bringing globalization home
Portraits of Popular Education at the Global-Local Junction

Globalizing Civil Society from the Inside Out
A JOINT PROJECT OF
Center for Justice, Tolerance and Community at University of California, Santa Cruz
and the Inter-American Forum at the Collins Center for Public Policy in Miami, Florida
January 2005
A Letter from the Directors

Ever since the mass protests at the 1999 Seattle meetings of the World Trade Organization, the U.S. wing of the global justice movement has been both celebrated and challenged. Held up as a new avenue for civic engagement in international issues, the movement has also been criticized for lacking diversity. It is a striking irony, particularly since communities of color and low-income communities are often among those most affected by corporate globalization in the U.S.

The reasons for this gap lie not just in race and class, but in scale: given the daily immediacy of the issues they confront, community activists are often decidedly local in their focus. Yet, as corporate globalization continues to generate impacts at the local level, being able to make the connection between global processes and local realities—the global-local link—is becoming increasingly necessary as a part of community organizing. Fortunately, a range of activists and advocates have begun making these connections by building on community knowledge and experience, often through the use of the popular education techniques profiled here.

Popular education has a rich history in social justice struggles around the world, and is being used today by grassroots organizations as a leadership development tool that builds critical consciousness, as an organizational methodology, and even as a philosophy of life. Grassroots organizations, looking to unpack the abstract concepts that often times muddle the public’s understanding of global economy, have devoted themselves to popular education as a means to communicating the issues and the connections to their membership base. It is in light of this growing interest that these profiles were created.

These profiles stem from Globalizing Civil Society from the Inside Out Project (GCS), a three-year initiative jointly launched by the Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community (CJTC) of the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the Inter-American Forum (IAF) of the Collins Center for Public Policy in Miami, Florida. The GCS Project is designed to explore how the perspectives of those whose work is primarily oriented toward local issues and the concerns of marginalized communities can be better infused into the globalization debate. Along the way, we interviewed over 250 activists from around the country and hosted convenings in California, Florida, New York, and Brazil. The project team has participated in two World Social Forums, worked to document and publicize the success of Root Cause, a community-based protest approach to the November 2003 meetings of the Free Trade Area of the Americas in Miami, and convened activists, analysts and policymakers to explore common ground in working toward a community-centered vision of economic integration.

For support of the overall project and this report, we thank the Ford Foundation, and particularly Mike Conway and Jeff Campbell. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the organizers from Miami Workers Center, United for a Fair Economy, Project South, and Environmental Health Coalition, and many others, who have provided invaluable feedback and guidance throughout this project, and have given generously of their time in sharing their experiences with popular education and community-building. Their vision and commitment has helped us and others realize the truth in the slogan of the World Social Forum: Another world is, indeed, possible.

Manuel Pastor, Jr.  Co-Director Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community

Tanya Dawkins  Executive Director and Founder Inter-American Forum

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Introduction

In most countries where social movements have been meaningful in the last 30 years, popular education is familiar terrain. By the 1970s and 80s, the methodologies hatched out a generation earlier by Brazilian thinker and activist Paulo Freire were catching on around the world, invigorating social movements in Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere.

The core philosophy is clear:
- **People learn** when their personal experience is the basis of their education, not when they are reading theory;
- **People pay attention** when they are participating in a discussion, not being lectured to, and;
- **People are empowered** when they are on an equal footing working collectively to find answers and define action, not when they are looking to a supposedly superior figure to impart knowledge.

Despite these common sense principles, and a proven track record, popular education has not taken root as strongly as it might in the U.S. While there are some innovative and inspiring efforts, many veteran organizers argue that, historically, there has been a separation between education and organizing in progressive social movements in the U.S. This disconnect can lead to less informed and hence weaker bases of support that pave the way for movements dominated by heroic individual figures or more traditional middle-class leadership. Looking to address these shortcomings and support new leadership development, community-based organizations around the U.S. have increasingly embraced popular education in recent years.

One of the most time-sensitive applications of popular education at the U.S. grassroots has been in connecting local realities and struggles to the global economy and policymaking. Since the global justice movement (GJM) burst onto the scene in Seattle in 1999, there has been limited involvement from grassroots organizations representing low-income communities and communities of color in the U.S. that are often the most affected by the neoliberal agenda. Many commentators are quick to point out that the GJM has been able to maintain only a diffuse base of support as a result, and even global justice organizers concede that the analysis that has driven the framing of the movement has been too technical in style and international in scope.

CBOs have begun to fill this gap by re-tooling the language and analysis to fit the issues relevant to the communities they work in. This booklet profiles several organizations that have spearheaded unique global-local popular education initiatives. They are active within a coalition called Grassroots Global Justice (GGJ), which is one of the arteries for this work that was first formed with the objective of scaling up the presence of CBOs from the U.S. at the annual World Social Forum (WSF), a huge progressive gathering that is designed to provide space for movements to coalesce. But as the GGJ delegations—usually over 100 individuals—began to return from the WSF eager to relate to global movements and counterpart organizations active around similar issue-sets, they decided to institutionalize and staff GGJ, with a mandate to guide grassroots engagement in the debate around globalization.

Popular education has been foundational for GGJ organizations looking to find their bearings in the global arena. One GGJ conference held in September of 2004 in Ciudad Juarez brought together organizations from Cuba, Mexico, and the U.S. to share best practices and to discuss different methods and approaches.

Organizations such as Project South and Environmental Health Coalition (both profiled here) gave demonstrations of how each group has tailored tried-and-tested popular education modules to new global dynamics affecting their constituencies.

While most organizations are still in the nascent stages of introducing a global context to their members, the early payoffs have been encouraging. For example, during the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) ministerials in Miami in 2003, a coalition of CBOs from South Florida organized the Root Cause initiative, which turned out the first-ever global justice march led by people of color in the U.S. The march has been touted as a precedent in many respects: not only did it generate positive press that communicated an anti-FTAA message in a highly visible, local, and relevant manner, but it also built off of a deep commitment to popular education that重任 local work in a global context and consciousness. Miami Workers Center, one of the central players in Root Cause’s success, is profiled in this booklet, along with United for a Fair Economy, who participated in early popular education efforts that helped lay the ground for organizing in Miami.

While the examples we offer are encouraging, CBOs note that they sometimes have limited capacity to explore these connections without diluting their focus on local issues that are closest to the livelihoods of members and must take first priority. While working on issues related to globalization can enrich and expand local work, identifying the resources that allow for staff to develop comprehensive popular education programs with a strong global element will be vital. Equipped with adequate resources, popular education and initiatives such as Root Cause or Grassroots Global Justice help to empower the GJM, and promise to generate a more representative base that further strengthens the movement for social justice in low-income communities of color.
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Miami Workers Center: Lifting Up Leadership

The Miami Workers Center (MWC) is a strategy and organizing center for low-income and low-wage workers that has been developing a broad-based social justice movement in the South Florida region for nearly five years. The organization uses a unique blend of popular and political education methodologies as a part of its leadership development efforts. These initiatives are central to the Miami Workers Center’s organizing strategy, which emphasizes developing grassroots leadership from within the communities. As the Executive Director of the organization, Gilian Perera, notes, “Leadership development is not part of our organizing model, it is our organizing model.”

The Miami Workers Center has developed two initiatives geared toward building grassroots leadership from among those who face a variety of socioeconomic insecurities: the Circles of Consciousness and the Rotating Organizing Corps Internships (ROC-IT) programs. The Circle of Consciousness is a weekly political education program during which participants explore historical and contemporary issues that relate to the daily realities of their communities. A particular emphasis of this program is making analytical links between global processes and their local impacts so that members can identify their struggles as related to the struggles of communities in other parts of the world. The ROC-IT program is an intensive effort to build the organizing skills of emerging grassroots leaders through hands-on training as well as mentoring.

Max Rameau, former leader development coordinator at the Miami Workers Center, noted that during this three-month training process, members gain a variety of skills that they employ in real-time, including the valuable lessons that can be drawn from “making their own mistakes” and thus developing “self-ownership” over these tools and resources and how they are employed in organizing work.

The centrality of grassroots leadership development has resulted in breakthoughs on the issues important to Miami Workers Center’s organizing. In November 2003, for the negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) took place in Miami, Florida, the Miami Workers Center—in cooperation with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and Power U: Center for Social Change—developed a unique grassroots, people of color led coalition to raise awareness about the potential impacts and implications of the FTAA for poor communities in the region. This coalition, known as Root Cause, effectively demonstrated the potential and need for those communities most adversely impacted by global processes to assume leadership roles in addressing these impacts.

Today, the Miami Workers Center continues to deepen its understanding of the role that popular education can play in its work. In Summer 2004, Gilian Perera took a trip to Brazil to meet with Brazilian social movements including the powerful Landless Workers Movement (MST) and MOVA, the literacy movement of Porto Alegre, to learn about their long histories of Freirian popular education. As Tony Romano, Organizing Director, notes, witnessing the success of these organizations is proof that popular education methodology could be more than an organizing technique, it has the potential to be the fabric that runs through everything the Center does.

I think the perception of our Circle of Consciousness is that it’s like coming to some kind of church. It’s a space that’s consistent. People come because they like being in an intellectual space, they like to be intellectually stimulated. I think part of it is that people feel like they were robbed when they were in school, and so they are determined to get their education back. —GILIAN PERERA

This is what Miami Workers Center’s ‘Circle of Consciousness’ means to me—you have a space in the organization where people grapple with these issues and incorporate them into their own analysis and practice. It’s both one-on-one, and collective. The point here is that you can’t mass produce that. —MAX RAMEAU (UNITED FOR A FAIR ECONOMY)

VOICES FROM THE MIAMI WORKERS CENTER

What are some of the popular education approaches that the Miami Workers Center uses and how do members relate to these?

MAX RAMEAU: One is a weekly series called Circle of Consciousness and it generally takes place in a couple of formats, but the main one is that we take a topic and we put a particular target group together to discuss it over the course of several weeks. A lot of it is very personal and that’s what makes doing the curriculum very difficult. You have to be flexible.

Can you give me an example of a Circle of Consciousness topic and how it was explored?

MAX: We did a series on white supremacy where we started with its genesis and worked through a bunch of definitions, illustrating them historically, such as prejudice, discrimination, individual racism, and institutional racism. So, to help people think through these definitions we used different scenarios.

For example, one scenario was three white guys walk into an Indian restaurant and they immediately smell the aroma of Indian food, and the first guy says, “This place stinks, I bet they’re cooking dog, let’s get out of here and go to McDonalds.” The second guy says, “I’ve never smelled anything like this before, but people all over the world eat this kind of food, so maybe we should give it a try and maybe we’ll like it.” Third one says, “This smells great, Indians are wonderful people, this is special food, it should only be digested by Indian stomachs and that’s how they get their pretty dots on their forehead.” So what the people in the Circle of Consciousness had to do was go through the scenario in small groups and decide, is this a case of people having differences? Is this prejudice? Is it discrimination, is it individual racism or is it institutional racism? And they would discuss the scenarios and there’s no right or wrong answers, it’s just what your opinion of these three guys is and how they are relating. And then each group reports back what they conclude. So you draw different conclusions on each scenario.

How has your base reacted to the use of popular education approaches in your work?

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—MORE PROGRESS (UNITED FOR A FAIR ECONOMY)

LIFTY member, Theresa Brown, at the City of Miami Commission demonstrating against an anti-poor ordinance on the eve of the FTAA summit in Miami, October 2001.
Could you say more about the specifics of the methodologies you are exploring?

Terry Borham: Paulo Freire’s* work focuses on methodology to a great extent. We can have great content on any topic, like white supremacy, for example, but if we just go in and lecture on it for an hour and a half, what have we really accomplished? Sure, people may have internalized answers after that, but what have they really taken away from that experience? Freire calls this, broadly, the banking method. Students spit back the answers that they know teachers are expecting, and teachers ask questions that have intended, programmed response. If this is what we do, we can very well end up reinforcing many of the problems we were trying to uproot in the first place. The point is to change the relationship of power, even amongst us. That begins with a framework where people can bring their own experiences into the mix, where everyone to some degree is a teacher as well as a student.

How do you approach popular education as a community-based organization in terms of the resources you need to have and the time you should plan on investing in it?

Max: I think first of all you have to be very, very realistic about where your organization is and what its capacity is, and what the membership is like. So, I would want to caution anyone against just taking a model and dumping it into your desert. You have to be very flexible and dynamic in your thought and application of broad ideas. And, with that, don’t be afraid to let the membership itself participate in the process. The membership should help decide how popular education plays in, what kinds of models you use, and how those models play themselves out. And that’s what worked out very well with Low-Income Families Fighting Together (LIFFT)*.

Doing real leadership development is extremely time consuming, and it’s also incredibly rewarding; watching people develop has been one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever seen. Watching them grow from very shy, interverted people, with not a lot of confidence, to someone who shows up on TV and holds a press conference is really amazing. And when people go there, they just can’t go back.

In terms of facilitation of this approach, do you try to have people reach a point of consensus during a discussion?

Max: We don’t make any demands like that. If there’s consensus, then they got through this and ended up at consensus. But we actually encourage them to say three people felt this way, two people felt this way, one person felt that way. We just want them to report back. So we’re not going to draw conclusions, even if at the end there are unpopular answers: this is an exercise for you figuring this stuff out, and there is no right answer to it.

How does someone actively apply the knowledge gained through popular education experience like the Circles of Consciousness?

MAX: When we’re planning the syllabus for the Circles of Consciousness for the entire year, we are matching the syllabus with what’s going on in our campaigns and what we do. So the syllabus that we have for 2004 includes report back from the Free Trade Area of the Americas meeting and things on the Haitian revolution—because this is the 200th anniversary of Haitian independence. We did a whole series on gentrification because that is our main campaign right now. This way, people understand what gentrification is, and when they get into the campaign, they actually get out a position of knowledge, not a position of “I’m not sure what this is.” We try to match it up with the campaigns so that there can be like a 1-2 punch about it. So someone knows the theory, and then they can apply that theory.

It seems that ownership over the work is a big part of these processes. Could you say more about that?

MAX: There’s something about being the active element in your own struggle which has a great impact on you. At first, the Workers Center staff was doing the agenda, facilitating, note-taking, and then we realized that LIFFT had become very dependent on the Workers Center for actually doing all of this. We had to create a range where people could make their own mistakes, and learn through their experiences, rather than have Center staff pick up whatever slack there may be. I think that is popular education in a real way. That’s a written and explicit part of the training because you learn more from mistakes than from successes.

Why do you think it is important for community-based organizations to incorporate a global lens into their work?

Guerr: We wanted to push for a global analysis just because we understood that in local organizing a ton of decisions come up that you can’t make strategically without a global understanding. So, for example, on issues of organizing in the African community, a lot of what may come up is a reaction that blames the problems on immigrants. For example, you might hear, “Well, you know, we’re having this jobs issue because the Haitians are coming in and taking our jobs and our rights.” What do you say to that? We have to have a process to try to build towards a much more holistic understanding of the root causes of the tensions between African Americans and Haitians. You can’t get to those root causes unless you can explain why people left Haiti, and what were the factors that forced them out, and link that to the forces that are driving African—American from Liberty City, which is the low-income, African American part of Miami that we do a lot of work in. If you don’t create a space to deal with that on a more global level, you’re either going to remain in deepening conflict or you have to impose a politically correct resolution or a top-down moral assertion that is constantly managed and rarely owned by the membership. So, we incorporate a global analysis so as to be able to anticipate future conflicts and to start a process that deals with those up front, struggling with them ahead of the game before they become issues as much as possible.

If you don’t have those spaces, then that means you’re always making in-the-moment decisions that are not reflective, that end up never getting truly resolved. Without that global analysis, alliances are going to be incredibly temporary and short-sighted, if possible at all. There’s 80,000 more things that will split it apart than will keep it together.

The (objective of Root Cause) was to create the space where people could get their voice heard and put forth their perspective, and be the face of their own resistance. It’s the people of color that are resisting on a daily basis, and their role in these large international protests should reflect that. —Guerr Fernandez

* Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educationalist. His work on methodologies of education touched upon many areas, but he is most well known for his writings on the capacity of popular education approaches to help people bring about positive social change. His book on this and other related themes, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, remains one of the most referenced works on education today.

† Low-Income Families Fighting Together is an example of an organization led by people of color that is emerging under the organizing model of the Miami Workers Center. This model emphasizes the need for leadership development among jobless and low-wage workers. The Miami Workers Center provides space for grassroots initiatives like LIFFT to develop and take responsibility over their work.
Could you say more about the specifics of the methodologies you are exploring?

TENY BORHAM
Paulo Freire’s* work focuses on methodology to a great extent. We can have great content on any topic, like white supremacy, for example, but if we just go in and lecture on it for an hour and a half, what have we really accomplished? Sure, people may have memorized answers after that, but what have they really taken away from that experience? Freire calls this, broadly, the banking method. Students spit back the answers that they know teachers are expecting, and teachers ask questions that have intended, programmed response. If this is what we do, we can very well end up reinforcing many of the problems we were trying to uproot in the first place. The point is to change the relationship of power, even amongst us. That begins with a framework where people can bring their own experiences into the mix, where everyone to some degree is a teacher as well as a student.

How do you approach popular education as a community-based organization in terms of the resources you need to have and the time you should plan on investing in it?

MAK: I think first of all you have to be very, very realistic about where your organization is and what its capacity is, and what the membership is like. So, I would want to caution anyone against just taking a model and dumping it into your drawer. You have to be very flexible and dynamic in your thought and application of broad ideas. And, with that, don’t be afraid to let the membership itself participate in the process. The membership should help decide how popular education plays in, what kinds of models you use, and how these models play themselves out. And that’s what worked out very well with Low-Income Families Fighting Together (LIFTT).‡

Doing real leadership development is extremely time consuming, and it’s also incredibly rewarding; watching people develop has been one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever seen. Watching them grow from very shy, introverted people, with not a lot of confidence, to someone who shows up on TV and holds a press conference is really amazing. And when people go there, they just can’t go back.

In terms of facilitation of this approach, do you try to have people reach a point of consensus during a discussion?

MAK: We don’t make any demands like that. If there’s consensus, then they got through this and ended up at consensus. But we actually encourage them to say three people felt this way, two people felt this way, one person felt that way. We just want them to report back. So we’re not going to draw conclusions, even if at the end there are unpopular answers: this is an exercise for you figuring this stuff out, and there is no right answer to it.

How does someone actively apply the knowledge gained through popular education experience like the circles of consciousness?

MAK: When we’re planning the syllabus for the Circles of Consciousness for the entire year, we are matching the syllabus with what’s going on in our campaigns and what we do. So the syllabus that we have for 2004 includes report backs from the Free Trade Area of the Americas meeting and things on the Haitian revolution—because this is the 200th anniversary of Haitian independence. We did a whole series on gentrification because that is our main campaign right now. This way, people understand what gentrification is, and when they get into the campaign, they actually get out a position of knowledge, not a position of “I’m not sure what this is.” We try to match it up with the campaigns so that there can be like a 1-2 punch about it. So someone knows the theory, and then they can apply that theory.

It seems that ownership over the work is a big part of these processes. Could you say more about that?

MAK: There’s something about being the active element in your own struggle which has a great impact on you. At first, the Workers Center staff was doing the agenda, facilitating, note-taking, and then we realized that LIFTT had become very dependent on the Workers Center for actually doing all of this. We had to create a range where people could make their own mistakes, and learn through their experiences, rather than have Center staff pick up whatever slack there may be. I think that is popular education in a real way. That’s a written and explicit part of the training because you learn more from mistakes than from successes.

Why do you think it is important for community-based organizations to incorporate a global lens into their work?

GAWA: We wanted to push for a global analysis just because we understood that in local organizing a ton of decisions come up that you can’t make strategically without a global understanding. So, for example, on issues of organizing in the African community, a lot of what may come up is a reaction that blances the problems on immigrants. For example, you might hear, “Well, you know, we’re having this jobs issue because the Haitians are coming in and taking our jobs and our rights.” What do you say to that? We have to have a process to try to build towards a much more holistic understanding of the root causes of the tensions between African Americans and Haitians. You can’t get to those root causes unless you can explain why people left Haiti, and what were the factors that forced them to come, and link that to the forces that are driving African-American from Liberty City, which is the low-income, African American part of Miami that we do a lot of work in. If you don’t create a space to deal with that on a more global level, you’re either going to remain in deepening conflict or you have to impose a politically correct resolution or a top-down moral assertion that is constantly managed and rarely owned by the membership. So, we incorporate a global analysis so as to be able to anticipate future conflicts and to start a process that deals with those up front, struggling with them ahead of the game before they become issues as much as possible.

If you don’t have those spaces, then that means you’re always making in-the-moment decisions that are not reflective, that end up never getting truly resolved. Without that global analysis, alliances are going to be incredibly temporary and short-sighted, if possible at all. There’s 80,000 more things that will split it apart than will keep it together.

THE (OBJECTIVE OF ROOT CAUSE) WAS TO CREATE THE SPACE WHERE PEOPLE COULD GET THEIR VOLE HEARD AND PUT FORTH THEIR PERSPECTIVE, AND BE THE FACE OF THEIR OWN RESISTANCE. IT’S THE PEOPLE OF COLOR THAT ARE RESISTING ON A DAILY BASIS, AND THEIR ROLE IN THESE LARGE INTERNATIONAL PROTESTS SHOULD REFLECT THAT. —GIHAN FERIES

Be realistic about your organization’s capacity and membership

Low-wage workers and low-income families lead 24-mile march to protest corporate globalization and the free Trade Area of the Americas summit in Miami, November 2003.
Could you talk about the experience of bringing in the global as part of the Miami Workers Center’s overall goals?

**Gianna** Well, our global analysis is not there yet just to make our campaigns work easier. The Center is attempting to build an explicitly progressive culture and politics amongst our leadership and base. Our popular education method is the bridge between that vision and where our membership may be. It constantly questions and reshapes both our vision and the vision of our membership. For example, the Center has a clear analysis of how the destruction of public and subsidized housing is directly related to neoliberalism. We don’t assume that our base comes in with that analysis, and we don’t try to impose that analysis on our base. But we think that the point of the Workers Center is to create a space to have that dialogue. And our responsibility is not just to fight around local issues. Instead, we want to fight around housing and ask how that turns into global lessons for global issues. How do lessons in terms of power and power dynamics lead to lessons in terms of how housing is connected to neoliberalism? We felt like the point of organizing is to create that space. And the point of taking on local struggles is to be able to start developing leaders who see themselves as part of a broader social justice movement. The end goal is, hopefully, that those leaders become leaders in their communities and their communities are part of that broader movement.

**What was the experience like leading up to and during the FTAAs in terms of representing a community-based, people of color-led organization that was connecting with the global justice movement?**

**Gianna** Our principle goal was to carve out space for working class people and people of color to speak and be heard. We feel that those most impacted by the policies of the FTAAs must be front and center, and Root Cause accomplished that. For example, our grassroot formation led a march 34 miles long into the heart of a militarized downtown Miami. It created a lot of visibility for our issues, and it was a platform for our members.

So, the external objective was to create the space where people could get their voice heard and put forth their perspective, and be the face of their own resistance. It’s the people of color that are resisting on a daily basis, and their role in these large international protests should reflect that. The internal side of it was to, one, strengthen our relationships and bonds with other working class organizations of color in South Florida, and at the same time to deepen our own consciousness around global issues, and connect up our local issues to the larger context.

**What is the long-term vision for the Miami Workers Center in terms of the role of popular education?**

**Gianna** As we talk about leadership development, we also want to step back and examine methodology. In the past and today, we’re very deliberate about the content of our work, and as we look forward, we want to be just as thoughtful about the methodology we use to express that content.

For example, the Circle of Consciousness is a space for ideological development where we’ve thought out the substance. At the same time, individually, we’ve all brought our own methods to that process. Now, we want to see if we can develop one clear methodology to be used by all of us. The more we think about this, the more we realize that methodology in and of itself affects development as well. The process a person is experiencing impacts the type of leader they become.

We feel that we need to start right now looking at how we function, because methodology can either bring in equality or inequality. So part of our work is ensuring that all of our principles and visions for how we think the world should be are reflected in our methodologies for realizing them starting today.

**How do you go about implementing this long-term vision for the popular education methodology?**

**Gianna** We understand that the process of leadership development does not only take place in formal settings. While Circles of Consciousness gatherings are one example, there are so many other places where development takes place. Like one-on-one conversations, prep sessions before an action, debrief-sessions, and other teachable moments. These moments, which take place over the course of entire campaigns and struggles, are just as important, if not more important, than the traditional two-hour session for discussion. So we are trying to become very deliberate in identifying these moments for leadership development purposes.

And, to take it one step further, we initially approached popular education around working with our base. However, once we started getting into it we realized that the methodology really carries over to how we operate within the organization. In fact, popular education is much more of a philosophy than just a method. So, now we are asking ourselves how should we take what we’ve learned into other spheres of the organization: staff development, training, study, work with our allies. How do we globally approach all of our work? We are examining how we move to honest, challenging, engaging dialogue at every level. We want to say that it can potentially be the fabric that runs through everything.
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United for a Fair Economy: Building Binational Consciousness

United for a Fair Economy, based in Boston, Massachusetts, is a research and resource organization devoted to increasing ‘economic literacy’. UFE distributes publications and materials that deconstruct the inaccessible terminology of economics into a vernacular that people can react to and understand. They have designed several workshops used widely by organizations around the country which illustrate the ‘growing divide’ between rich and poor in the U.S.

After playing a significant role in the organizing and educating that led to the landmark WTO protests in Seattle in 1999, UFE built a program that brought into focus some of the trends and contradictions of the global economy. Their initial approach to global justice was solidarity-driven, demonstrating the negative impacts of corporate-driven globalization on the poor in the developing world. In recent years, however, UFE has framed a domestic critique that communicates how low-income people of color are bearing the effects of a structural adjustment program at home.

Building from their mandate to advance economic literacy, UFE has used popular education methodologies to engage immigrant constituencies in the Boston Area to take leadership in global justice campaigns. Beyond passing along information about global issues, UFE’s staff has been instrumental in motivating immigrant organizations to use popular education to expand their members’ capacity to participate in and lead campaigns.

The following profile is composed of four interviews with staff from UFE and partner organizations. Jeanette Huez, a popular educator from UFE whose roots are in the revolution in El Salvador in the 1970s and 80s, has been instrumental in reaching out to the Central American community and invigorating popular education as a means to organizing at both the global and local level. In the profile below, she discusses her technique and process of conducting workshops that lead immediately to action. A former colleague of Jeanette’s, Mike Pkosch, shares some insight on the importance of popular education to leadership development, and the challenges of expanding popular education within U.S. social movements.

Two organizers from immigrant-based organizations in the area, Carlos Rosales and Edwin Aragón, discuss how they have applied the knowledge and training gathered from UFE’s workshops in two initiatives, one confronting the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), and the other to hold money transfer companies accountable for their heavy take on remittances sent back to Central America. Both of these campaigns are strong examples of how immigrant communities are identifying binational strategies that confront corporations and governments in the U.S. and at home.

There are a lot of global justice activists that think they are the experts because they can speak the language, because they know terminologies, but you’re not going to the base where people can really make connections with the personal experiences, with the reality that they are living. What the global justice movement does not have is the human faces, is concrete cases. They have theory, but they don’t have practice. — JEANETTE HUEZ

How do you build an understanding of globalization in the immigrant communities that you work with?

JEANETTE HUEZ: My first question is always, “What do you think you have?” or “What do you think it is?” and “Why do you think it is global?” Most people say they have no idea. But maybe they saw something on the news, and maybe they saw something in their community or heard about something back home. Everyone has something that you can draw on and connect. I don’t come into a workshop and say, “this is the global, blah, Mah, blah.” I ask, instead, what people think. And the global is everything that is affecting us as immigrants, that has forced us to come here and that forces us from any place or every place.

Do you think people are happy to leave their countries? Look at me. I didn’t leave my country because of economics, I left because I was in trouble for political reasons. That’s why I am here. I am definitely part of this global discussion because this government in the U.S. was forcing our people to leave. Who do you think does the dirty work here in the United States? Immigrants. Why does the U.S. apply these rules everywhere? Because; they need this cheap labor to do the dirty work that no one wants to do. Just check out the jobs in your clothes. That’s the clothes from your home country. Who made it? Do you think the people that are making the clothes get any of the benefits? There are so many places to start what you eat, what you wear, everywhere.

Globalization is touching, in a very personal way, everything from immigrant culture to the services immigrants use. I think we’ve been doing a pretty good job of getting the realities across and communicating what free trade really means. We get it across that free trade isn’t la Niña Juana being able to come up to the U.S. to sell her pupusas here. Wal-Mart will sell pupusas here, and there, and they will be cheaper in both places.

What kind of tools or exercises do you use to spark these discussions?

JEANETTE: There are different activities. For example there are case studies, there are pictures, there are exercises, and from there you build in an open question. They talk as a group and they come up with the answers, with their own revelations. I use a lot of songs, because we love to dance and we love music. One of the songs that I always use is from Silvio Rodriguez, “El Niño Pobre.” We talk about el niño pobre and the home. It’s unbelievable the reaction you get. One time this guy started crying, and saying that he’s feeling so bad. He says that I’ve killed him with that song. He says, “you know what, a lot of time we forget where we come from. And just with the song, you put me back in my reality.”

CARLOS ROSELALES: There’s a lot of people in our community that don’t know how to read or write, and so there’s oftentimes a separation in groups where the people that can read and write take leadership or they stand apart. For this reason, popular education is really important. You need everyone to understand and take leadership. For instance, take the remittance problem, which is a global problem. So, let’s say that Don Juan was in El Salvador and there wasn’t any work because of the economic conditions, and he decided to come here to the U.S. So, we make a drawing of Don Juan with his suitcase. He comes to the U.S. without papers, and Don Juan begins to wash dishes. So, there’s a picture of him washing dishes. Then there’s another picture of Don Juan transferring money. Then there’s another picture with the family receiving the money, and then going out to buy food. Now, where are you going to buy it? That’s part of it. The people don’t want to go to the local market to buy their clothes, they want to go to GAP and all this. Later, if they buy rice, well, it’s not from El Salvador because of the agricultural limitations they put on rice cultivation. So, where are you going to buy rice? Well, you’re going to buy the imported granola rice. And so, the people start to educate themselves and come to consciousness and realize what is really going on with these free trade agreements.

Can you give me an example of where the Salvadoran community is able to struggle with more precision around certain issues because it is binational?

EDWIN ARAGON: Yes, take the elections that just happened in El Salvador. There were individuals that were part of the delegation negotiating the free trade agreement that went down to El Salvador. For instance, the brother of the president of this country,

Mike Pkosch, former director of UFE’s global economy program, leads a workshop for the FMA.

Literacy won’t drive a wedge in the audience if you communicate visually and through song.
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Mine Pekkos, former director of UFE’s global economy project, leads a workshop at the FTAA.

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Job Bush, went and made comments that were part of a campaign to get the people to vote for a certain political party—the conservative, right party. This is a reflection of the foreign policy of the U.S. in the sense that this was all about the potential benefits for U.S. corporations. The important thing is to demystify and discover the intentions of the free trade agreement, and to learn from other examples that we already know about, like NAFTA. For instance, how when NAFTA came it destroyed small farmers in Mexico, amongst other things, and this produced an exodus of Mexicans toward the United States. So, as our people are struggling to get amnesty or some type of migratory protection in this country, it’s really a result of this foreign policy. We can fight on each front and both at once.

CARLOS: We’re really focused on remittances as a tool that can be used to make connections between the two countries. In 2003, more than $2 billion was sent back in remittances, which represents 54% of the commerce in El Salvador. When we work with our popular education model, we dig into who benefits from those remittances. Is it your family or is it the financial system or the government? We definitely see that the biggest benefit is received by the government that is able to sustain their big budget deficit.

When you’re doing popular education, is it just about raising consciousness, or do you actually focus in on a campaign? How important is it to have a specific action resulting from a session?

JEANETTE: You have to have action, and because people understand how it is affecting their own lives, it is easier to do a campaign. One of the big things we’ve been doing here is to call the Salvadoran consulate about NAFTA. One time we got the whole Proyecto Hondureño to give us their cellars, and we used them to make those calls immediately after the workshop. We have it, so let’s do it. Here are the cell phones, now make the phone call. And people make it. But if you send them away, and ask them to call next week, then forget it. Popular education has to transform something. It’s a continuing process that has to be reflected in your actions. You always need to have actions where people can use what they learn. Because you’re not doing your job if you just come and talk about NAFTA. People will be frustrated if you make them angry and then don’t give them anything to do.

As a popular educator, what have you learned from Jeanette and UFE?

CARLOS: It’s the difference in how something is presented. The UFE people don’t present it like they’re the experts, but rather that they’re learning, also. That’s what makes this model of teaching different than the one I’m used to. Usually, someone stands up at the front and doesn’t give anyone a chance to participate. Within the community there is so much knowledge. Knowledge that people that work in an office don’t have. This is something that I learned in El Salvador, that the campesinos knows a whole lot more than the person at the front of the classroom. And I think that’s the key and that’s the challenge—how does a facilitator find the talent that exists within. It’s difficult though, because they were organized in El Salvador and they know the issues. But now that they’re here, they haven’t had the opportunity to develop their knowledge, or they don’t want to start trouble.

Oftentimes when you hear NAFTA or CAFTA or FTAA being debated, there’s this argument that Latinos really want to see NAFTA pass because they believe that it creates jobs for them. Do you see that your popular education work helps to get rid of that myth?

JEANETTE: I think so. I have been very lucky to meet people who have experienced NAFTA, and they do that work for me. Once I was doing a training-for-trainers at Miami’s Workers Center. And one lady from the Inmigrantes Workers came. She asked if CAFTA was like NAFTA? I said yeah. She said that’s why she was in the U.S. and I said, ‘Really? Tell us more.’ She took it and ran with it. She used to have a small tortilla business in Mexico, with five people working for her. Each of those workers had a family, so her business was supporting five families. She remembers when the media was covering NAFTA and talking about how it was Mexico’s ticket to the first world, that this is how Mexico is going to get back at the U.S. for stealing Mexico’s land. Then NAFTA went into effect, and within a month, she could not find white corn. She started trying to make yellow tortillas and all the clients said, ‘Forget it, I’m no pig.’ So, those five people with five families lost their jobs. She lost her house. She said she even lost her family because she couldn’t support them. She came to the U.S. because she didn’t feel that she had any other option. Two of her kids came illegal, and one son died at the border. I look around and this story is touching everyone, there are tears in people’s eyes. She ends by saying that she is so glad that this work is getting done. She wants to educate people about CAFTA, and she asked me to tell her story, so I’m doing that. This is the kind of story that the global justice movement needs.

What do you expect back from people when you start working with them on a workshop basis?

JEANETTE: I ask them to teach others, to multiply. I tell people that they have the knowledge, and I tell them not to keep it to themselves, because it is not so helpful locked up in your head; you’ve got to share it with somebody else. I look at folks, and I know they go to the church. I tell them that if they really believe in that priest, they ought to go and educate the priest. I don’t care who, share it with the dog if you want, but share it. And people laugh, and they say, Jeanette, what can a dog do? And I tell them that a dog can bark.

Why do you think there’s been such limited involvement of low-income folks, people of color and immigrants in the global justice movement?

JEANETTE: I think because the information that we have has not been accessible to communities of color and immigrants. We have the experience, through suffering, living through bad policies, but we just don’t know the system. That’s part of it. That’s why it’s an elite movement. Remember, education is power; information is power. If we don’t have that piece, we don’t have any power.

Why do you feel that the materials that are out there aren’t accessible?

JEANETTE: Language. Not language like English, Spanish, French, Portuguese. It’s the words that are very sophisticated, very technical, very hard to understand. And I think it is part of the culture. The American culture values sophistication. That is not accessible to everyone. For example, who is eligible to go to college in this country? Even white poor people do not have access to the higher education where you can learn to be sophisticated. There are a lot of global justice activists that think they are the experts because they can speak the language, because they know terminologies, but you’re not going to the base where people can really make connections.
I think we’ve been doing a pretty good job of getting the realities across and communicating what free trade really means. We get it across that free trade isn’t la Niña Juanita being able to come up to the U.S. to sell her pupusas here. Wal-Mart will sell pupusas here, and there, and they will be cheaper in both places. —Jeanette Huet

Job Bush, went and made comments that were part of a campaign to get the people to vote for a certain political party—the conservative, right party. This is a reflection of the foreign policy of the U.S. in the sense that this was all about the potential benefits for U.S. corporations. The important thing is to demystify and discover the intentions of the free trade agreement, and to learn from other examples that we already know about, like NAFTA. For instance, how when NAFTA came it destroyed small farmers in Mexico, amongst other things, and this produced an exodus of Mexicans toward the United States. So, as our people are struggling to get amnesty or some type of migratory protection in this country, it’s really a result of this foreign policy. We can fight on each front and both at once.

Carola: We’re really focused on remittances as a tool that can be used to make connections between the two countries. In 2003, more than $2 billion was sent back in remittances, which represents 54% of the commerce in El Salvador. When we work with our popular education model, we get into who benefits from these remittances. Is it your family or is it the financial system or the government? We definitely see that the biggest benefit is received by the government that is able to sustain their big budget deficit.

When you’re doing popular education, is it just about raising consciousness, or do you actually focus in on a campaign? How important is it to have a specific action resulting from a session?

Jeanette: You have to have action, and because people understand how it is affecting their own lives, it is easier to do a campaign. One of the big things we’ve been doing here is to call the Salvadoran consulate about CAFTA. One time we got the whole Proyecto Hondureño to give us their cellars, and we used them to make those calls immediately after the workshop. We have it, so let’s do it. Here are the cell phones, now make the phone call. And people make it. But if you send them away, and ask them to call next week, then forget it. Popular education has to transform something. It’s a continuing process that has to be reflected in your actions. You always need to have actions where people can use what they learn. Because you’re not doing your job if you just come and talk about CAFTA. People will be frustrated if you make them angry and then don’t give them anything to do.

As a popular educator, what have you learned from Jeanette and UFE?

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with the personal experiences, with the reality that they are living. What the global justice movement does not have is the human faces, is concrete cases. They have theory, but they don’t have practice.

Do you feel that there is space within the global justice movement for immigrants to take leadership and share their message?

JEANETTE: I’ve received many phone calls from universities or organizations asking us to send someone to speak. And I say, you know, we have a great leader here that can do it. And they ask if he speaks very good English. If we say no, then they ask if we can send someone else. It’s very hard for immigrants and people of color to jump into that. A lot of times you hold a meeting and if you invite people from the global movement, they bring their agenda. And they want to impose their agenda without listening to the reality. They’re always saying, ‘no, no, no, you’re not right,’ and ‘No, no, no, I can prove it, I have sources.’

How do you think we can expand popular education within social movements in the United States?

MIREIKA PERDOMO: The first question to answer when you look at popular education and social movements in the U.S. is, ‘What is the substance there?’ There is not much of a movement. Jeanette just got back from a Mesoamerican popular educators forum in El Salvador, in the heart of FMLN country. The premise was popular education helped create the revolutionary wave of the 1970s and 80s, how can it be done? One of Jeanette’s conclusions coming back was that we’re not ready to do that in the U.S. Who would we work with? I had a similar experience in my solidarity work in the 80s and 90s.

We are so underdeveloped in terms of movements, analysis, ideology, sophistication in thinking about politics, and the experience of organizing and winning victories. Too often, when we’re doing popular education for a group, they want us to do the one shot. It’s hard to schedule even two hours for a one shot. That’s not enough to develop a strategy. It’s a kind of a corporatization, the pop-ed light. People want you to do something in thirty minutes. This is part of the whole dialogue about organizing. How much of organizing is leadership development, what is our model of leadership development? We need to look at the very applied forms of organizing that are neglecting the need for deep transformations of the people who are going to legitimately drive an organization.

As an intermediary organization that does popular education, how do you insure that you’re cultivating leadership and autonomy?

MIREIKA: This is where the Miami Workers Center’s (MWC) model of popular education and leadership development are so impressive. Gilbar’s (MWC’s executive director) perspective is that the challenge is not one of curriculum. The problem is that there is not a mechanism internal to base building organizing for incorporating analysis into leadership, into the consciousness of leadership. And his current thesis is that you need a process to do that which is specific to the leadership in each organization. So it’s not even that every organization needs its own model and method—it’s more specific than that, it’s a sort of sub-organizational level where this needs to happen.

This is what Miami Workers Center’s ‘Circle of Consciousness’ means to me—you have a space in the organization where people grapple with these issues and incorporate them into their own analysis and practice. It’s both one-on-one, and collective. The point here is that you can’t mass produce that. It’s intensive work, it doesn’t pay. You can learn a hell of a lot from others, but you can’t pick up the template and just move it. So, it’s probably not so attractive for most foundations. It’s not an R and D department that develops a template and then markets it. It’s more grassroots than that.
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Mike: Popular education is a slow and patient process.
VOICES FROM PROJECT SOUTH

How did you start to integrate popular education into your organizing work?

Stella Williams: I would get a group of people together and I realized that if they just sit there and let me talk, talk, talk, then they don’t learn anything. If the conversation is fun, and if there’s a game or something, or if they get to give their opinion, then everybody remembers. When people are hearing each other’s stories, they see that the health crisis ain’t just who you working for, it’s a national thing.

Dak Heronzi de Garcia: I didn’t know I was doing popular education, really. I just thought it was something to keep people in the room. My understanding of it has really changed a lot. From popular education as a leadership development tool, to using popular education as an organizing methodology, which is a lot different than how I was originally taught and how I learned to organize. Before, I thought just being interactive was popular education. You know a lot of folks think that if you play a game, you are using popular education. I no longer think that’s true. That’s just tactical thinking. For every organization, popular education is different based on the struggle and the values of the people involved. It doesn’t have a definition, it just has principles. We move those principles around depending on the culture of the people we’re talking with. I think equality is always a piece of it. Everybody in the room is a learner and everybody in the room is a teacher. And I think that people learn when they really experience something. So, I think one of the basic principles of popular education is you have to create a process by which people experience.

You mentioned that you view popular education as more than just education or leadership development, but as an organizing strategy. What do you mean?

Lawrence: I come from a labor background and a community organizing background where you knock on doors, you have one-on-one conversations to get people to a meeting and you give them tasks, and once in a while, you talk about the bigger picture. In this country, there has been a kind of separation between organizing and education. But, when I see different models, like how the Zapatistas organized, and how folks in Africa organize, there is no separation. I think a lot of that is based on a culture of democracy that is not the same in the United States. It’s important to have an entity like Project South or Highlander that’s focused on the education and at the same time can push an issue. And, you know, there are a lot of front porches in the South. The reason is people like to sit down and talk, they like to sit down in groups, and that’s an organizing strategy that works for people. Humans are very social. Every culture in the world organizes. But they organize in different ways. To use, popular education is basing the education on what people do naturally.

Why is history so central to Project South’s popular education model?

Jeannie Scott: Because, in order for you to know where a problem is going, you got to know where it came from. You got to know its trends and how it functioned in various historical arenas. And if you can look at it historically, you can begin to think about the direction it’s going in. We really think in order to get a handle on the ability to analyze a problem, you have to know what its history is. We do a timeline exercise as one of the core tools that we use. The timeline that we display goes back to the 1920’s or the 1900’s, but we also refer to the timeline in our publications that goes back to the 1400’s. And, we’ve developed a jeopardy game for various workshops, and the questions within the jeopardy game emphasize history.

What else besides the emphasis on history distinguishes Project South’s brand of popular education from others?

Joe Wright: Another distinction is that we think that having some kind of theoretical understanding and analysis is really important to our brand of popular education. And you don’t get that from necessarily just reading a book, although we think that reading is very important. But you also get it from talking to each other, and dissecting a problem.

Another one is action. We just think that it’s important to hit it straight up. I’m not sure what other people do, but in our popular education, we develop it in such a way that action is a result of the relationship. And we think our model leads that action to be anti-capitalist. I don’t know anybody else that does that. So, I think Project South’s popular education inspires a broader critique that brings in ideology. People generally shy away from ideology. I think it’s important not to shy away from it because it creates the conditions for the next step, which I also think is frequently skipped over, and that is figuring out what our vision for the future is.

So, history, theory, action, and the fourth distinction is vision. And I think vision works best when we develop consciousness and then use the consciousness to talk about what our vision is. And we develop that consciousness and that vision right there in the exercises. We ask questions like, Where do you think the movement is going to be in ten years? What do you think it should look like? How did you determine that?

How did you decide to build globalization into your popular education modules, and in general, integrate a global analysis into the vision and mission of the organization?

Joe Wright: The main reason we made that decision was that we began to look at globalization and neoliberal policies as they were being applied to developing countries all around the world, such as the various IMF and WTO policies. And then we began to look at what was happening in this country, and saw with very little variation the same kind of policies being applied here.

We don’t need to take a lot of folks to march on the International Monetary Fund. I think framework and thinking is extremely important. If you are trying to shut down a prison, you are going to have the entire international economy as your enemy, and that’s scary. I think what’s scarier, though, is to have the entire international economy as your enemy and pretend that you don’t.

Jeannie Scott: Project South facilitates low-key popular education initiatives called ZIPs – building a movement. During the workshops, ZIP participants, like these folks in Seattle who are working on a distinct popular education tool to grapple with segregation.

When I came to the organization, it was right after the protest in Seattle in 1999/2000. There was a big demonstration in D.C. with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. But, what we found is that when we worked with folks like the Georgia Human Rights Union, which is a welfare rights organization composed almost exclusively of low-income women of color, mostly African American, we talked to them about what was going on on TV, and they were like ‘why are those white kids getting beat up?’ So, we said ‘it’s about globalization’. And they said ‘what the hell is globalization’?

So, here we were dealing with welfare reform, and Georgia was one of the first states in the country to institute welfare reforms, which we saw as a distinct neoliberal policy. The difference is it wasn’t imposed on us by the International Monetary Fund, it was adopted by the Governor voluntarily. But the philosophy was the same. We are talking to folks who are directly impacted negatively by a policy of neoliberalism and there are these folks in Seattle who are trying to stop these institutions of neoliberalism and both of them look at each other and say ‘I don’t know what the hell you’re doing and what it has to do with me.’ We thought this might be a problem.

Stella: Whenever we do our intern training, we usually do globalization as part of it because we have members who come from all parts of the world. 60% of our members are from other countries, so when we get in a group people are telling stories to each other about what’s going on in their country now, and why it is that they were forced to come here. So, they feed each other information that way, and it creates a bigger picture.
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Project South facilitates low-wage popular education retreats.
Called BMX - Building a Movement, the workshops bring together
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Do you incorporate the ‘alphabet soup’ of trade terminology—the IMFs and WTOs and WBs, etc? Yes, I use words like that. I use words like imperialism. I am not one of these folks that think you can’t use big words in the group. I just think you can’t use big words and not explain what you’re talking about. I don’t think they can be used in a way that makes people feel stupid.

How do you communicate effectively without getting too technical? One of my favorite things when we talk about imperialism, I ask folks ‘when you were in elementary school who was the bully in your school?’ Tell me about the bully, who did the bully do? What was the bully’s name? Did he pick on you? Who did he pick on? What did he take from them? Everyone has a common experience with somebody who used violence to get something from somebody else. Ok, so let’s talk about the war in Iraq Who’s being picked on? What are they taking?

We also have a bunch of different games. We do a globalization gong show. This works really well when you’re working with folks who have never dealt with globalization and a bunch of folks who think they know it all. What you do is you have somebody come to the front of the room to define neoliberalism in no more than two sentences. If anybody in the room does not understand you, they have got to hit the gong. That happens until everybody understands. Not that everybody agrees with the definition, just that everybody understands the definition. If someone in the audience hits the gong, then somebody else comes up. You have all these definitions which people understand, and then you can talk about if people agree or disagree. Otherwise, if we talk about the subtleties before people understand then it’s not a conversation.

We use that and globalization jeopardy, which is my all-time favorite game. What we do is we hand out the answers beforehand like a cheat sheet, and sometimes we will have multiple choice answers. Then people will go through and each team will have ten seconds to answer. Whereas jeopardy has daily double, we have these whammies that ask you to tell about a time that you fought for justice on the job, or to name an organization fighting globalization, or other kinds of things that people know because it’s based on their lives.

We spoke earlier about plugging popular education into action. What do you think makes a campaign a global justice campaign?

What would qualify to me as a global justice campaign would be if that analysis, if that thinking, if that framework, is integrated into the campaign structure. Let me give you an example: I have a friend who is trying to replace a prison they shut down with a learning center in the Delta region of Louisiana. It’s never been done before. This is the first time this kind of economic conversion has ever happened with a prison. I think I can think that can be totally framed as a global justice campaign by saying economic development that is community based and community driven is a right and that’s what we need to rallyize our economy. And that runs counter to all this crap that corporate globalization is telling us. You don’t need to take a lot of folks to march on the International Monetary Fund. I think framework and thinking is extremely important.

If you are trying to shut down a prison, you are going to have the entire international economy as your enemy, and that’s scary. I think what’s scarier, though, is to have the entire national economy as your enemy and pretend that you don’t.

I have a very strict opinion on this. I think in order to have a global justice campaign, you’ve got to have global partners in developing countries that are part of it. We can do it around trade issues, we can do it around corporate issues, because these multinational corporations have entities in various countries. I think that we have got to get to that level of sophistication before we can actually call it a global justice campaign. A few other things: One is that you’ve got to have collective planning, you’ve got to have collective goals, and you’ve got to have developed the various tactics for each country that is involved.

What’s your opinion of the existing global justice movement? What has it done right and what could it do better?

Well, I think what’s right with it is that it has developed to the point where there are World Social Forums and Hemispheric Social Forums that are happening on a regular basis throughout the world. What that means is that it has developed to a level where people are actually thinking about the global justice movement, and trying to figure out how to make it work better. What’s wrong with it is that people in the United States are so far behind, and it needs the United States, and the United States needs it. We’re so behind that it must be frustrating to a lot of the developing countries in terms of just where our analysis is at and where our organizational development is at.

Why do you think the U.S. is lagging behind other countries in the global justice movement?

I think our analysis is behind. The best example is when Seattle happened. People in the United States felt that that was the beginning of the global justice movement. Well, that shows a clear lack of international analysis because it has been going on for quite a while. So analysis wise and organizational wise, because I don’t think there’s a lot of organizations that have a clear understanding of what a global justice campaign would look like. And therefore, they are not organizationally getting ready for it. Then there’s this pattern of continual mobilization. Mobilization after mobilization after mobilization without any education and assessment and figuring out what else should be done. You know, I think it’s a really prime example of how not to build leadership, particularly grassroots leadership.

Can you give examples of movements that you’ve seen that haven’t had strong leadership, and have suffered because of it?

I think that for the most part, the Civil Rights Movement is an example. There were pieces of it, local organizations that had it, but really the national Civil Rights Movement was mainly middle class preachers, and middle class folk. And I think when you look at how that movement developed, starting out from what was a human rights freedom and justice movement and ending up as a voting rights movement, you’ve got to think about why people were able to make those compromises. It’s because economically and politically they were separated from the base.

It’s not about marching on the IMF.
We began to look at globalization and neoliberal policies as they were being applied to developing countries all around the world, such as the various IMF and WTO policies. And then we began to look at what was happening in this country, and saw with very little variation the same kind of policies being applied here.

—JEROME SCOTT

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Two effective games: The Globalization Gong Show and Globalization Jeopardy

It’s not about matching on the IMF.
Environmental Health Coalition
Taking Power Back in the Borderlands

One of the few grassroots binational organizations active today, Environmental Health Coalition has played a pivotal role in exposing the catastrophic impacts of globalization in the U.S./Mexico border region. Founded in 1980 in San Diego, California, EHC has effectively teamed together organizers, researchers, and policy advocates to carry out community-driven environmental and social justice projects. In the early 1990s, EHC opened a second office in Tijuana, Baja California, and began to actively engage border pollution issues.

After a lengthy campaign, EHC’s Border Environmental Justice Campaign (BEJC) and its Tijuana affiliate, the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental (Chilpancingo Pro Environmental Justice Collective), celebrated an important victory in Summer 2004 when the Mexican government signed an agreement with representatives of the Colectivo to complete a five-year multi-million dollar clean-up of Metales y Derivados, a U.S.-owned lead smelter company whose owner aban-
doned 23,000 tons of hazardous chemicals that were con-
taminating the nearby community of Colonia Chilpancingo. Metales y Derivados is the landmark case illustrating the failure of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in environmental protection. EHC has released a report Globalization at the Crossroads: Ten Years of NAFTA in the San Diego/Tijuana Border Region, in October 2004 (download the report at www.environmentalhealth.org), which further documents NAFTA’s environmental record.

One of the key factors in EHC’s collaboration with community activists in Colonia Chilpancingo came through an intensive popular education program called SALTA, or Salud Ambiental Latino/a Tomando Asuín. In 1995, EHC pioneered its first SALTA project in Barrio Logan, a low-income Latino community in San Diego.

The basic premise of SALTA is to build from what the participants already know about their neighbor-
hoods. Participants learn about toxic chemicals by looking at common household products, then move on to industrial pollution and to learning the political and regulatory framework. In the same way, participants are asked to make personal changes to reduce their own use of toxic chemicals before demanding changes by industry and government. Within two years, the participants had led a successful campaign to shut down a major source of toxic air pollution and establish a policy to prohibit this type of operation in the area.

EHC continued to develop the SALTA model, adapting it to serve different communities both within and outside the organization. In 2001, the BEJC adapted the SALTA curriculum to its campaign with Colonia Chilpancingo. SALTA proved effective as a community empowerment tool. The participants had long worked with EHC on environmental and social justice issues in the Colonia Chilpancingo community, such as the Metales y Derivados case. The first SALTA in the Colonia culminated with the participants for-
mally establishing EHC’s Tijuana affiliate, the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental.

One of the unique traits of the “SALTA Chilpancinos,” as it is referred to, is its treatment of globalization as a central theme in the content. The interview excerpts below are testimony to both the value and challenge of grappling with globalization and free trade agreements in popular education work.

Interviewed below are: Amelia Simpson, the director of the Border Environmental Justice Program at EHC, Magdalena Cerda, an EHC organizer with the BEJC who facilitated many of the workshops and played a key role in building the partnership between the organization and the Chilpancinos community, and Lourdes Lujan, a Mexico-based promotora with EHC who has lived in Colonia Chilpancingo for 30 years.

For me, (SALTA) has meant a huge change in my life. I don’t know the word for it... maybe “empowerment.” It has shown me that we can make a change in the community if we want to, and it has given me hope.

—LOURDES LUJAN

How do you use the SALTA program in Colonia Chilpancingo and how has it contributed to EHC’s success supporting the efforts of the people there?

MAGDALENA CERDA: Our approach and success are really based on the time that we’ve spent in the community and the trust that we’ve built there. We go house to house talking to the community about problems. We sit down with folks, and talk about what is happening, and let them know that we’re there to support their struggle. After a lot of time just spreading information, we organize a formal workshop, and we go over the basic concepts. For instance, “What is contamination?” “Where is it coming from?” “Why are our homes in such dan-
ger?” This is something more formal, more organ-
ized. And then, it becomes even more formal when people join the Colectivo that the people in Colonia Chilpancingo formed as an organization. Within the Colectivo, they visualize and decide on goals, and they make a real commitment. This is how it generally goes. This is how we spark partici-
pation in communities.

What kind of topics does the SALTA program in Colonia Chilpancingo cover?

MAGDALENA CERDA: We cover a lot. The first part focuses on the values of the community and what the commu-
nity represents. We get to know each other, we locate each other on a map of the community. And then we talk about the toxins that exist in this com-
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We go into the specifics about contamination and health, we talk about the political situation, we talk about the maquila industry and its role in the region. We get into the origins of the maquilas, of international treaties, and we talk about globalization and social change. We focus a lot on industrialization because that’s at the heart...
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Magdalena Corda, standing next to Metales y Derivados, an abandoned lead smelter plant that for more than two decades has leaked toxic pollutants into Colonia Chalpacingo (in the background of this photo)

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VOICES FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH COALITION

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We focus a lot on industrialization because that’s at the heart of this community’s problems, and it’s where the contamination comes from. There are 111 companies operating in the industrial parks adjacent to the Colonia every day, day and night, non-stop.

Can you talk about why you include the emphasis on globalization? Why not just focus on what’s happening here in the community?

**Magdalena León de Alegre:** Because it helps us see clearly that if we want to improve the environmental conditions in this community, we’ve got to get rid of polluting industry. But we need to show how powerful these companies are. We need to show how they are in power in the process of globalization. That they exist legally like people, but they have more power.

**Lourdes Luján:** Before we took part in SALTA, we saw this stuff flash on the news, but we didn’t pay attention to it, we didn’t know what it meant. When I first heard the term “globalization,” it kind of seemed like a weird word. I knew very well what NAFTA was because we’ve been living it for years in this community, but “globalization” sounded weird to me. I would never have guessed how much of an effect this word has on the world. Some of the women understood right away, and for others it took longer, but we’ve started to figure it out amongst ourselves. In 2003, I went with EHC to Porto Alegre, Brazil, for the World Social Forum, and it seemed like every workshop I went to was about globalization. People who have worked in maquilas shared testimonials with each other, and we had so much in common. I learned that it’s not just happening in my community or in Mexico, it’s happening all over the world.

How are you connecting the everyday struggles of Colonia Chilpancingo to the much broader issues of globalization and the global economy?

**Amelia Simpson:** What we find in Tijuana is that people are super sharp and aware of the injustices in the maquilas. They may even know where the maquilas came and that the maquilas are from the U.S. or are multinational. But they don’t necessarily see how that is connected to a trade agreement. So that’s what we try to emphasize, and it’s difficult. They want to know who made that agreement, why they weren’t included, and since they’re getting shafted by it, how can it change it? You can try to cut to the chase when you’re talking to somebody and say something like, “Would you sign this postcard that says we should stop expanding NAFTA because it brought pollution, it brought poverty, it brought the maquila to your doorstep with those bad wages.”

And as soon as you say “maquila, bad wages, pollution” they nod and say yeah. But making the deeper connection is very detailed and tough. Usually what we have is limited time with maquila workers, many of whom have a hard time feeding their kids. If their kids are hungry, beyond inviting people to a meeting, you can’t envision them taking time off from their job or jobs to participate in the movement. How to change globalization is peripheral to immediate needs. They want to know more, and they understand that it’s unjust, and they will do whatever they can when they have time. But to be a leader when you can’t feed your kids is difficult.

We work with communities to support their empowerment, to challenge the status quo of environmental and social injustice, and bring about change that’s both systemic, such as a law that is created or enforced, and at the same time material, such as change that translates into concrete improvement in people’s daily lives. The gap between globalization and concrete change in a community is hard to close. The Metalex y Derivados landmark NAFTA case—the successful effort to compel cleanup, and small changes around it, such as successful block by block street paving projects to channel the toxic runoff from the Metalex y Derivados site—is an example of how that gap is bridged in a meaningful way. But the connection to trade and globalization is often a stretch. Someone might be willing to join a street paving project, for example, but not march in a protest against NAFTA.

As an educator, when you introduce globalization and free trade agreements, how do you make those complex, distant, abstract concepts more concrete?

**Magdalena León de Alegre:** We use case studies. We talk about corporations that everyone recognizes from their daily lives and we analyze the power that they have. For instance, Coca Cola is a giant corporation that sells around the world, and has had enormous influence in Mexico. And not just in economic terms, but they’ve inserted themselves into the politics of the country, as well. We also have exercises that we use. One is to have everyone look at the tag on the shirt that the person sitting next to them is wearing. Then we have them mark on a big map where the shirt is made. People are astonished to see that these products that we use everyday are made around the world. And we talk about the working conditions and the very low salaries that workers are paid to do this work, and in the meantime, how the profits are flowing into a foreign corporate bank account.

**Lourdes Luján:** The people here know a lot of these companies first hand because they have worked for them. They’ve seen what they do. And they see that they don’t care in any way about Mexico. The inspectors, the managers, all of the supervisors come...
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from the U.S. or other countries, and the workers just do the grunt work. The skilled work, everything that could benefit Mexico, stays in the hands of the foreigners. There was a video that we used that showed how all of the components of the televisions come from abroad, and here it is just the assembly that happens. The workers can’t organize for better salaries because there’s always the threat that the management is throwing at them of moving the factory.

We can talk amongst ourselves about what people have seen. We can figure it out together that the maquilas do nothing for the community, they do nothing for the people. They pay very low taxes, they violate the environmental laws in Mexico, they don’t respect the labor laws, and they don’t offer any sort of social salary like providing for education in the community, or building parks, or hospitals.

How has SALTA helped to advance the organizing in Colonia Chilpancingo?

**Amelia**

SALTA and popular education have had great results in Colonia Chilpancingo. Residents are better informed, and with more information they have more confidence; they feel empowered. SALTA is organizing in the sense of awakening a social consciousness, of deepening that consciousness, and of promoting solidarity. SALTA sparks an interest in organizing, and expands the work of the Collectives. Coming out of SALTA, the participants want to run workshops on their own, they want to work in the schools, and pursue other projects. SALTA helps grow people’s commitment to work for change and justice.

**And now that you’ve scored a victory in the Metales y Derivados Campaign, what is next?**

**Amelia**

Well, we’ve been asking that question in our meetings. From my perspective, I think we should work on the Río Alamar, which is a river that runs through the Colonia here that was totally destroyed when the maquila industry arrived. I’ve lived next to the river a long time, and the water used to be crystal clear. It was a clean river where everyone around here used to have picnics on Sundays. About 20 years ago, they started building the maquilas close to here; up above us, and because they were not complying with any of the environmental laws, they destroyed this river. My father had beautiful land with all kinds of fruit trees, grapes, peaches, with everything. When the maquilas came, everything died almost immediately because of the contamination, and my father couldn’t work the land anymore. Now, people don’t want to get near the river unless they have to. It’s personal for me, and it is a deep anger that I feel.

**What has the SALTA program meant to you?**

**Amelia**

For me, it has meant a huge change in my life. I don’t know the word for it... maybe “empowerment.” It has shown me that we can make a change in the community if we want to, and it has given me hope. And this feeling really influenced me through our campaigns to clean up Metales y Derivados. All the workshops and the information about the toxics motivated people to get involved and taught people how to make a change.

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**Organizational and Project Biographies**

**Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community**

The Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community (CJTC) at UC Santa Cruz is a progressive research institute tackling issues of social justice and diversity and seeking to build collaborative relationships between the university and local community. Our overall mission is to promote equity. We define this task broadly, including studies of the sources of economic inequality, the patterns of environmental injustice, and the obstacles to building community at local and regional levels. We seek to work at the cutting edge, combining rigor, relevance, and reach to those who are leading the way to a more just society. Most of all, we seek to promote research that translates into action. (http://cjtc.ucsc.edu)

**Inter-American Forum**

The Inter-American Forum is a leadership and public policy project dedicated to promoting a dynamic pro-community, pro-equity economic and trade-policy agenda at the international, hemispheric and community level. The Forum seeks to transform the increasingly polarized public and policy discourse about globalization, regional economic integration, communities and social equity by creating a unique space for developing, highlighting and promoting new visions of trade and economic policy that places social equity, public interest and community at the center of the policy agenda. The Inter-American Forum is hosted by the Collins Center for Public Policy (www.collinscenter.org).

**Globalizing Civil Society from the Inside Out**

Funded by the Ford Foundation, GCS is a multi-year project that assesses the risks, barriers, opportunities, and resource-needs for community-based organizations looking to integrate a global perspective into their work. Since 2002, CJTC and IAF have convened four gatherings of grassroots leaders and allies in the U.S. to explore this theme. Additionally, CJTC and IAF have worked to document and publicize successful examples of community-based engagement in the debate around globalization. For more information, see http://cjtc.ucsc.edu/globalizingcivility.html

For further information on popular education being used to connect global and local issues, please visit www.GloballyLocalOpEd.org. This site offers more profiles and interviews, downloadable popular education tools and curriculums, listings of popular education artists, resources, and organizations, and much more. The site will be active starting Spring 2005.
from the U.S. or other countries, and the workers just do the grunt work. The skilled work, everything that could benefit Mexico, stays in the hands of the foreigners. There was a video that we used that showed how all of the components of the televisions come from abroad, and here it is just the assembly that happens. The workers can’t organize for better salaries because there’s always the threat that the management is throwing at them of moving the factory.

We can talk amongst ourselves about what people have seen. We can figure it out together that the maquilas do nothing for the community, they do nothing for the people. They pay very low taxes, they violate the environmental laws in Mexico, they don’t respect the labor laws, and they don’t offer any sort of social salary like providing for education in the community, or building parks, or hospitals.

How has SALTA helped to advance the organizing in Colonia Chilpancingo?

Answer: SALTA and popular education have had great results in Colonia Chilpancingo. Residents are better informed, and with more information they have more confidence; they feel empowered. SALTA is organizing in the sense of awakening a social consciousness, of deepening that consciousness, and of promoting solidarity. SALTA sparks an interest in organizing, and expands the work of the Collectives. Coming out of SALTA, the participants want to run workshops on their own, they want to work in the schools, and pursue other projects. SALTA helps grow people’s commitment to work for change and justice.

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Answer: Well, we’ve been asking that question in our meetings. From my perspective, I think we should work on the Rio Alamar, which is a river that runs through the Colonia here that was totally destroyed when the maquila industry arrived. I’ve lived next to the river a long time, and the water used to be crystal clear. It was a clean river where everyone around here used to have picnics on Sundays. About 20 years ago, they started building the maquilas close to here, up above us, and because they were not complying with any of the environmental laws, they destroyed this river. My father had beautiful land with all kinds of fruit trees, grapes, peaches, with everything. When the maquilas came, everything died almost immediately because of the contamination, and my father couldn’t work the land anymore. Now, people don’t want to get near the river unless they have to. It’s personal for me, and it is a deep anger that I feel.

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Interviews in this booklet were conducted by Tony LoPresti of the Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community, and Eduardo Moncada of the Inter-American Forum. LoPresti and Moncada, along with Rachel Rosner and Manuel Pastor of CJTC, created and edited the profiles. Additional assistance on this project was provided by Shambhavi Manglik and Charles Tolliver. If you would like more copies of this booklet, or have questions or comments, please write to CJTC at cjtc@uccc.edu, or call 831.459.5743.

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