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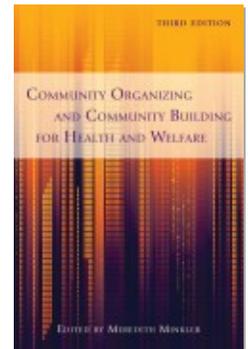
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Popular Education, Participatory Research, and Community Organizing with Immigrant Restaurant Workers in San Francisco's Chinatown

A Case Study

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Popular education has been used across diverse settings, cultures, and populations and has been a major influence on the development of social movements and social change processes worldwide. Although most strongly linked with participatory research whose “Southern tradition” was deeply rooted in the approach developed by adult education scholar and practitioner Paulo Freire (1982; Beder 1996; Wallerstein and Duran 2008), popular education also has played a major role in Freirian and other approaches to community organizing (Horton 1998; Su 2009; see chapter 4). Indeed, such consummate community organizers as Martin Luther King Jr. and Fred Ross received early training at the Highlander Center, in Appalachian Tennessee, whose use of popular education and literacy as a vehicle for civic participation and community organizing dates back to the center’s inception in 1932 (Horton 1998). As discussed in chapter 4, popular education focuses on the lived experience of the learners themselves and is defined as “a community education effort aimed at empowering adults through cooperative study and action, directed toward achieving a more just and equitable society (Arnold et al. 1995; Hurst 1995)” (Richard 2004, 47).

In this chapter we review the shared roots and influences of popular education, participatory research, and community organizing. We then present a case example from San Francisco’s Chinatown that illustrates how popular education

techniques were applied in investigating the working conditions and health of immigrant restaurant workers and collaboratively advocating for sustainable improvements for workers. We describe how this approach helped to integrally weave together broader goals common to both community organizing and participatory research such as leadership development, empowerment, social justice through action, and improvements in worker health and well-being. We conclude by discussing lessons learned from the partnership about how popular education, participatory research, and community organizing can be mutually reinforcing in the struggle for social justice and health equity for marginalized populations.

Popular Education

As suggested above, popular education “serves the interests of the popular classes (exploited sectors of society), [and] involves them in critically analyzing their social situation and in organizing to act collectively to change the oppressive conditions of their lives” (Arnold et al. 1995, 5). Inherent to popular education is an emphasis on the perspective of the learner as well as larger educational and social change goals (Beder 1996). Beder (1996) identifies three key components of popular education approaches: praxis, collective and participatory orientation, and action. Briefly, *praxis* is action based on critical reflection (Freire 1973) and involves an iterative process that permeates decision making throughout a popular education endeavor (Beder 1996). The *collective and participatory orientation* of popular education underscores its focus on group process and the “owning” of that process, as well as the information uncovered by the members themselves. It further recognizes the need for the generation of group, rather than individual, solutions and for a sustainable infrastructure for “collective social action,” including community capacity building and the development and nurturing of new leaders (Beder 1996; Su 2009). Finally, the *action* component of popular education is reflected in the fact that this approach “is always rooted in struggles for democratic social change” and in the belief that “ordinary people can make that change” (Richard 2004, 48).

Participatory Research

When communities find they require data to support their organizing needs and efforts to improve their health and welfare, participatory research can provide an important and promising alternative to traditional outside expert-driven research paradigms. Participatory research has been defined as “systematic investigation with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied for purposes of education and taking action or effecting social change” (George et al. 1996, 7). Popular education and similar approaches from participatory research’s Southern tradition not only question traditional conceptualizations of the nature and production of knowledge but also emphasize the need for

knowledge generation to be both democratic and emancipatory in its processes and outcomes (Wallerstein and Duran 2008). Among the central principles of this approach are that participatory research should be co-learning and mutually beneficial, involve an empowering process that contributes to community capacity, and balance research and action (Israel et al. 2008).

While community organizing and participatory research have many similar goals, such as participatory and empowering processes and social change, those engaged in community organizing and participatory research may also have differing, if consistent and aligned, aims. For example, unlike traditional community organizing, participatory research often involves academic or other professionally trained researchers as key partners. Additionally, while action is central to community organizing, participatory research occurs along a spectrum, with a high degree of community participation and a strong focus on social change action at one end and less participation and a greater focus on knowledge generation and more pragmatic improvements to organizational functioning at the other (Wallerstein and Duran 2008). Although “balancing research and action” is a core participatory research principle (Israel et al. 2008), tensions between the knowledge generation aspect and the community action aspect of this approach commonly arise. Despite such challenges, real opportunities exist for merging participatory research and community organizing efforts. Popular education can be a powerful means for integrating these two paradigms and more effectively promoting their common community capacity building and empowerment goals.

Case Study: Popular Education, Participatory Research, and Community Organizing with Immigrant Restaurant Workers in San Francisco’s Chinatown

A recent example of the successful integration of participatory research, community organizing, and popular education may be found in a participatory, action-oriented study of immigrant restaurant workers’ working conditions and health, conducted in San Francisco’s Chinatown, and the subsequent organizing campaign in which all authors participated. Combining critical analysis and consciousness-raising with action helped to improve the quality and salience of the research and the effectiveness of concomitant organizing efforts. This process also strengthened community capacity through the enhancement of restaurant worker leadership and the increased visibility of the Chinese Progressive Association, a community-based organization located in the heart of Chinatown, as a potent resource for change in the community and beyond.

The Community and Partnership

Chinatown is a vibrant, dynamic neighborhood in San Francisco. Home to over thirteen thousand residents and numerous local businesses, Chinatown is the

cultural hub of the city's Chinese immigrant community. In the city's increasingly service-oriented economy, restaurants stand out as an important source of jobs, employing approximately one-third of Chinatown residents (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). Health and safety problems abound in restaurants and include traditional occupational health concerns such as cuts, burns, falls, and on-the-job stress (Chung et al. 2000; Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York 2005; Teran et al. 2002; Webster 2001). Health problems also encompass serious economic and other social vulnerabilities when employers do not pay the legal minimum wage and engage in "wage theft" by delaying or evading payment of wages earned, sometimes for periods as long as several months (Chung 2005; Teran et al. 2002).

The Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) had been organizing around such worker issues for over thirty years when it formed a partnership in 2007 with the University of California, Berkeley, School of Public Health and its Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP); the San Francisco Department of Public Health; and the University of California, San Francisco, Division of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. The partnership soon expanded to include six current and former Chinese restaurant workers who provided on-the-ground community expertise to the research and were the focal point of CPA's efforts to develop leaders for its campaign to address the working conditions of Chinese immigrant workers.

Building on previous collaborations between various partners on separate efforts, the new partnership formed to carry out a participatory research study of working conditions and health among Chinatown restaurant workers. Ecological in nature, the study included focus groups with restaurant workers, a survey of working conditions and health among 433 Chinatown restaurant workers, observations of working conditions in 106 of the 108 neighborhood restaurants, and an evaluation of the partnership (Chang 2010; Gaydos et al. 2011; Minkler et al. 2010; Salvatore and Krause 2010).

Integrating Participatory Research and Community Organizing

As Kathleen M. Roe and Brick Lancaster (2005) have pointed out, "Research and practice are best understood as a partnership, learning from and informing each other" (129). Integrating participatory research and community organizing requires open communication, mutual consideration, and careful planning on the part of all collaborators. In the Chinatown project, many hours of partnership meetings—both formal and informal—were dedicated to discussing and reflecting upon the varying needs, strengths, and visions for community change of different partners, the goals of the partnership, and adaptations needed to better bridge the two. In this project, adoption by the full partnership of the community partner's (CPA's) need to recruit worker partners who could then become leaders for the organization's citywide organizing campaign made possible a more efficient use of time and resources and more cohesive connections between the research and organizing components of the worker partners' training.

Critical to the integration of the participatory research and organizing aspects of the project was the project director herself (Pam Tau Lee), a university partner at LOHP, longtime community organizer in Chinatown, and founding board member of CPA. A veteran of previous participatory research collaborations between labor organizations and academic researchers and an experienced popular educator, the project director served several critical roles. As an “insider” in both the community and the university and someone who could understand the differing needs and complementary goals of the research and organizing, she acted as a bridge between the different partners. She worked closely with CPA organizers (led by Shaw San Liu) to coordinate and conduct the many partnership meetings, worker trainings, research activities, organizing activities, and actions involved. Finally, she provided critical mentorship for CPA organizers throughout the research process. Although CPA had decades of experience organizing in the community, it had never before conducted research with academic and health department professionals. The mentorship provided by the project director was doubly important, as it enabled CPA organizers, in turn, to facilitate the worker partners’ participation in the study.

Popular Education Approach

As suggested above, popular education permeated all stages of the Chinatown project. Two organizers at CPA and the project director developed an evolving, progressively more intensive curriculum for worker partners that drew heavily from popular education practices to address the dual needs of the research and the organizing.

Interactive, Participatory, and Learner-Centered Trainings

To introduce and prepare worker partners who had no prior experience conducting research, CPA organizers and the project director developed an initial eight-week training. Conducted at the CPA office in Chinatown, these trainings were designed to help worker partners view themselves as experts in restaurant work and realize their value to the research partnership and organizing efforts. Sessions aimed to deepen worker partners’ reflections about the realities of Chinatown restaurant work, teach them about participatory research, and facilitate greater familiarity and comfort with CPA and the other project partners. Training activities focused on developing skills necessary for research, such as how to recruit workers and organizing (e.g., effective communication, public speaking, group facilitation, and the filing of work-related complaints). After the initial training and making a commitment to work with CPA on the project and campaign, worker partners continued to meet weekly or biweekly for additional training on workplace health and safety, workers’ rights, survey design, interviewing, confidentiality, and informed consent, as well as to participate in CPA organizing activities. Interactive activities such as risk mapping (Brown 1995, 2008; Mujica

1992), neighborhood mapping, workshops on policymaking, power mapping (Ritas et al. 2008), and mock food inspections in a simulated kitchen were used in training sessions. Such exercises enhanced worker partners' participation, assisted them in drawing connections between their own lives and study and organizing goals, and elicited their knowledge and expertise.

One popular education activity used to trigger workers' reflections about their experiences and generate new knowledge began with the project director and CPA organizers displaying pictures of Chinese restaurant workers in various work-related situations. Responding to the prompt "What kind of questions would these workers have about their working conditions?" worker partners related stories that revealed several important issues. For example, one worker partner described a situation she had experienced at the restaurant where she worked. A fight had broken out and the boss did not call or allow any workers to call 911, fearing the negative impact that having police cars parked in front of the restaurant could have on his business. Another worker partner shared a story of a coworker who suffered a head injury after slipping on the floor. The coworkers who walked the injured worker to the hospital were yelled at by the boss for leaving work and the injured worker was fired upon her return to work. When asked for assistance with medical bills for the work-related injury, the boss told the injured worker that the incident was her own fault and the expenses were her sole responsibility.

These stories led not only to additional questions being added to the worker survey regarding workplace abuses, such as being yelled at and witnessing or experiencing violence, but also to training on how to handle emergency situations at work. A "Frequently Asked Questions" booklet was developed for workers with a corresponding curriculum for English as a second language classes. Among the questions addressed were "Can I call 911 when violence breaks out and a worker is injured?" "Is my employer supposed to provide me gloves when I wash dishes?" "Can workers seek medical help if they get hurt at work?" "Can my employer withhold money from my first paycheck?" and "When should I get my pay when I leave the company?"

Critical Reflection

Critical reflection was a central component of the worker trainings throughout all stages of the research and organizing. Following activities like those described above, the project director and CPA organizers engaged worker partners in facilitated reflections about the larger political and economic contexts of the specific issues they were discussing. For example, during a session about the value of engaging in research, the project director and CPA organizers shared examples of participatory research that had been conducted with Latina hotel room cleaners, Koreatown restaurant workers, and Chinese immigrant workers at a local computer chip factory. Worker partners then took part in a critical analysis of the status of immigrant workers in the restaurant industry and in the country

in general. In discussing the root causes of workplace hazards and their health impacts, worker partners concluded that “it’s important to use the law to protect people.” As dialogue progressed, they linked the problems that immigrant workers face in Chinatown and similar neighborhoods to broader policies and globalization trends. The group raised concerns about polluting factories moving overseas, often to China, where the problems are shifted to other workers. In the words of one worker partner, “They transfer the problems over to China and then we complain about it [unfair labor practices].” She went on to ask “What responsibility does the U.S. have when the companies move to China?”

The project director and CPA organizers additionally used research ethics training (required for all federally funded research involving human subjects) to raise workers’ consciousness about the human rights and social justice abuses that made such a formal review process important. When human rights abuses such as those committed by Nazi forces in World War II in the name of science were discussed, worker partners reflected on their own historical trauma. “Japan did the same to China,” noted one worker partner when discussing the atrocities committed by the Japanese army in his homeland during World War II. The discussion went on to explore how participatory research can help protect the safety of study participants in part through the active engagement of workers as study partners and not simply research “subjects.”

Worker partners also engaged in critical reflection during the six monthly data interpretation workshops that were held after the worker survey and restaurant observations had been completed. These workshops were conducted in Chinese by the project director and CPA organizers with additional support from university and health department partners, who wore simultaneous translational equipment. The workshops employed hands-on learning to teach worker partners to speak “data language” and to facilitate interpretation of checklist and survey findings. Worker partners provided many insights into the data not originally apparent to other partners, explaining, for example, that the relatively high proportion of workers who reported receiving “sick leave” benefits (58 percent) most likely reflected the misconception that making up an unpaid sick day with an extra day of work was in fact “sick leave” (CPA 2010). They also suggested that the apparent underreporting of workplace abuses, such as being yelled at (reported by 42 percent), could be due to the fact that only workers for whom “yelling had made them cry” would have responded affirmatively to this question. Worker partners explained that they are constantly being yelled at by their supervisors.

During the data interpretation phase the project director and CPA organizers also engaged worker partners in reflections about their definitions of “a good life” and “a good job.” Through group dialogue, workers came to the consensus that “a good life” for Chinese immigrants is one in which “good health means everything.” “Harmonious families and doing one’s best to provide,” good academic achievement for children, and the absence of extramarital relationships were also key

elements. Worker partners discussed how the shrinking numbers of manufacturing jobs in the United States and the increased reliance on the service sectors of the economy contributed to workers' vulnerability and increased the importance of good health. They noted that without good health, immigrant workers with few or no English skills and little or no formal education are unable to keep up with the physically demanding tasks of the low-wage service jobs available to them. When asked for a definition of "good health," worker partners dismissed problems, such as back pain, that they perceived to be minor problems, explaining that "health doesn't impact your [ability to] work. Unless you're in the hospital and you can't move."

Worker partners reflected that "a good job" should include "income enough for a stable life," "a reasonable work environment and working conditions, including a reasonable workload and respect on the job," "good benefits, including health care, paid vacation, and paid sick leave," and having "a job you like." They went on to note that the economic difficulties of their own lives did not afford them the luxury of obtaining the latter. As one worker explained, "Right now, if you're in a position of choosing between two jobs, one that you enjoy doing and one that you dislike, you choose the one that pays more, even if you hate it." Another added, "People just deal with reality. What you want and what's reality are different."

Included in these discussions was critical reflection on workers' immigration experiences. Comparing life in the United States with their lives back in China, worker partners recalled their own experiences and noted the numerous challenges facing immigrants coming to this country. Language was considered to be among the greatest barriers faced. Lack of English proficiency not only resulted in great difficulty finding jobs but also presented challenges in standing up for oneself when faced by discrimination. "Here in America," one worker noted, "it's hard for me to communicate with people. Even when I'm being treated badly, I'm not able to protect myself." Worker partners felt that learning English was especially difficult for immigrants in their late forties or older, and although most immigrants want to learn the language, family responsibilities and long work hours make it difficult to attend classes or study.

Action

Along with interactive, learner-centered activities and critical reflection, action was central popular education component in the worker partners' leadership development training. Even prior to reaching the "action phase" of the project (described below) action was incorporated in the worker partner trainings; as one CPA organizer remarked, "Experiencing the struggle and directly confronting power" was an indispensable step. She went on to note that because fear is common in early experiences in organizing, particularly among low-income, immigrant workers, some of whom may also be undocumented, "the action piece and stepping up to take risks and coming out the other end is essential."

Activities requiring worker partners to take action in the community were introduced incrementally. Early on, worker partners passed out fliers in Chinatown on topics such as wage and hour violations, a task that several found to be challenging because of its public nature. CPA's organizing campaigns around political elections and winning back wages for workers also offered ongoing opportunities for worker partners to gain experience in a wider range of activities and issues. In one instance, a poultry market in Chinatown owed thousands of dollars of back wages to its workers from minimum-wage violations and suspensions in payment of wages. Poultry market workers approached CPA and together with that organization pressured the market owner to pay the owed wages. Worker partners became involved in the campaign, joining the picket lines and attending planning sessions. In another case, a Chinatown restaurant employer owed ten months' back pay to workers. In support of their peers, worker partners participated in two public delegations and a series of meetings with the employer, who later began to pay back wages. With time, worker partners took on increasingly visible roles, sharing their personal experiences at public hearings on city budget cuts and participating in demonstrations for immigrant rights.

Throughout the worker partners' participation in actions, the project director and CPA organizers continued to facilitate praxis by providing opportunities for reflection to reinforce critical analysis and further consciousness-raising and learning. Discussions during and after the poultry market campaign revealed that the experience was particularly influential and inspiring to worker partners as an example of the possibilities of organizing and the attention CPA and the issue could receive in the local media. At the time, worker partners felt that Chinatown community members seemed "not as scared" as they had been before to voice complaints about unfair practices at work.

In these discussions, worker partners also considered the incentives for employers to withhold wages within the larger economic and political context. They noted that larger issues such as the high rent costs for business space, fierce competition, and a weak economy that prevented the raising of prices were encouraging the downward pressure on wages and abuse of workers in other ways. Such reflections, together with their experiences with action, were the foundation for subsequent recommendations for change and organizing demands made by CPA organizers and worker partners (discussed below).

Participatory Research: Translating Research to Action

Consistent with both participatory research principles and community organizing goals, the partnership recognized the importance of translating research into action.

Research findings corroborated most of the concerns expressed by the worker partners and CPA. Results from the survey of 433 restaurant workers indicated that wage theft and pay-related violations—the problems of greatest concern to workers—were widespread. Fifty percent of workers surveyed did not receive

minimum wage, 17 percent were not paid on time, and 76 percent of workers who worked more than forty hours a week were not paid overtime wages. Approximately a third of workers indicated that their bosses took some portion of tips. Findings also revealed high proportions of respondents reporting accidents and injuries. About half (48 percent) of workers had been burned on the job in the previous twelve months, 40 percent had been cut or had cut themselves, and 17 percent had slipped or fallen (Salvatore and Krause 2010; CPA 2010).

The study's observations of working conditions in 106 restaurants supported worker-reported data. Checklist data indicated multiple preventable hazards, including an absence of anti-slip mats (52 percent), wet and greasy floors (62 percent), lack of posting of required labor laws (65 percent), and lack of fully stocked first aid kits (82 percent) (CPA 2010; Gaydos et al. 2011; Minkler et al. 2010; Minkler and Salvatore, in press).

In the dissemination and action phase of the participatory research project, the worker leadership development that had been fostered through popular education activities bolstered the organizing initiatives taken by CPA and its allies, as well as activities developed by the health department and university partners to translate findings into action.

CPA organizers and worker partners led these efforts with a range of policy and educational initiatives. A key step in translating the research into action was CPA's drafting and launch of a comprehensive report, *Check Please!*, summarizing findings of the participatory research and worker focus groups (CPA 2010). Reporting primarily on project findings, CPA also drew upon additional studies to illustrate that the working conditions in Chinatown reflected broader trends in the city and across the country for low-wage workers (Bernhardt et al. 2009; Mujeres Unidas y Activas 2007; Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York 2005). The recommendations for improving the conditions of low-wage workers made in this report advocated improvements for low-wage workers throughout the city and featured a "low-wage worker bill of rights," developed by the San Francisco Progressive Workers Alliance (PWA), a coalition founded by CPA and other local worker centers and organizations.

A significant moment of worker leadership was the large press conference held to launch CPA's report (CPA 2010). Worker partners had a prominent role in this public meeting, presenting research findings and recommended actions to the almost two hundred members of the community present, including four of the eleven members of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and other local government officials. Several worker partners were interviewed and photographed by local and ethnic media reporters (see video of the launch event and associated press conferences at <http://www.youtube.com/user/cpasf>).

Following the launch event, a major milestone in the organizing and actions has been the joint work of CPA, worker partners, the PWA, and the board of supervisors in preparing the San Francisco Wage Theft Prevention Ordinance. CPA and the PWA introduced this novel legislation with a kick-off press event on

the steps of city hall and with a public hearing in which worker partners and other members of the original study team participated. Provisions of the ordinance aim to improve efficiency in the processing and handling of workers' labor violation claims and holding employers accountable through a variety of means, including enhancing the city's ability to investigate and address problems, eliminating delays in citations, imposing penalties for failure to post the legal minimum wage, and requiring public notification when violations are found. The ordinance also called for better education for workers on their rights and information on investigations of their employers, and increased protection from employer retaliation. In introducing the legislation, Supervisor Eric Mar remarked, "I am proud to be introducing local legislation that is drawn from action-based research and bottom-up grassroots organizing that will help strengthen labor law enforcement in San Francisco and give workers a meaningful voice in stopping wage theft in our City" (Eric Mar, personal communication, May 12, 2011). The board of supervisors unanimously passed the ordinance and Mayor Ed Lee signed it into law four months after it was first introduced.

In addition to the development of the ordinance, CPA and PWA have called for a citywide task force to improve the interorganizational coordination of agencies responsible for enforcing labor laws and workers' rights, such as the Office of Labor Standards Enforcement (OLSE), the city attorney's office, and the Department of Public Health. Voluntary programs that could help to promote and create additional rewards for the "high-road" employers who comply with labor laws and maintain healthy and safe working conditions are also being explored. The need to recognize and reward "high-road" and "good" employers was stressed by CPA and worker partners, who emphasized that within and beyond Chinatown there are employers who want to do the right thing but must compete against those who ignore even basic labor standards. As stated in CPA's report, "Ultimately, the high road is the only road that can lead to a healthy Chinatown where workers have stable living wage jobs, local businesses compete fairly and grow, customer and public health are protected, and the community can thrive" (CPA 2010, 24). Finally, recognizing that worker protections are also needed outside Chinatown, CPA and community partners have stressed a citywide approach that brings together the voices of low-wage worker communities across industries, ethnicities, age, genders, and sexual orientations.

CPA and worker partners have scaled up educational activities for immigrant workers. Popular education sessions, which began early in the project with worker partners, have increased in number and scope to reflect study findings and include a wider number of participants. Ongoing efforts include worker teas, held monthly at CPA. Worker partners play a central role in planning these activities, defining issues and topics to be discussed, facilitating education sessions, and conducting outreach with community members.

Other members of the participatory research partnership are also leading efforts to translate study findings into sustainable improvements for restaurant

workers. As a result of the significant lack of labor law postings documented in this research, and the results of a subsequent study to examine compliance with labor law postings in restaurants within and beyond Chinatown, the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) now requires proof of workers' compensation insurance coverage for all new and change-of-business health permits. The health department is also taking steps to assess and improve citywide compliance with these policies. These efforts included sending formal letters to regulatory bodies such as the OLSE to inform them of the participatory research study findings and set up meetings about improving enforcement of these laws. Currently, OLSE and the SFDPH are exploring mechanisms to improve violator identification and enforcement (Gaydos et al. 2011). Additionally, LOHP and the health department have obtained new funding to explore feasible ways to involve food safety inspectors, who are trained public health professionals and have a regular presence in restaurants, in the promotion of workers' health.

Personal Transformation and Organizational Growth

Although community organizing and participatory research guided by popular education are heavily focused on engaging participants in taking action and changing their reality, an equally strong emphasis on personal and collective transformation underscores the importance of documenting changes on these levels as well. In the Chinatown project, worker partners reported overcoming fears of engaging with new people and "talking to strangers," experience speaking in public, a greater sense of "courage" and confidence, and a deepened analysis of and perspective on social issues. In Freire's (1973) words, the changes worker partners noted in themselves were part of developing a *critical consciousness* and a belief in their ability to transform their world.

Evidence of the worker partners' transformation emerged at the project midpoint, when they began to feel comfortable discussing their own "leadership potential," a dramatic change from the beginning of the project, when they shied away from use of the word *leader*. As the project continued, further shifts were observed, with worker partners moving from simply "wanting to help other workers" to owning issues and solutions themselves through the public sharing of their own stories and experiences working in restaurants and living in the community.

Worker partners directly attributed their changes to the experiences they had with CPA and the project. One described her growth in the following way: "[My leadership skills] increased a lot. After CPA and being a coordinator [worker leader at CPA] really increased it. It's like yesterday at the hearing, I went and spoke. In the beginning, I was really scared. If I had never been to CPA before, I would have been more afraid. Yesterday I wasn't afraid at all."

Similarly, another worker leader reported that the trainings, activities, and experiences with CPA and the project had changed her thinking, noting, "[Previously,] I didn't dare to fight for anything. When I was working, [the boss] said,

‘Work,’ and I would work. Later, when my old boss asked me to go back, I would tell him I wanted minimum wage, I did not want to be owed wages.”

Several worker partners also mentioned that because of their participation at CPA and in the project, friends and family now viewed them as “people who help new immigrants and restaurant workers.” One worker partner explained that because she volunteers at CPA, her husband recommended her as a resource to an acquaintance who was owed back wages at work. Another worker partner counseled an out-of-work friend to go to CPA if she needed help with housing or employment. Worker partners have gone on to educate and inspire their children and spouses about the movement, with some of these family members in turn beginning to participate in and support community activities.

Currently, worker partners are an integral part of CPA’s Worker Committee, which serves as the leadership core for the organization. They have continued to take on increasingly higher profile roles and have been largely responsible for activities that foster community and build CPA’s membership base among Chinese immigrants in the city. These worker partners now frequently speak at public events, such as demonstrations on anti-wage theft and immigration; serve as emcees for CPA’s Lunar New Year celebration program and other fund-raising and awareness-raising events; and represent the organization at educational exchanges with other workers and community groups in San Francisco and nationally, such as the U.S. Social Forum. Recently, thirty youth and adult grassroots members of CPA and staff, including some worker partners, traveled to the San Diego–Mexico border region to learn from and build community with area workers, organizations, and activists working on immigration, housing, and environmental justice issues. Worker partners’ and CPA’s goals have continued to expand beyond Chinatown, as exemplified in the stated goal of the U.S.-Mexico Border Exchange Trip, to “challenge mainstream notions of immigration, to deepen our analysis about the root causes of globalization and immigration, as well as to inspire us to continue building with all communities” (CPA 2011a). Throughout this process of transformation and reflecting popular education’s collective and participatory orientation, the formation of a group identity to provide mutual support in worker partners’ leadership development has been an important part of the experience. One CPA organizer explained the importance of leadership development’s occurring “people to people—not just organizer to leader, but leader to leader. Getting people to challenge each other and support each other and push each other to grow as part of a group process.” On the whole, worker partners have perceived a very positive environment and the development of friendships over the course of their participation. One worker partner likened the other worker partners to being “just like family.” Another described the benefits of co-learning in the group, remarking that time spent in the company of the other worker partners was good because “sometimes they are bolder than I am and I can learn some skills from them.”

At the organizational level, CPA organizers mentioned a number of areas of increased capacity that resulted from their involvement in the participatory

research project. For example, the research grant allowed them to obtain resources to develop community leaders in a more proactive and prospective way than prior, more reactive efforts dictated by the tight time pressures of earlier campaigns. In particular, the outreach and recruitment efforts of the worker partners, as well as the research findings and subsequent CPA report and launch, raised CPA's profile and brought greater visibility to workers' rights in Chinatown, and in the larger Chinese immigrant community in San Francisco. Immediately following the survey data collection, one worker organizer observed that people in the community were increasingly able to connect real workers with CPA's name, something that drew people to the organization: "In the past they only read the papers and saw on TV what activities were happening and saw CPA. But now when they [worker partners] go to do outreach and talk to people, it leads other people to know us. . . . [When people come into CPA], I ask them why, how did they come to know this place? She says, I saw it on the flier! Those people passing out the flier told me."

Finally, the data generated in the study also has helped CPA to more effectively generate additional resources through grant writing to support their mission to "educate, organize, and empower the low-income and working-class immigrant Chinese community in San Francisco to build collective power with other oppressed communities to demand better living and working conditions and justice for all people" (CPA 2011b).

Lessons Learned

The integration of popular education, participatory research, and community organizing can be a potent means of studying and addressing collective health and social problems. These approaches can complement and strengthen each other by improving the relevance and quality of research, helping in more effectively working toward shared goals of empowerment and capacity building, and resulting in a stronger foundation for promoting action for change.

Benefits to Participatory Research

Popular education and community organizing orientations provide many benefits for the research process. Involving members of the community most affected by the health issue being studied can increase the relevance of the research and improve instruments, participant recruitment, data collection, and interpretation of findings (Israel et al. 1998; Cargo and Mercer 2008; Minkler and Wallerstein 2008a). In the Chinatown study, worker partners expanded the focus of the investigation to include a careful look at wage theft as a major health issue and helped develop research instruments that were culturally and linguistically appropriate. Worker partners' lay knowledge and experiences also were key to identifying and addressing such ethical concerns as fear of employer retaliation and essential in improving the relevance and cultural sensitivity of both survey items and the restaurant-level occupational checklist (Gaydos et al. 2011; Minkler et al. 2010).

Additionally, the high-level community participation helped to ensure that the research findings were both communicated back to the community and used as the basis of action to address issues of concern (Cargo and Mercer 2008; Green et al. 2001; Green and Mercer 2001; Israel et al. 1998; Minkler and Wallerstein 2008a, 2008b).

Empowerment and Community Capacity

Empowerment and capacity building at both the individual and organizational levels are central goals of both action-oriented participatory research and community organizing (Israel et al. 1998; Minkler and Wallerstein 2008b; Wing et al. 2008). The use of a popular education approach combining critical reflection and action enhanced the development of a core group of worker leaders in the Chinese immigrant worker community, furthered the expansion of CPA's community and worker networks, and resulted in a higher profile for the organization and its causes. This process also greatly facilitated translation of the research findings into action, as with the launch and dissemination of the community report on the research, the creation of legislation to prevent wage theft, and the development of coalitions and alliances with other worker and community groups facing similar issues across the city, country, and international borders.

On an individual level in participatory research and in community organizing informed by popular education, community partners should themselves see changes in their capacity and power. The dramatic changes often described by worker partners in the Chinatown project, who went from eschewing the title of *leader* to testifying before the board of supervisors, participating in rallies, telling their own stories in the media, and actively working for change for and with other low-wage workers, was a critical outcome of this project.

Yet the co-learning critical to participatory research and popular education further suggests the importance of ensuring that outside researcher partners also are growing through their collaboration in the work. Both university and health department partners in the Chinatown project commented on how much their work with CPA and the worker partners had increased their own understanding of problems, such as wage theft, and the immense benefits that community partners, with their expert knowledge of their community, brought to the research and its action outcomes. As Bernard (2002) reminds us, "For Freirians in occupational health concerned with generating an assertive, critically thinking, united workforce . . . we need to unleash the full power of popular education and not limit ourselves to promoting the form without the critical—including self-critical—content" (7).

At the organizational level, enhanced capacity and strength should be a key outcome of such work. In the Chinatown project, the integral role that the worker partners who were hired and trained through the study now play as a Worker Committee leadership core for the CPA, and the organization's enhanced visibility and increased resource base, provide important examples of such growth and change.

Conclusion

The case study from San Francisco's Chinatown discussed in this chapter illustrates how integrating participatory research and community organizing efforts can support the distinct yet complementary ends of each while also furthering shared goals of community empowerment, capacity building, and social change. Popular education, one of the major philosophical traditions shaping the development of participatory research and an important approach to organizing in and of itself, can help to weave together the common threads of these two related but distinct paradigms. Popular education can enable participatory research partnerships to better study and address community-identified problems through community organizing and related social action. At the same time, it can provide community organizers with the philosophical grounding, skills, and resources needed to promote true, member-led action based on critical reflection, while using data gathered collaboratively that reflect lay and professional ways of knowing.

The Chinatown case study demonstrates the fluid boundaries that exist between popular education, community organizing, and participatory research as well as the potential of such fluidity for achieving change on multiple levels (Richard 2004). From these efforts come additional ripple effects as the individuals who participate in the process come to internalize the struggles and take ownership over the conceptualization of community issues and their solutions and begin to influence their families, friends, colleagues, and community. Discussions of the "good life" and "good jobs" initiated in worker trainings laid the foundation for recommendations for policy change and for building the base of support and leadership in the community, which, in turn, led to stronger linkages and alliances with diverse workers and communities across the city and the world.

From individual workers' feeling a new sense of power and empowerment, to their organizational home being increasingly recognized as a strong worker voice within and well beyond its Chinatown roots, to new proposed anti-wage theft legislation and the health department's using the data collected to help pressure for real changes in restaurant working conditions, the project helped lay the foundation for improving the health and lives of Chinese immigrant workers in the community and low-wage workers across the city. The project incorporated the critical expert knowledge of immigrant workers and facilitated their ability to work in genuine partnership with academic researchers in gaining new knowledge for change. This all occurred through a process that was itself empowering, helping to pave the way for more transformative change in the years ahead and demonstrating that knowledge is indeed power in community organizing (Alinsky 1971; Sen 2003). Reflecting on her experience, one worker partner summed this up well: "When I first got involved in this survey project, I thought it was impossible to change anything in Chinatown. But now that we have done so much work in the community and helped other workers recover wages, I see that change is possible. We can improve things. We must!"

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