and working class people
Criteria met from Acevedo's (1992) framework (based on preliminary research)	All five	All five

APPENDIX B: GEL Program project groups

Table X: GEL Project Groups

Project	Purpose	Participants
6th Street activation project	"6th Street is San Francisco's #1 fatality and injury zone for traffic accidents. It is a containment zone for homelessness, filthy alleyways, negative activities, and blighted storefronts. The danger and lack of traffic safety poses a threat to residents. We aim to transform and revitalize 6th street as a safe and clean place by improving cleanliness, traffic and public safety, wider sidewalks, walkable streets and alleyways, available public lounge, vibrant street lights and events and activities." (6th Street Activation brochure)	June, Anita Expanded project group members: Cynthia
Alternative economy developme nt project	To "prevent economic gentrification by resisting control of big corporations, so people can stay and thrive in our communities. To create and develop an alternative economy that transforms what is existing right now in our communities and aims to serve all of us (low-income people, communities of color, the alienated, disenfranchised that include all genders). And showcases the people's inherent talents, products, creative arts that focuses on saving and promoting our culture and diversity." (Alternative economy template)	Nubian, Mahwaje, Bianca Expanded project group members: Vanessa, Tom, Pedro, Abel
Electoral organizing project	To "build community power to help shape city policies and programs for the betterment of low-income community and communities of color." (Electoral project PowerPoint document)	Celia Sunshine, Lina, Gabriela, Mei, Faith Expanded project group members: Lila, Carolyn
Housing sustainabili ty and SRO organizing project	To "keep our community intact and sustainable by helping solve homelessness, evictions, availability of decent affordable housing for everyone, to ensure that no one will be priced out of their homes." (Housing sustainability project PowerPoint document)	Reynardo, Julian, Iris Expanded project group members: Cameron, Shannon, Erin, Leffet

APPENDIX C: GEL program class topics

Class	Schedule	Topic
1	3/14/2020	Facilitation and Communication
2	4/4/2020*	Social Movements
3	4/11/2020	Strategy and Tactics
4	4/25/2020	Approaches to Social Change: Different models of social change
5	5/9/2020	How Systems Work: How City Hall Works and Making City Hall Work For You
6	5/23/2020	What is Social Justice 1: Why there is Income and Wealth Inequality
7	6/13/2020	What is Social Justice 2: Racism and Class
8	6/27/2020	Importance of Arts and Culture in Social Change
9	7/11/2020	Electoral History: Why Elections Matter
10	7/25/20	Understanding Political Economy: What is Grassroots Economy?
11	8/8/2020	Mid-way Evaluation Class
12	8/22/2020	Outreach
13	9/12/2020	Community-Based Sustainable Economy Models
14	9/26/2020	Place-Making
15	10/10/2020	Land-Use Organizing Part 1
16	10/24/2020	Land-Use Organizing Part 2
	11/14/2020	Alternative Economy Street Fair and 6th Street Activation Event
17	11/16/2020	Final evaluation class
	11/28/2020	Graduation
*Moved forward one week because of COVID **Added class		

APPENDIX D: Interview questions

Interview questions for facilitators/organizers:

1. How did you first learn about popular education?
2. What does "popular education" mean to you? What is your definition? (If someone asked you to tell them about popular education, what would you say?)
3. How have you used popular education in this program?
4. What are your goals in your popular education work?
5. What theory, readings, or other sources have influenced your work?
6. What role do participants play in the development of the classes? Can you give me examples?
7. Have you worked through conflict or differences of opinion in the classes? What happened?
8. Have you adapted classes as a result of what happens in previous classes or feedback from students? If yes, in what ways?
9. Think about the community (workplace, town, population) you work with as a whole. Has the community changed as a result of your popular education work? If yes, how?
10. How have you adapted your classes and organizing work in the age of COVID-19? What has been the impact of these changes?

Interview questions for program participants:

1. How did you get connected to this program?
2. What motivated you to participate in this program?
3. What have you enjoyed most about it?
4. What do you learn in the class? How do you learn it? (Does the teacher tell you, do you figure things out from doing activities, etc.)
5. What role do you and other participants play in the classes? Can you give me examples?
6. Does the class help you with your organizing work? If so, how? If not, how could it change so that it does help you?
7. Has your perspective changed as a result of being in this class? If yes, how?
8. Have you seen conflict or differences of opinion come up in the classes? How were they addressed or resolved?
9. Think about the community (workplace, town, population) you work with as a whole. Has the community changed as a result of this program? If yes, how?
10. What are your needs right now to be able to continue your organizing work? What do you need support/guidance with?

APPENDIX E: Data collection overview

GEL program SF			
Data	**Dates/timeline**	**Details**	**Hours (approximate)**
Participant observations (co-facilitating classes, observing project groups)	June - November 2020	Bi-monthly classes for five months (2 hours each) Four ~weekly project groups (1 to 1.5 hours each - I attended about half, or 30 meetings) Weekly facilitator meetings (1 hour each)	20 hours 40 hours 20 hours **80 hours**
Semi-formal interviews and informal conversations	<u>Participant interviews</u> Sunshine: 7/7/20 and 11/28/20; Gabriela: 7/16/20 11/20/20; Nubian: 7/22/20 and 11/10/20; June: 8/20/20; Mahjawe: 8/28/20 and 3/21/2; Reynardo: 10/2/20; Celia: 11/30/20 + Informal conversations <u>Facilitators/coordinator interviews</u> Alim: 7/13/20 and 12/1/20 Armand: 9/2/20 and 11/5/20 James: 4/19/21 + Informal conversations **GEL interviews: 16**	11 participant interviews - 1 to 1.5 hours each Informal conversations with participants 5 facilitator/coordinator interviews - 1 hour each Informal conversations with facilitators/coordinators	15 hours 10 hours 5 hours 10 hours **40 hours**
Workers' Dialogue			
Data	**Dates/timeline**	**Details**	**Hours (approximate)**
Observation	New England educators' union #1: 7/14 - 8/4/20 Healthcare workers' union	4 sessions, 2 hours each with Rosa, facilitator 4 sessions, 2 hours each	8 hours 8 hours

	#1: 7/29 to 8/19/20 + extra session 8/24/20		
	Southern state educators' caucus: 9/27/20 to 10/17/20	4 sessions, 1 hour each with Naomi, facilitator	4 hours
	New England educators' union #2: 10/29/20 - 11/19/20	4 sessions, 2 hours each with Rosa	8 hours
	Healthcare workers' union #2: 10/12/20 to 11/2/20	4 sessions, 2 hours each with Naomi	6 hours
	New England educators' union - United Educators caucus: 11/17/20 to 12/15/20	4 sessions, 1.5 hours each with Naomi and Philip, facilitators	6 hours **40 hours**
Interviews	<u>Participant interviews</u> New England educators' union #1 - Micah: 8/3/20; Kate: 8/7/20 and 9/22/20; Michael:* 8/10/20 and 9/30/20; Via: 8/17/20 and 9/23/20	7 interviews - 1 to 1.5 hours each	10 hours
	Healthcare workers' union #1 - Aliyah: 8/25/20 and 11/13/20; Nina*: 8/26/20; Mira*: 8/27/20 and 8/31/20; Jen: 9/11/20 and 10/2/20	7 interviews - 1 to 1.5 hours each	8 hours
	Southern state educators' caucus - Angela: 10/03/20 and 10/13/20; Emily: 10/11/20 and 11/2/20; Jesse: 11/23/20	5 interviews - 1 to 1.5 hours each	6 hours
	New England educators' union #2 - Tamara: 11/17/20 and 12/18/20; Maya: 12/3/20	3 interviews - 1 to 1.5 hours each	3 hours
	Healthcare workers' union #2 - Donna*: 10/10/20 and Carrie: 10/12/20 and 11/16/20	3 interviews - 1 to 1.5 hours each	4 hours

	Educators United caucus - Charity: 12/1/20 and 12/15/20 Heather*: 12/8/20	3 interviews - 1 to 1.5 hours each	4 hours
	Attendees of previous Workers' Dialogues - Jed (11/24/20) and Danny (12/4/20)	2 interviews	3 hours
	<u>Facilitators/coordinators interviews</u> Rosa: 9/21/20 and 10/5/20 Naomi: 9/2/20 and 9/16/20 Philip: 11/17/20 and 12/7/20 Andrea: 12/29/20 + Informal conversations	7 interviews - 1 to 1.5 hours each	8 hours 4 hours
*Also attended in-person Workers' Dialogue prior to shelter-in-place	**WD interviews: 37**		**50 hours**
	Total interviews: 53		**210 total hours interviews and observation**

APPENDIX F: GEL program electoral project draft platform

1. Preserving Diversity and Inclusion
    1.a economic dislocation
    - lack of employment programs
  1.b equal housing opportunity
2. Police Reform
  2.a police union
    - ban police in the elections
  2.b stronger accountability
  2.c demilitarize the police
3. Systematic Racism
  3.a support for BIPOC's (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) representation in city committees and commissions who are recommended by SF POWER
  3.b more funding for community based arts programs, drop-in centers and Rec centers
  3.c create an oversight and accountability committee for non-profit Housing receiving funds from the city and include people of color on their board
  3.d more support for student of color in high school and college
4. Preserve and Support Small Business and Resident led organizations for their sustainability.
  4.a funding support for mom and pop as a back bone of the community
  4.b funding support for resident-led community organizations for their projects and programs for community improvement
5. Resident Empowerment
  5.a Support for a community process in creating policies and programs
  5.b Support a community process in ensuring Race and Social Equity Assessment on all market rate development
6. Low-income Housing and Homelessness
  6.a permanent housing for all homeless
  6.b buy existing rent controlled buildings and build more affordable housing
    - Fund COPA
    - #30RightNow based on actual income
    - expand income eligibility threshold for food stamps

APPENDIX G: GEL program project template example

Housing Sustainability Program Project Plan Template (1st page)	
Project Name	Housing Sustainability and SRO Organizing Project
Core Purpose	We want to keep our community intact and sustainable by helping solve homelessness, evictions, availability of decent affordable housing for everyone, to ensure that no one will be priced out of their homes.
Big Audacious Goal (BAG)	We will work to stop hotel conversion, champion a campaign to set a policy or pass a law to fix the rent across the board at 30% of income for everybody, so we can work to shut down the shelter system forever. We will campaign for jobs and housing balance on land use and community planning to ensure housing affordability for new jobs created. We need to do things differently that will enhance our ability to accomplish and create weapons to solve problems, develop, and maintain them. Actively engage people in meetings and inspire them to join clubs like central city democrats, organizing political groups, community associations etc.
BAG Tactic	Join forces with other groups who are fighting this issue in order to build a campaign coalition that will advocate to pass a law to fix the rent to 30% across-the-board. Bring in allies like [District 6] Supervisor and other progressive supervisors to work with the coalition to pass the 30% rent across-the-board Regulate Hotel conversion via BOS Advocate for reform in the SRO Hotel System and Master Leases for clear accountability and upkeep of the building. Ensure regular building inspection is being complied with. Explore the possibility of initiating a ballot measure Support progressive candidates and work for community leaders to be in the position of power who understand us and will work for the issues that we care about

Tactical Plan for March - November 2020	[deleted from here to save space]
Project Objectives/Desired Outcomes	
Key Stakeholders and Allies	
Major Milestones and Timeline	
Assumptions and Constraints	
Contingencies and Dependencies	
Activities	
Project Team *Project lead(s)* *Team members* *Project structure*	
Resources Needed *Meeting space* *Logistics* *Technical support* *Budget*	
Major Risks	
Mitigation Strategies	
Start Time	
End Time	
Notes:	

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