Understanding Empowerment, Informal Education, and Access to Decision-Making in a Community Organization

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7-1-2010

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Understanding Empowerment, Informal Education, and Access to Decision-Making in a Community Organization

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Graduate Division of
Social and Cultural Foundations in Education
School of Education
DePaul University
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

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July 2010

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The Thesis of Maurya Delaney, in the Masters of Arts Program in Social and Cultural Foundations of Education at DePaul University's School of Education, is hereby approved.

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July 22, 2010
Abstract

The purpose of this case study was to explore how participants of a community organization are engaged in the problem solving and decision-making process regarding neighborhood issues and concerns. In addition, this study explored the informal education process embedded within the problem solving and decision-making processes and the various forms of empowerment that exist within the organization. My data collection involved participant and non-participant observations, four in-depth interviews, and analysis of organizational and media documents. This organization’s power-based confrontational approach to organizing consisted of local leadership development, community-led outreach and action, and community and organizational identified accomplishments. Community participants engaged in a representative and participatory democratic process, which created an informal space for learning. This democratic and informal education processes provided opportunity for individual and collective empowerment.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Education can occur in many different situations and environments. My experience in various educational settings in diverse communities influenced my curiosity to understand community involvement in alternative informal education spaces. In particular, I’m interested in community organizations\(^1\) that provide an informal education process through dialogue, participation, and decision-making.

The purpose of this study is to explore how participants\(^2\) of a community organization are involved in the problem-solving and decision-making processes regarding neighborhood issues and concerns. Therefore, the research questions that guide this research are:

1. What are the problem-solving and decision-making processes and how are participants involved in these processes?
2. What is the informal education process embedded in a community organization’s problem-solving and decision-making processes?
3. What are the various forms of empowerment that exist within a community organization?

Community organizations play an important role in community education, empowerment, and change. Participants of an organization can represent the

\(^{1}\) There are many different types of community organizations. They can differ in their approach to building relationships, level of community involvement, and the action taken for community change.

\(^{2}\) I refer to the board of directors, volunteers, employees, affiliates, or anyone else connected with the interests or activities of the organization as the community organization participants.
diverse perspectives of neighborhood residents and neighborhood institutions such as places of worship, schools, and non-profit organizations. Community organizations have the potential to empower individuals and groups through personal and collective struggles for change. Participants’ level of involvement in an organization is an important element for collective community change (Silverman, 2003; Baum, 1999; Hardina, 2004; Hughey, Peterson, Lowe & Oprescu, 2008; Mondros & Wilson, 1994). Community participation in dialogue, decision-making, and action is a complex process. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the dialogue and critical reflection regarding community involvement, informal education, empowerment, and community change as it relates to a community organization.

My thesis research is a case study on one community organization, Park Neighborhood Federation (PNF)\(^3\), in an ethnically and linguistically diverse neighborhood in a midwestern city. PNF is a membership-based organization, which includes religious institutions, schools, and non-profit organizations as its members. My field research took place over a two month period in which I conducted participant and non-participant observations, four in-depth interviews, and analysis of organizational and neighborhood documents. My research focused on PNF’s housing committee and organization wide meetings and events that took place at various member institutions. I took descriptive field notes and audio-recorded and transcribed each interview. My analysis consisted of coding the data using open

\(^3\) Park Neighborhood Federation is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the organization and their participants. All names of individuals, organizations, and locations are pseudonyms.
coding in which I allowed categories to emerge. Prior to conducting my field research, I reviewed literature pertaining to my research questions.

Chapter 2 includes a review of current scholarly literature on the various types of community organizations, community organizations in relation to the concept of community, informal education, community participation in decision-making, and individual and collective empowerment. Chapter 3 explains my research methodology and methods, the research site, my positionality, and quality and ethical issues. In Chapter 4, I present my findings and analysis. And Chapter 5, the conclusion, returns to my research question, and discusses implications of my research and the need for future research.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Within this chapter I review scholarship about (a) the various types of community organizations and their approach to organizing and community development, (b) community as it relates to community organizations, (c) informal education in the context of a community organization, (d) decision-making processes within a community organization, and (e) individual and collective empowerment within an organization.

Types of Organizations

Theodore and Martin (2007) illustrate the historical changes that have impacted the need for community organizations such as social upheaval, including those created during the Great Migration, the civil rights movement, the community empowerment movement and anti-gentrification struggles (p. 271). Cities in the United States have become increasingly more diverse with people from many different countries and cultures, speaking many different languages. As these cities change it is important to understand the role participants of a community organization have in the problem-solving and decision-making process regarding community issues. Who are the participants of an organization? How does an organization come to understand the community it works with? How do organizations involve linguistic, cultural, and ethnically diverse populations in community change and empowerment? There are many different types of
community organizations that have taken on various approaches to community change and empowerment of individuals and groups.

Melvin (1986) states, “The term ‘community organization’ from the very beginning of popular usage has meant different things to different people. Because it has been used in so many different contexts, the term has acquired a decidedly ambiguous meaning” (p. vii). It is difficult to define a community organization because each organization can take on different approaches or models to create social change (Stoecker, 2003; Gittell & Vidal, 1998; Smock, 2004; Fisher, 1994; Rothman, 1999).

Fisher (1994) identifies three dominant approaches to neighborhood organizing as social work, political activism, and neighborhood maintenance. The social work approach focuses on developing a sense of community and delivering resources and services. The political activist approach sees the community as a political entity with the potential of redistributing power. Neighborhood maintenance refers to maintaining the neighborhood by opposing external threats to its permanence. Similar to Fisher, Rothman (1999) identifies the three categories of community organizing as advocacy and social change, neighborhood and community development, and rational planning to solve community problems. Smock identifies five descriptive models of community organizing: (1) Power-based, (2) Community-building, (3) Civic, (4) Women-centered, and (5) Transformative. Stoecker (2003) differentiates between community organizing and community development by stating, within the United States, community development is associated with building buildings and community organizing is focused on building
power. In addition to the power-based model, Stoecker discusses community organizing strategies combined with development as community building, consensus organizing, and women-centered. Stoecker (2003) and Caprparo (2004) believe community organizing linked with development can be a very powerful model. Gittell and Vidal (1998) agree with Smock and Stoecker by stating the two types of community organizing are confrontational and consensus organizing, which can be used as a community development strategy.

The following descriptions of the power-based confrontational model, consensus organizing model, and community building model were developed from Smock (2004), Stoecker (2003), and Gittell and Vidal’s (1998) models of community organizational approaches. These approaches represent the most commonly recognized approaches among community organizing literature.

**Power-Based Confrontational Model**

Community organizing has traditionally been associated with a power-based model (Smock, 2004) as a confrontational approach with those shut out of decision-making, struggling for the redistribution of power (Gittell & Vidal, 1998; Stoecker, 2003). Saul Alinsky has played an important role in community organizing in many cities in the U.S. He is known for promoting self-help programs and organizing low-income residents to transform their neighborhoods through building political and economic power. He was best known for co-founding the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC) in Chicago and the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), which is a national trainer of community organizers (Melvin, 1986, p. 4). After the IAF, community organizing as a distinctive approach was established. Power-based
organizing focuses on building indigenous leadership and strengthening existing relationships and organizations sharing similar values and interests (Gittell & Vidal, 1998). Smock (2003) states the traditional power-based model argues “That change isn't possible without conflict, power-based organizations rely on aggressive, in-your face tactics to pressure political officials and economic elites to accede to the community’s demands” (p. 14). Gittell and Vidal (1998) state that some critics see power-based, confrontational organizing as having the potential to create political division, obstacles in different groups working together, limit funding and resources from the outside, and are possibly detrimental to larger societal interests.

**Consensus Organizing Model**

In contrast to the power-based confrontational model, consensus organizing creates relationships with those with resources, power, and influence (Gittell & Vidal, 1998). The founder of consensus organizing, Eichler, opposes the “us vs. them” model of community organizing (Stoecker, 2003). The purpose is to build respectful and mutually beneficial relationships between community leaders, business, and government by improving power in communities (Stoecker, 2003; Gittell & Vidal, 1998). Some confrontational organizers reject developing relationships with those in power for fear of feeling “disempowered” by sharing responsibilities with people in disadvantaged positions (Gittell & Vidal, 1998). The community building approach does not focus of power but on relationship building.
Community Building

Community building focuses on building relationships within a community. Community building does not focus on political power or building external relationships, it focuses on building neighborhood and community capacity from within by focusing on the community’s assets and strengthening relationships between community residents (Smock, 2003; Stoecker, 2003). According to Kretzman and McKnight (1993), there are two approaches for community development. The first is the traditional approach of providing services based on needs. The second is the asset-based approach that emphasizes a community’s strengths. The traditional method creates a “needs” map of a neighborhood that focuses on a community’s deficiencies. These neighborhoods are portrayed as problematic, populated by deficient and problematic people. The alternative asset-based path focuses on policies and activities based on the capacities, skills, and assets of lower income people and their neighborhoods. Kretzman and McKnight (1993) argue that historic evidence indicates that significant community development occurs only when local community people are committed to investing themselves and resources in their development. In addition to understanding the various approaches to organizing, it is important to understand effective strategies to community organizing.

Effective Community Organization Strategies

Although each model has similarities, mainly around the importance of relationship building and goals for community change, it is import to note that every community organization’s visions and process for change can be very different. In
addition, it is important to note that each community organization may take on a combination of strategies and approaches depending on community concerns and the action taken (Veen, 2003).

Gutierrez, Alvarez, Nemon and Lewis (1996) state that effective organizing recognizes and builds from community strengths, works as a partner, and deals with conflict in between groups. “Community organization methods are designed to create social environments that support social justice through influencing policies, developing programs, or governing locally” (Gutierrez, et al., 1996, p. 502). Smock (2003) identifies the following as effective strategies for community organizations to create change: Building individual capacity of local leaders, community capacity of social capital, community governance structure, diagnosing and framing the community’s problems, collective action for change, and organizing for broader social change. Each community organizing model has the potential for change. It is important to understand the community of participants within an organization and how these participants are involved in identifying problems and visions for change. Community participants of an organization represent various aspects of the surrounding community.

**Community and Community Organizations**

Community is a vital aspect of a community organization. It is important to understand both the broader community and the community within an organization. Community can be defined and understood in many ways (Burke, 2007; Goe, 2006; Grossman, Cardoso, Belenger, Belski, Corethers, Pettinelli & Redd, 2000; Hallahan, 2004; Warren, 1963). Many theorists and researchers have placed
the notion of community into two categories. The first refers to a spatial or
geographic community with the same neighborhood, location, or space. The second,
known as functional or symbolic, refers to a community which shares common
interests and beliefs (Burke, 2007; Goe, 2006; Hallahan, 2004). Community can also
be thought of as the combination of both of these definitions when common
interests form a community based on a geographic region (Goe, 2006; Grossman, et
al., 2000). Grossman, et al. (2000) say that a geographic community may be made up
of many “communities of meaning” (p. 132). Warren (1963) recognizes the difficulty
in defining community by geographic location or common interest. He states, “...by
‘community’ we mean the organization of social activities to afford people daily local
access to those broad areas of activity which are necessary in day-to-day living” (p.
9). In addition to geographic communities and communities based on interests,
communities can be understood based on ascribed characteristics.

A community of ascribed characteristics is formed based on one group’s
assumptions or stereotypes of another group. Charles Taylor (1997) notes that
misrecognition of a group of people can be detrimental to the development of that
group. “Often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people
can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror
back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves” (p.
75). Misrecognition or ascribed characteristics can influence a community’s
perception of themselves and their relation to the larger society. Gutierrez, et al.
(1996) highlight that community organizers who view communities of color in
stereotypical ways will be ineffective because they will not work as partners or be
able to build leadership. The community an organization works with through outreach and services can be a combination of geographic communities, common interest communities, and communities of ascribed characteristics. Although the community an organization works within is important, my interest lies in understanding the community of an organization based on participants involved in the organization.

Over time, the participants of a community organization can change due to a shift in neighborhood residents and changing issues and concerns. Mondros and Wilson (1994) group community participants into three categories: constituents – those benefiting from the organization; members – those who affiliate with the organization; and leaders – those who accept responsibility in the organization. The degree of participation by these groups will vary. I define the community of an organization as the board of directors, volunteers, employees, affiliates, partners or anyone else connected with the interests or activities of the organization. The degree of participation by these groups will vary. The community of participants engages in informal learning processes through their involvement in the organization.

**Informal Education in the Context of Community Organizations**

The informal learning process within a community organization can play an important role in the development of the community, community action, and community change (Veen, 2003; Hamako, 2005; Ebert, Burford & Brian, 2003; Beder, 1996). It is important to understand how community participants are
involved in constructing knowledge, reflection, and action in a community organization.

Ruud van der Veen (2003) theorizes that community development is an “...alternative route for the education, training and learning-by-doing of citizens, in particular citizens with low levels of formal education” (p. 581). He theorizes that there are three forms of education within community development: education as training, education as consciousness-raising, and education as service delivery. Within education as training, action comes first followed by learning and training. Action-oriented community development starts with the formation of an organization or group, led by a professional or indigenous leader. “The relationship between action and learning can have three different forms: (1) the professional acts on behalf of the group (2) the professional supports residents informally in their action or (3) the professional instructs residents in more formal sessions” (p. 587). Following action by the professional, it is imperative that the leader delegates tasks to active residents for informal learning to occur and to insure the residents gain their independence and ability to run the organization without the help of the professional. Education as consciousness-raising involves organizing discussion groups followed by action. This involves, “...learning how we are caught in our own history and at the same time as learning to become critically aware of the cultural and psychological assumptions that have influenced the way we see ourselves and our relationships” (p. 589). Service delivery, also known as “survival education”, is an outreach service to individuals and groups with limited formal education. It is thought of as survival education because it provides outreach in affordable housing,
health centers, childcare, and resources for job education. Ruud van der Veen (2003) states that education as training, consciousness-raising, and service delivery are understood as separate traditions and theories. Veen believes these approaches to education should not be separate, but an integrated approach in the education of community organizations. He believes that a comprehensive integrated approach would allow residents to choose their path towards lifelong learning. Another form of community education is popular education.

Similar to Veen’s (2003) consciousness raising model, Hal Beder (1996) views popular education as an appropriate educational strategy for community-based organizations. Beder (1996) uses Arnold, Barndt, and Burkes’ definition of popular education by stating it as: “Education that serves the interests of the popular class (exploited section), that involves them in critically analyzing their social situation and in organizing to act collectively to change the oppressive conditions of their lives” (p. 74). Popular education is also associated with Paulo Freire’s beliefs expressed in _Pedagogy of the Oppressed_ (1993). Beder states that popular education has three essential components: praxis, a collective and participatory orientation, and action. Praxis is the interaction of collective critical reflection of theory and practice. A collective and participatory orientation involves a group that has a shared interest in solving a problem or problems. This process is conducted by, with and for the participants. Action must further goals oriented towards social justice, equity, and oppression. Beder highlights realistic challenges to be considered with popular education within a community-based organization such as decision-making challenged by a grants objective, meeting the needs of
funders and community members, and being too busy for collective critical reflection. Popular education is an aspect of transformative education, which focuses on dialogue, reflection, and action.

Ebert, Burford and Brian (2003) researched the transformative education model of the Highlander Research and Education Center, founded by Myles Horton, who believes grassroots education is a way of effecting social change. They highlight Horton, Freire and Mezirow’s theories towards transformative education. Horton’s theory focuses on social transformation through focusing on learning from one’s individual experiences. Mezirow’s theory focuses on individual perspective transformation through the sharing of individual experiences with others, rather than social transformation. Freire on the other hand, focuses on individual and collective transformation through shared experiences and perspectives. Horton, Freire, and Mezirow share a common interest in transforming people’s lives by acquiring knowledge through dialogue and reflection.

Horton found that to empower people he had to begin with their individual experiences to help them define their own problems and find solutions for themselves. Horton honored people as unique individuals possessing a wealth of knowledge. Horton aimed to help groups value individual experiences so that decisions and goals were based on knowledge gained from shared experience through collaborative dialogue (Ebert, Burford & Brian, 2003).

Mezirow (2003) defines transformative education as, “...learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more
inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (p.58).

Mezirow views participation in discourse with other individuals that challenge one’s interpretations as development towards reflective thinking. Mezirow focuses on individual transformation rather than social transformation.

Freire (1993) differs from Mezirow’s focus on the individual by focusing on both individual and collective transformation. Freire’s view of transformative education is reflected in Beder’s (1996) notion of popular education. Freire opposes the “banking” concept of education in which a teacher deposits information into the student. Freire believes knowledge is produced through a problem-posing model, in which a student and teacher collaborate with a constantly unveiling of reality. Freire emphasizes the importance of communication through true dialogue, which necessitates trust. “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72).

The informal education process in an organization is interlinked with the dialogue, reflection, and action involved in the problem-solving and decision-making process of an organization.

**Community Participation, Problem-Solving, and Decision-Making**

Baum (1999) notes the value of participants in a community organization, because they bring their interests, information, and new perspectives. Baum identifies three ways participants can contribute to an organization: legitimacy, effort, and money. Participants contribute to an organization’s legitimacy through participating psychologically or politically by believing in the organization. Effort is
understood through participants contributing to the organization’s governance, work or both. Participation can also be through the contribution of money to the organization. Baum indicates a dilemma within community organizations is maintaining a balanced contribution from participants in regards to an organization’s legitimacy, effort towards the organization, and the contribution of money. Baum believes, “An organization for the community should be an organization of and by the community” (p. 188). Baum’s study found that organizations must continually recruit new participants in order to contribute to their legitimacy and increasing the number of new participants increases the organization’s representation of diverse interests. Furthermore, Participation in the governance can determine the decision-making outcomes of the organization, which can impact community change. Therefore an organization with participants that contribute only to one of effort, legitimacy, or money, may encounter difficulties in acting and creating collective change of and by the community. Baum argues that organization participants that contribute to all three—legitimacy, effort, and money—can enable common understanding, goals and action for the organization.

Participation in the decision-making process within a community organization raises concerns regarding community representation and participation (Swindell, 2000; Hardina, 2004; Stoecker, 2003; Haus & Sweeting, 2006; McCoy & Scully, 2002). The problem-solving and decision-making process within a community organization is linked to participatory democracy and representative democracy.
Participatory Democracy

Participatory democracy is based on the notion “The construction, articulation and promotion of the common good cannot be delegated, but must evolve from the communicative interactions of active citizens” (Haus & Sweeting, 2006, p. 278). Benjamin Barber notes the three dimensions of participatory democracy as deliberative, direct, and communitarian democracy. Direct refers to making a decision, such as an initiative or referendum and creating committees that make decisions. Deliberation allows a space for citizens to discuss problems, propose solutions, and discuss the evaluation of these proposals. Communitarian strategies are understood as “An attempt to activate citizens for civic engagement, but also as a channel of participation in constructing the common good of local society (Haus & Sweeting, 2006, p. 280). Deliberation and dialogue are an important aspect of participatory democracy.

McCoy and Scully (2002) highlight the importance of the combination of deliberation and dialogue as having the potential to create mutual understanding and connect personal with public concerns. Dialogue can enable constructive communication, dispelling of stereotypes, honesty, and listening with the intent of understanding others. Deliberation is the use of critical thinking through decision-making. In addition, McCoy and Scully (2002) see community organizing and deliberative dialogue as an important combination because they address public conversations through civic engagement. The civic engagement of involving people in addressing public problems, allows for voice, agency, and empowerment. McCoy and Scully (2002) discuss ideal democracy as “…ongoing, structured opportunities
for everyone to meet as citizens, across different backgrounds and affiliations, and
not just as members of a group with similar interests and ideas” (p. 119). It is
important to understand that each community organization has its unique process
of deliberation and dialogue. Within a community organization, the participants
involved in deliberation and dialogue represent various aspects of the surrounding
community.

**Representative Democracy**

Another form of democracy within community organizations is
representative democracy. It is the “representation of local society by elected
bodies” (Haus & Sweeting, 2006, p. 271). Swindell (2000) points out that there is
very little research confirming whether community organizations or neighborhood
organizations are actually democratic. He states that representation can be analyzed
in two ways. The first, “An organization whose membership has socio-economic and
demographic traits similar to those of the organization’s constituency is
proportionally or sociologically representative” (p. 125). The second “examines the
representativeness of an organization in terms of the issues it chooses to address
vis-à-vis the issues of most importance to neighborhood residents” (p. 125).

Similar to Swindell (2000), Hardina (2004) argues that an issue that has
never been resolved in the scholarly literature on citizen participation is whether
inclusion of community members that represent the socio-economic status or the
neighborhood on the boards of directors actually makes a board representative of
community interests. Swindell and Hardina argue that representative democracy
does not “represent” the beliefs and concerns of the entire community. Including
people with diverse interests is believed to balance the demands of funders with the needs of the community (Hardina, 2004). However, there remains the issue of community representation based on education and socio-economic status. Educated higher income individuals are more likely to participate in governance systems, which results in the lack of representation of individuals who have lower levels of education and income (Veen, 2003; Swindell, 2000; Print & Coleman, 2003).

Stoecker (2003) found that for a community development corporation to work on community organizing it would need a board of directors democratically elected through a community-wide process, an executive director, and at least one respected board member with community organizing knowledge and experience (p. 508). Board of directors that are democratically elected are more likely to have community support for decisions made because community participants feel a sense of involvement by choosing the representatives on the board of directors. In addition, the board of directors should have an elected community organizer with knowledge and experience creating community change through an organization.

McCoy and Scully (2002), Haus and Sweeting (2006), Swindell (2000), Hardina (2004), and Stoecker (2003) highlight the complexity of the decision-making process within a community organization in regards to participatory and representative democracy. It is important to understand participant access to the problem-solving and decision-making process of an organization. Organization participants’ engagement in the decision-making process of an organization impacts collective goals, action, and the potential for change in a community. Swindell indicates that community organizations have the power to have an open decision-
making process through meetings where resident participants can voice their concerns and learn about the concerns of other neighbors.

In addition to informal education, citizen participation in addressing problem-solving and decision-making in an organization is connected to potential individual and collective forms of empowerment and change (Silverman, 2003; Baum, 1999, Hardina, 2004, Hughey, et al., 2008; Mondros & Wilson, 1994).

**Individual and Collective Empowerment**

Community organizations have the potential to provide opportunities for individual and group empowerment through involvement in community action and community change. An empowerment approach to community change is to foster change for individuals, groups, organizations, community, and society (Hardina, 2004). Mann Hyung Hur (2006) notes that empowerment is a progression of steps. Three issues are identified for understanding empowerment:

First, empowerment is multidimensional in that it occurs within sociological, psychological, economic, political, and other dimensions. Empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individual, group, and community. Third, empowerment, by definition, is a social process because it occurs in relation to others (p. 524).

In Rocha's (1997) research on community organizations, she identified a ladder of empowerment with five types of empowerment that moves from a focus on individual to community experience with power. The five types of power are atomistic individual, embedded individual, mediated, socio-political, and political empowerment. Each type of power focuses on these four dimensions: locus--
intended area of change (individual to community); process--method to obtain results; goals--intended outcomes; and power experience--includes all stages (p. 34).

Atomistic individual empowerment focuses on individual change with the goal to increase individual efficacy. This process occurs through changing the emotional physical state of the individual. Strength is gained through help from powerful others. Embedded individual empowerment also focuses on the individual but it “...considers the person-environment fit, contextual variables and their relationship to empowerment”(p. 35). The goal is the ability to understand one's external environment. Mediated empowerment can focus on the individual or the community. The process is mediated by a professional with the goal to provide the information necessary for decision-making and action. Socio-political empowerment focuses on community development through developing the people within the community and then developing the physical neighborhood in which those people live. This type of empowerment reflects Freire's notions of transformation through education. “Socio-political community empowerment consists of two core elements: (1) critical reflection by the community and members-of-community (individuals) rethinking their relationship to structures of power and (2) collective action upon those structures” (p. 38). Political empowerment focuses on the community through political action aimed at institutional change. The goal is to gain access to group resources “in education, housing, employment, government benefits, healthcare, or political representation” (p. 39). Rocha's ladder of empowerment indicates empowerment occurs at various
levels for individuals and groups, or can be impacted by powerful others, understanding of one’s context, and one’s relationship to power. Rocha identifies that all empowerment is not equal. Rocha’s ladder of empowerment highlights the interaction between an organization and participants and the various forms of empowerment that can exist within an organization.

Hur (2006) notes that the path of empowerment consists of five progressive steps. The first step is the existence of individual or social disturbances. This can be any form of powerlessness usually realized by the oppressed or disadvantaged group. The second step of empowerment is the conscientizing process. People gain awareness of their position in relation to power and the potential for change. The third step is the initiative to empower the oppressed to take collective action. The fourth step continues the empowerment process by sharing power with the populace. The final stage is maximized human empowerment overcoming oppression to achieve social justice.

Hur (2006) states that empowerment can operate at various levels “personal or individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and collective” (p. 530). Individual empowerment consists of mastery and self-determination. Mastery is defined as in depth understanding or increased skills and mastery of information and decision-making. Self-determination consists of: “(a) consistency and perseverance in activities, (b) the courage to take risks, (c) initiative and proactivity, and (d) the ability to voice one’s opinion” (p. 531). Collective empowerment refers to belonging to a collective group with an emphasis on autonomy. It involves collective belonging, involvement in and control over organizations in the
community. Community building is an important element of collective empowerment for the need to work together to overcome obstacle and create change.

Rocha (1997) and Hur (2006), indicate that empowerment can occur at various levels and be impacted by many factors. It is important to understand the various levels of individual and group empowerment and the factors that contribute to the different forms of empowerment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, community organizations take different approaches to promote community change. These approaches encompass varying levels of community involvement in processes of informal learning, decision-making, and empowerment. Within each community organization, informal education can involve consciousness raising, reflection, and action. Participation in a community organization’s decision-making process can involve representative and participatory democracy. Empowerment within a community organization consists of many levels and dimensions that can occur individually and collectively. In addition, it is important to understand the community of an organization can be understood in many ways based on geographic, common interests, and prescribed characteristics. What do these look like in an actual community organization? The next chapter outlines how I explored my research questions in an actual organization. The research questions that guided the study are:

(1) What are the problem-solving and decision-making processes and how are participants involved in these processes?
(2) What is the informal education process embedded in a community organization's problem-solving and decision-making processes?

(3) What are the various forms of empowerment that exist within a community organization?
Chapter 3: Methodology

I approached this study as a qualitative researcher with a constructivist, interpretivist lens. “As an interpretivist researcher, your aim is to understand this complex and constructed reality from the view of those who live in it” (Schram, 2006, p. 44). Through my research I aimed to construct understanding and insight into participation, education and empowerment within a community organization.

I also approached this case study from a critical perspective by choosing an organization whose work reflects a critical model of social change and by focusing to understand processes relating to power. I engaged in my research to better understand this process in hopes that my study will further promote critical social change. I view this community organization as a potentially transformative organization (Creswell, 2007) in which community involvement in dialogue and praxis can lead to social change. Although a critical approach can be associated with a researcher advocating for an exploited person or group (Schram, 2006), I do not wish to speak for organization participants but rather to understand a community organization through the experience and voice of participants. This understanding may be useful in my own future work, or that of others, in promoting social justice through community organizing.

My choice of methodology for my research was a case study. A case study explores an issue or problems through one or more cases in a bounded system (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). My research was bounded by the experiences of community participants in one organization. I chose a case study approach because it provides a

There are three variations of case studies: the collective, intrinsic, and instrumental case study (Creswell, 2007). The collective case study involves one issue or concern in multiple cases. The intrinsic focuses on the case itself because it is unusual or unique. The instrumental focuses on the issue or concern and then selects a case to study. I conducted an instrumental case study, which enabled me to develop a better understanding of the organizational participants involvement in the process of informal learning, problem-solving, decision-making and empowerment in one organization. This instrumental case study allowed me to explore one organization's process of creating community change.

**Research Site**

The unit of exploration for my case study is Park Neighborhood Federation (PNF). PNF is located in a midwestern city. PNF works with four ethnically and racially diverse neighborhoods. One of these neighborhoods has the largest percentage of foreign-born residents of any community area in this city. PNF creates a rich context to study a community organization with diverse participants from the community.

PNF is a membership-based community organization with at least 27 member institutions, including religious institutions, schools, service agencies, and local universities. The organization focuses on issues around education, healthcare,
housing, immigration, and youth development. I chose this organization because it works with a diverse population that takes an organizing approach that involves creating local leadership, identifying common issues, and creating collective and strategic ways to address community issues. PNF is known for creating effective change within its neighborhood communities. It recently won a community organizing award presented by several foundations, in recognition of it’s work toward social, economic, and racial justice through its campaigns which are focused on increasing immigrant rights, preserving and creating affordable housing, improving the quality of education, and increasing access to affordable health care.

The diversity of the residential communities of PNF and their strategy to involve community participation through local leadership, created a rich research environment to explore informal learning, community access to the problem-solving and decision-making processes and the various levels of empowerment.

**Methods**

Case study research involves the collection of data from multiple sources (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). My data collection involved participant and non-participant observations, four in-depth open-ended interviews, and analysis of organizational and media documents.

I gained access to the organization through a family friend who has worked as an organizer in various organizations and communities and currently works for a national organization that has worked closely with PNF. He identified this organization as fitting my site criteria. After meeting with the director of PNF and the housing organizer, I was allowed the opportunity to introduce myself at a staff
meeting. I explained my interests as a researcher and volunteer. The staff individually and collectively made a decision to allow me to learn from them and their leaders. Through my initial conversation with the staff, I learned that the organization is made up of different committees focused on various social justice issues. An organizer who is an employee of the organization and community volunteers who are identified as leaders leads each committee. I chose to focus on one committee with the opportunity to observe organization wide meetings and events. I focused on the housing committee consisting of one organizer, and many leaders and volunteers.

I approached this research with the hopes of being both a volunteer and researcher. I believe as a critical researcher it is important to give back to the organization in which I am researching and asking for information. I also believe volunteering can allow the opportunity to build relationships and trust within the organization. I believe volunteering enables access to information through observations and relationship building more than a non-participant form of research. Although I showed interest and made myself available as a volunteer, I was only asked to do two research tasks via the Internet at home. Due to my lack of volunteer opportunities that involved interaction with participants, I began my research as an outsider. Through consistent presence at meetings and as organization participants learned of my volunteer work, I slowly gained trust and respect and began to build relationships.

4 A PNF leader is a community member who volunteers to lead the organization in planning, decision-making, and participation in outreach and action.
I conducted mainly non-participant observations and some participant observations at meetings and events. I took field notes as a non-participant observer. As a participant observer, I did not take notes in the field as it would have taken away from my role as a participant in events, although I did write field notes immediately following observations. I kept a journal recording my non-participant and participant observations and my communication with participants of the organization.

My research focused on observations and interviews with the housing organizer, leaders, and participants of the housing committee. I also observed organization wide meetings for the planning of a town hall meeting on the state budget crisis and planning for their annual fundraising event. The director, organizers, leaders and volunteers from the various committees attended the organization-wide meetings. A PNF organizer is an employee responsible for the facilitation of meetings, compiling research on community issues, ongoing communication with all leaders, volunteers and affiliate organizations. PNF uses the term leader in reference to volunteers who take on a leadership role in the various committees. Leaders are community members engaged in community issues through their involvement in setting agendas at planning meetings, planning events, communicating with the community and elected officials, and being actively involved in all levels of outreach and action. Although youth play an important leadership role in the organization I chose to observe leaders who were 18 years of age and older. My observations took place during planning meetings, outreach meetings, town hall meetings, and other events at various member institutions.
including two churches, one non-profit organization, and an elementary school. These are typical of PNF’s member institutions. The organization participants I observed included PNF employees, leaders, board members, member institute participants, and affiliate organizations. Meetings were conducted in English with Spanish translators, bilingual English and Spanish, Spanish only, and on one occasion with Korean translators. Although I do not speak Spanish fluently I observed meetings that were conducted in Spanish only. The housing organizer offered to translate meetings held in Spanish for my benefit. I declined the offer, as I did not want my presence as a researcher to change how meetings would normally be conducted. I was able to understand the structure of the meeting from a large sheet of paper that stated the agenda items in Spanish. Although I had difficulty following the rapid discussion in Spanish, I was able to follow the main topics discussed as they were recorded on chart paper by the organizer. Following the meeting I was able to clarify my understanding of the discussion through a quick conversation with the organizer and by looking up unknown Spanish vocabulary words. My limited understanding of Spanish impacted my understanding of each participant’s individual testimony and discussion of topics.

I was in the field conducting observations and interviews one to two days per week, for a couple hours each session, for two months. I conducted four one-on-one in-depth interviews. I interviewed the housing organizer and three of the leaders who were actively involved in the housing committee and other issues in the organization. The criteria for selection for interviewees was based on observations of whether the participants were actively involved in the housing committee and
that they had been involved in the organization for at least one year. I wanted to learn from an organizer and leaders with experience in the organization to help me understand PNF’s organizing process. I interviewed Lee, a PNF employee of three years, who is the organizer for the housing committee; Tina who has been a leader for ten years with the housing committee, healthcare committee and is also a board member; Joe who has been a leader for three years on the housing committee and also volunteers for the immigration committee; and Lisa who has been a leader for one year on the housing committee and is also involved with the immigration committee. The interviewees consisted of an employee, a board member who is also a leader, and two additional leaders, which enabled me to learn various perspectives and experiences in regards to their access and involvement with the problem-solving and decision-making process, their informal learning process and the various forms of empowerment that exist within the organization. Each interview ranged from 45 to 60 minutes. I conducted the interviews at the organization’s site, a neighborhood coffee shop, and at one person’s home. The interviews allowed me to learn from unique perspectives although they do not represent the feelings of all organizers, board members, or leaders. Each interviewee represents the unique perspective and experience of that individual employee, leader, and board member. Each interview focused on understanding the background of each participant in regards to their involvement and understanding of the purpose of PNF; PNF’s decision-making processes in regards to identifying problems and solutions in the neighborhood, PNF and community accomplishments, and their personal learning processes.
Seidman (1998) states, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 3). I conducted each interview in a conversational manner with open-ended questions in order to not constrain the boundaries of the topics. The interview guide for all of the interviews (see Appendix A), which includes questions pertaining to the informal learning, problem-solving, and decision-making process, and empowerment. Each interview was not identical as I probed and used follow up questions to gather more in-depth information. I digitally recorded and transcribed each interview. Seidman (1998) believes, “To work most reliably with the words of participant, the researcher has to transform those spoken words into a written text to study” (p. 97).

In addition to observations and interviews, I analyzed public and organizational documents such as their website, newsletters, materials provided at meetings, and local newspaper articles written about the organization and participants.

I analyzed the observational field notes, transcribed interviews, and documents. The analysis consisted of coding the data using open coding. In open coding the researcher does not use preexisting categories to understand the data (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p. 152). Instead the researcher analyzes the data and allows categories to emerge. Seidman (1998) states, “The researcher must come to the transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text” (p. 100). I then created themes that emerged from similar and contrasting codes. I chose themes based on “recurrent and underlying patterns of
activities” relating to the structure of my study as evidenced in the codes (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p. 157).

**Positionality, Quality, and Ethics**

**Positionality**

While conducting my research, I remained aware of my positionality as a white, pregnant, thirty-year-old graduate student and researcher. I started my research as an outsider of the organization. I am not from the neighborhood and not actively involved in any of the organization’s committees. The housing committee consisted of a young white female organizer in her mid-twenties who is bilingual in Spanish and English. PNF leaders consisted of men and women, majority Latino, ranging in age from 30 to 60 years old. The leaders consisted of a range of low to middle-income residents dealing with housing issues in the area and leaders who belong to or work for PNF’s member institutions. The participants and leaders were a balance of men and women both English and Spanish Speaking. In addition the leaders were a combination of unemployed and employed individuals.

Although I was unable to build relationships through volunteering, I was able to build relationship in surprising ways. I began my research when I was six months pregnant, working in a part-time student position, with an unemployed husband. My continued presence and genuine interest to learn from participants was met with their sincere interest in my research, my pregnancy, and my husband’s job search. I realized that my pregnancy and financial situation allowed participants to relate with me on a human level as opposed to me only being seen as a student/researcher.
from a university. In addition, my positionality allowed for relationship building based on shared daily experiences of balancing work, bills, and home life. My observations and interviews reflect my role as a researcher and outsider of the organization and a pregnant woman experiencing the daily struggles of unemployment, bills, and a mortgage.

**Quality and Ethical Issues**

I enhanced the trustworthiness of my research by confirming data with participants by member checking, creating thick descriptions of my observations, liberally quoting from interview data, and having a peer review my emerging analysis for credibility. A fellow graduate student who has also undergone Institutional Review Board (IRB) training did the peer review.

The purpose of this case study is not to generalize the experiences of community members in an organization; it is to understand one community organization as a unique phenomenon in a specific context. My goal as a researcher was to understand my research questions through the unique lived experiences and knowledge of participants in this study. Research participants may have changed their behavior due to the nature of observations and the interview dynamic. In anticipation of this I asked that meetings not be modified for my benefit such as conducting a meeting in English instead of Spanish. I conducted the interviews in a conversational manner as opposed to a formal interview to avoid hierarchical roles as interviewer and interviewee, although the digital recorder made the conversation more formal. I was conscious of building trust and rapport with community members involved in the organization. I built trust and rapport through consistent
attendance at meetings, letting each participant know that their unique experience and perspective was important, and sharing my personal relatable experiences. Each participant was informed about my research interests and had an opportunity to voluntary consent to participate in the study. In addition, they signed consent forms that informed them of the study and the confidentiality of their participation. (See IRB Approval in Appendix B.) I believe it was important for participants to feel safe and comfortable discussing their experiences in the organization. The interview process revealed participants’ views towards the organization and the community it works with. In response to this I encouraged participants to minimize disclosure of their involvement in this study to others to protect their confidentiality with other participants of the study and organization.
Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

The leaders and organizers of PNF’s housing committee describe PNF as a unique community organization because it does not provide a traditional notion of service to the community. It is a grassroots organization with the mission to work for social justice and develop leaders within the neighborhood to work on the issues that they are affected by. Lee⁵, the housing committee organizer, stated:

I get a lot of calls from people looking, you know, do you offer housing, do you offer affordable housing? And a lot of those people will never become leaders.

A housing leader, Joe, described PNF by stating:

It isn’t really structured like other organizations...It’s not like we are going to be renting out houses but we can try to bring it [housing issues] to some peoples’ attention and we can work on the issue and maybe move on to something else.

So what makes PNF unique? My observations and interviews demonstrate that PNF offers a unique model that has an intentional organizing process. This section presents data (findings) that reveals this uniqueness, organized in three sections: Leadership Development, Community Outreach and a Call to Action, and PNF Accomplishments. Analysis of the data concludes this chapter.

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⁵ All personal names are pseudonyms.
Leadership Development

The PNF community consists of PNF employees including the director and assistant director, an organizer for each committee, and other staff members assisting with committees and campaigns. In addition to employees, the PNF community consists of community volunteers working as leaders on one or more committee, community participants, board members that represent the various member institutions, and affiliate organizations from other neighborhoods in the city, which consists of their employees and community volunteers working on coalitions and campaigns with PNF. PNF promotes community involvement and leadership through its membership institutions, which consist of religious institutions, non-profit agencies, schools, and local colleges. Although PNF does not formally acknowledge individual members, they do have individual participation and leaders that are not associated with a member institution. Lee, the housing committee organizer, raises concern over the lack of leadership representation of individuals on the board of directors. As of right now individual members cannot be on the board, only a representative of a membership institution can be on the board. According to Lee:

When the organization first started it was individual membership based so there were no member institutions, but I think from what I heard it was very..., I think it was very Latino dominated for whatever reason and at a certain point the staff decided to switch over to member institution[s],

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6 PNF’s notion of community is both based on a geographic residential community and a community of common interests based on member institutions and issue committees.
memberships based to get a more broad representation of the community.

And to get the buy-in from the top and then um you know the leaders of the mosque or refugee agency are brought in to the mission of the organization then they are able to bring their constituents on board that the organization wasn’t able to do without having that structure.

Tina, a leader and board member stated that the board is responsible for a number of things:

... they put the budget together for the next year, you know they revise the budget as needed. They keep a close watch on that. They do evaluations on the director and assistant director. And they determine if they get an increase in their salary. They determine which issues we’re going to work on or if there are new issues coming up. We talk about that amongst ourselves and decide...we don’t hire staff but we are involved in the audit, we have to approve the budget.

PNF’s switch from individual membership to institutional membership about seven years ago demonstrates it’s focus to work with the broad diverse representation of issues in the community but by not allowing individual members on the board, PNF is limiting the diverse perspective of those not associated with a member institution.

Leaders of PNF are an integral part of the identification of problems within the community and the decision-makers on how to combat those issues. PNF promotes and identifies leaders that are able to think critically about an issue. Each leader has unique leadership qualities based on their individual motivations and
contributions. PNF promotes leadership through ownership, community voice and providing opportunities for personal development.

**Identification of leaders**

As a PNF employee and organizer, Lee looks for community members to be housing leaders who have motivation within their personalities and life experiences; this allows them to see beyond just getting services. She tries to tap into peoples’ anger about what’s going on and why they don’t have access to the issue at hand. Lee states:

Our goal as organizers is to bring people together who are affected by issues and facilitate them to decide, you know, come up with their own solutions and to take action to make those solutions happen... We try to involve our leaders at every level of decision-making... It’s always you know the leaders who really are speaking for their own community.

In addition, Lee is continually looking for new leaders and intentionally wants leaders who are leaders within their member institutions. She looks for leaders who take a stand on an issue and want to take action. This does not necessarily have to be someone in a formal position. These leaders would hopefully inspire others to listen and get involved. Within their member churches, PNF promotes leadership by helping to create and establish Social Justice Committees. Social Justice Committees were established to promote leadership within religious institutions with low involvement in PNF committees. Social Justice Committees allow for leaders to grow within their religious community through the identification of and fight for
community-based issues. Most Social Justice Committees have leader representation within each committee at PNF.

Lee continually identifies new leaders and community-based issues by meeting one-on-one with current leaders and potential leaders interested in current housing issues. Lee states that the importance of a one-on-one meeting is to:

...learn what their issue is, what their story is, and we really just look for leaders. So who has the potential to actually become a leader in this work? Who is just here you know, out of desperation or out of you know what brought them to this meeting? ...It’s like keeping your ear on the ground on the one hand, to really hear what’s going on but also it’s constantly trying to bring in new blood, new life, to the issue, to the campaign. As so you know, we’re very, its intentional about leadership development so we look for people who we think have the potential to really see beyond just their individual case and understand, so why is this happening to me and what needs to change? And people who are willing to go on that level and actually take action with the organization, to work for that change.

Lee demonstrates PNF’s notion of a leader as being someone who can think critically about community issues with the desire to change that current reality. In addition, PNF works to continually promote new leadership by seeking new leaders with different perspectives from various member institutions that understand the current community context and issues. In addition to PNF’s identification of leaders,
I learned that motivation is an important aspect of individual leadership development.

**Unique Leadership Qualities**

Through my observations and interviews I was able to understand that each leader is motivated based on their personal experiences. In addition, each leader contributes to PNF in their own way.

PNF leaders from membership institutions such as religious institutions and non-profit organizations tend to fluctuate in their involvement dependent on how current issues affect their organization, school or parish. For example one representative from a non-profit member institution, who is also a PNF board representative, recently became more actively involved in PNF as a leader because of the state budget cuts to social services and a decrease in affordable housing in the community area. As a result, the non-profit organization is unable to provide certain state funded services and is also spending money to bus their clientele in from other community areas with more affordable housing. This leader is motivated to be involved in PNF to help the population she works with and to help the sustainability of her organization. Her unique experience and perspective in the decision-making process advocates for her constituents in the community. Lee stated that institutional involvement could fluctuate depending on issues that affect their institution.

Each of the leaders I interviewed from the housing committee had a personal experience and passion for access to affordable housing. Joe is an exception to PNF’s notion of a leader, in that he is both a non-resident of a PNF community and he does
not belong to a member institution. He joined PNF because of his passion to be involved in an organization that works for social justice issues, in particular affordable housing and immigration. Joe was invited by Lee to be a leader of the housing committee after meeting him at an affiliate organization. He gladly joined PNF, as there are no organizations like PNF in his area of the city. Lisa is a recent resident of one of PNF’s communities but does not belong to a membership institution. She was motivated to join PNF’s housing committee after she lost her home of 35 years. She is motivated to fight for others so they don’t have to experience her loss. Tina who is a resident of one of PNF’s communities and belongs to a membership church was motivated to join the housing committee based on her personal experience growing up in a large family with the need for affordable housing.

Just as each leader had a different motivation for their involvement in PNF, each leader has a unique involvement and contribution to the housing committee. As leaders, Lisa, Joe, and Tina are actively involved in the decision-making process within the housing committee and organization-wide meetings. Lisa displays leadership qualities through her active involvement in discussions and by sharing her personal story with both the community and elected officials. She hopes her story will motivate others to get involved in making a change. Lisa relies on Lee, the organizer and the other leaders, such as Tina and Joe to take care of finding out community issues. She believes it is Lee’s job as the organizer to know people and to let her know how to be involved. As a leader Joe is always willing to help facilitate meetings. Joe said that he also depends on Lee to keep track of what he needs to be
involved with. Tina also helps facilitate planning meetings and meetings with elected officials. Tina, a long time leader from a member church and a resident, said leaders of member institutions identify issues by asking parishioners about current issues and also by informing parishioners about different issue committee meetings through fliers and announcements. Each leader plays an important role in planning and implementing community change. Even though this process promotes community voice, the nature of varying personalities, allows for some leaders to contribute and voice their opinions more than others.

Joe expressed concern that, “...Decisions are born by certain leaders more than others.” He said that, “Leaders for one reason or another take up more responsibility than others.” Joe’s concern raises an interesting concept around equal voice in decision-making. Ownership and voice are an important aspect of leadership development.

Ownership and Voice

Ownership and voice is an integral part of PNF’s mission to develop leaders that identify and work on issues that they are affected by. The voice of PNF leaders comes through in the decision-making process of planning meetings, agenda setting, outreach, sharing of testimonies, meetings with elected officials and community stakeholders, and interactions with the media and press. According to Lee, “We try to involve our leaders at every level of decision-making.” Tina states that PNF's success as an organization can be attributed to the fact that leaders take ownership in the organization and feel they have a say, which keeps them engaged. Tina also states:
The staff actually do ask the leaders what they think and, you know, their opinion. (They) have them really involved in the decision-making on anything, especially the young people.

Through my observations of planning meetings and events, it was evident that each planning meeting was designed to be a safe space for all who attended to share their opinions and perspectives. This was shown through the formation of chairs and tables intentionally being an inclusive circle or rectangle that included all participants. In addition, each meeting was respectful of communication barriers based on language needs. Meetings accommodated language needs of leaders and participants by providing translation, meetings that were bilingual Spanish and English, and meetings held entirely in Spanish with no need for English.

I attended planning meetings facilitated by both organizers and leaders. Meetings were organized in a manner that promoted leaders’ voice and ownership of the meeting and the issues discussed. Leadership responsibilities included providing updates from the last meeting, sharing the background information on an issue, providing opportunities for questions, clarifications, and suggestions by all participants, and decisions based on the group consensus. Some planning meetings consisted of small breakout groups for sub-committees such as agenda setting for an event or planning of logistics. These breakout sessions allowed for a more intimate space for leaders to share and voice their opinions. In one breakout planning session that I observed, the director of PNF helped facilitate the discussion by balancing the discussion between leaders. As one leader dominated the discussion, she asked others what their thoughts were and if they agreed or had other suggestions. This
allowed space for people to interject with new ideas in English and Spanish. The
director also helped facilitate a group agreement on decisions and next steps. After
each breakout session the entire group would come back together. A leader from
each sub-committee would be responsible to report back to the larger group and
would provide an opportunity for others to ask questions and make suggestions.
Each decision was made based on group consensus. PNF’s purposeful leadership led
meetings, allow space for community driven ideas, planning, and action.

In addition to having ownership and voice in the decision-making process of
the organization, meetings are also an important time for community participants
and leaders to share their experiences and frustrations over an issue. For example a
member institution, Forgiveness Church, held meetings to initiate outreach and
action on foreclosure issues in their community. Lee intentionally did not involve
core housing leaders because she wanted to develop strong ownership and voice
within the church. Members of the church were able to share their personal story
and experience, which allowed participants to not feel alone or ashamed. The
sharing of these stories motivated the group to take ownership and action to change
the foreclosure issue in their community by getting more parishioners involved in
the issue. These community led meetings provided a space for church members to
realize that they were not alone in their struggles, which has the potential to be a
catalyst to unite people. Besides uniting people, community voice can also be an
effective tool to communicate community issues to elected officials.

Tina sees PNF as a vehicle to hold elected officials accountable through
community voice:
My experience with elected officials, they don’t know what the people want. They really don’t. And if it wasn’t for organizations like PNF, how would they know? How would we bring attention to things that were important to the people?

PNF communicates participant and leader testimonies through small and large meetings with elected officials. These meetings allow a space for community leaders’ voices to be heard by decision-makers in their local community. These testimonies also allow for individuals to develop a sense of leadership through the confidence they gain in sharing their story with elected officials, fellow leaders, organizers, and community members. For example, at a housing meeting held with an elected official regarding the issue of affordable housing in the area, Lisa and a leader from Forgiveness Church, shared personal stories and concerns regarding affordable housing within the community. In addition, they reminded him that they were registered voters in his area. Before sharing their stories, the elected official was very rude and said that he had heard many stories and is aware what’s going on in the neighborhood. PNF leaders stuck to their planned agenda to share testimonies and insisted that each leaders’ voice and story be heard by the elected officials. This demonstrates PNF’s respect and understanding of each unique individual voice in the organization and the community. Although the elected official was rude, community concerns were communicated to him through PNF leaders’ testimonies. After listening to PNF leaders, the elected official agreed to a follow up meeting to continue to discuss PNF’s community concerns and action needed.
Another way that PNF promotes community and leadership voice is through communication to the press. According to Lee, organizers intentionally never speak to the press, instead the leaders always speak for their own community. For example Lisa was quoted in a local newspaper telling her story of losing her home and the need to take action to help struggling owners and renters. PNF believes the community should be the voice of their stories and community-based issues, not organizers helping to organize the community. Leadership development allows for individual and collective development.

Personal and Organizational Development

Development of leaders is an important part of PNF’s mission. Individual growth can help the collective growth of the organization and community it works with. Each leader has a unique understanding of their personal and organizational growth. As an employee and organizer, Lee attributes her growth to PNF’s flexibility to let her jump right in and try creative approaches to organizing and leadership development. Lee states:

I think as organizers come in, you know when I started I really didn’t know anything about organizing, so over the years I’ve definitely learned a lot more and I feel that I’ve developed a lot more skills. And as we get newer staff you know I do feel like more of a, in a leadership role in the organization.... It’s hard because sometimes you just want to be able to go to a training and get the answers but there’s no cookie cutter approach to it and its all about creativity and being able to think strategically, but any given situation is going to have a completely different outcome.
Lee attributes her development to the fact that PNF allows their organizers to work very independently and given a lot of control over their campaigns and projects. Lee said she knows she still has a lot to learn.

Tina, Lisa, and Joe attribute part of their developments as leaders at PNF to the inspiring staff’s passion, energy, and dedication to their committees. In addition to being inspiring, the staff also provides a safe space for leaders to learn, be encouraged, and gain confidence. Lisa said:

I just say PNF have been real motivators for me. They have wonderful people there. Did you know it surprises me how hard those girls (organizers) work? It motivates me to see them like that. You know, make me feel like I keep going. I just like to challenge things so much. That you just, that you learn not to be afraid. Not nasty, but you learn to defend yourself because you see them like that.

Tina recalled her experience as a new leader coming back from a housing meeting with the current director that was an organizer at the time. Tina said that she had so many questions and that the director was patient and answered all of her questions the best she could. She concluded:

I think PNF, the staff we have, you know the leadership we have as far as staff and director is a huge contribution to our success.

Tina discussed her development over the past ten years with the organization:

I think I have grown as a leader. I mean to stand in front of a crowd of 300 people is something that I never thought that I could do and now I feel very comfortable doing that. Um, and I think I’ve just grown with everything that
happens with the issues that I work on. I think I’ve grown you know so the
only reason I got a computer was to look up things on housing...so I could
educate myself more on what was going on with the housing issue...but I
continue to grow and as long as that is happening that’s what keeps me
engaged, what keeps me excited because I am learning new things all of the
time.

I asked, “So what kind of things do you think you are learning?” Tina replied:

Well I think I have a lot more confidence in myself. Um, I can really and truly
go up to any elected official and feel comfortable.

In discussing Joe’s growth, he discussed his background in a Jesuit high school and
college with the emphasis on social justice. In addition to his Jesuit social justice
based education, PNF has helped him make time for action. He stated:

So I guess what I’ve learned now is how to take the time to actually do the
things that I uh believe were right.

Lisa said that through her experience at PNF she has grown up a lot:

I used to be involved with other stuff, big stuff. But nothing that had to do
with people where you can help people out and when you can motivate
people. I mean I’m a big mouth. And I can motivate anybody to come out and
say let’s go you know. And you grow up quite a bit because you put yourself, I
put myself in a lot of these people.

In addition to personal development, the leaders discussed organizational
development. Tina explained:
I think now that us, as I see the organization growing and being successful on many other issues and seeing how many young people are coming into the organization as well as a lot of the old time leaders. That makes me feel real good too because I feel like I'm a part of that you know.

PNF's leadership development involves the identification of leaders that are motivated to be involved in the organization based on their personal experience and passion to fight community issues by thinking critically about their current reality. Leaders are given the opportunity to take ownership and voice proposed solutions, which, contributes to their individual development as a leader and therefore the organization. PNF's organizing process also promotes community led outreach and action.

**Community Outreach and a Call to Action**

PNF's creative community outreach motivates community involvement and action. Based on my interviews and observations, community outreach consisted of open informational meetings, town hall meetings, meetings with community stakeholders, door knocking, putting notices in church bulletins, announcements at mass, and passing out flyers. PNF's outreach to community is often followed by the need for community members to take action on an issue. A call to action can include writing letters and emails, making phone calls, attending rallies, and meeting with legislators. This section will discuss PNF's various forms of outreach and calls to action.
Outreach

From the perspective of a housing organizer like Lee, community outreach is essential in finding out what really is going on in the community and connecting and uniting people through community issues. Tina joined PNF as a leader ten years ago because of the outreach efforts of an organizer who was door knocking to find out community concerns. Through Tina’s involvement she was able to connect with people in her neighborhood that had similar concerns and make changes. Tina started off as an individual member and is now a leader from a member institution, a board member, and involved in multiples committees and campaigns.

Outreach consists of gathering information to understand community issues through the transfer of information among community leaders and community residents. PNF learned of the housing foreclosure crisis in their neighborhoods through a study conducted by a national organizing organization, phone calls to PNF by concerned community residents, and leadership outreach to membership institution constituents to find out about current housing issues. Due to these outreach efforts, the housing committee shifted their focus from rental buildings being affected by foreclosures to looking at the impact on homeowners.

As stated earlier, a newly established Social Justice Committee at Forgiveness Church worked closely with the housing committee to establish an initial outreach meeting for it’s parishioners on foreclosures affecting homeowners in the church. The church’s Social Justice Committee handled the outreach to parishioners by putting notices in the church bulletins, announcements at mass, and passing out flyers. According to Lee, twenty people showed up for the first meeting, which
indicated that this was an issue affecting many people in the church community. The initial outreach meeting allowed members of the church community to connect through shared experiences. Lee stated:

The majority of what people did was just kind of share their stories and I think that was really powerful because people saw that they weren’t the only ones and they heard what other people were going through who were in their own parish.

Lee’s goal as an organizer is to promote ownership within the member churches through the Social Justice Committee. She wanted the church to decide what would happen at the home foreclosure community outreach meeting. Through one-on-one conversations with potential new leaders from the church, Lee and those who were involved in the initial outreach meetings were able to learn more about the bigger picture and next steps. Lee stated:

We’ve kind of already decided before going into this planning meeting that the first thing that really needs to happen is more of not just providing people with a counselor but a shift in the way people are thinking about the issue because people feel a lot of shame. People feel…they just kind of give up and we need, we need people to feel a little bit more angry and we need people to see the urgency of what’s going on and to understand that you know this… whatever is going on is probably not your fault and you know that is not even a good way to define it. It’s for people to see, this is a systemic problem. Our government is ignoring us on this issue. The banks are screwing us over and if we don't do anything our community is going to look
very different. So we want, I want people to come out of this meeting having that understanding and if that happens I will be very happy.

Lee and the Social Justice Committee’s outreach goals were to first, unite people through shared stories and experiences, next to tap into their anger and frustration, and then to take action on the issue. After the initial outreach meeting, Lee helped the social justice committee plan a home foreclosure informational meeting for the church community. Through my observations of the planning meeting for this event, it was a community led discussion on the need to unite a group of people through sharing stories, to have no fear of the banks, to provide information to people on the foreclosure process, and to continue outreach through passing out flyers in the neighborhood and through announcements at mass.

Although the planning committee did outreach to the church community, the home foreclosure information meeting did not have the intended turnout. There were about 10 people at the meeting. The meeting consisted of Lee the organizer, a housing leader who is also a church leader in the Social Justice Committee, and parishioners at risk of foreclosure and who are passionate about the current housing crisis. Each person or couple shared their personal story relating to the foreclosure crisis. Lee provided information on modifications that can be made to a mortgage before having to foreclose. In addition, she provided information on free counselors. The meeting ended with everyone agreeing that they needed more people involved in the cause to take action. Members of the church discussed the fact that other parishioners were being affected by foreclosures and that the next step for outreach should consist of sharing their stories with others to encourage
more people to get involved and know they are not alone. The goal of their outreach efforts were to get more people involved, unite, and learn the steps of the foreclosure process and the possibility of confronting the banks with a large group.

Even though outreach for the home foreclosure outreach meeting did not have a large turnout, it is important to keep in mind what a personal experience foreclosure is. Lisa said that she believes people don’t get involved because they are ashamed. Lisa stated:

Well a lot of them are ashamed to speak you know about what they are going through, what’s going on with them, what they about to lose. And they feel like they don’t care type (Sic).

Outreach meetings provide a space to learn about community concerns and unite people to take action. Outreach efforts can also educate the community and elected officials through large town hall meetings.

I observed several planning meetings for a town hall meeting focused on the state budget crisis and its effect on funding for social services. These meetings were organizational wide meetings with participation from organizers and leaders from the various committees. PNF is a part of budget coalition that provided a proposed solution or approach to the budget crisis. Members of the budget coalition, including affiliate organizations and PNF leaders from member institutions, helped in the planning of the town hall meeting and agreed to do their own outreach to their constituents and surrounding communities. Outreach included sending a letter to the two local representatives and senators describing where and when the event will take place and why the event is important. In addition, each affiliate
organization and PNF leader from a member institution committed to a certain number of attendees for the event. Outreach to all member institutions included PNF leaders handing out flyers and door knocking to residents in the neighborhood. Flyers included information on the budget cuts such as: state legislators “Cut scholarships by 49%; Cut student funding more than 50%; Cut ESL and GED classes at our churches by up to 50%.” The flyer also indicated that state senators and representatives were invited in addition to all interested residents.

One of my observations of a planning meeting for the budget crisis town hall event consisted of a discussion around the need to pressure local senators and representatives who had not committed to attending the town hall meeting. PNF leaders and affiliate organization staff and volunteers continued to pressure local senators and representatives to attend the event through phone calls and emails. Before the big event a group consisting of PNF organizers, leaders, volunteers, and affiliate organization staff and volunteers decided to do a last round of community outreach by door knocking. Individuals informed residents on the potential budget cuts and encouraged them to get involved by attending the town hall meeting.

Outreach efforts resulted in an estimated attendance of over 200 participants at the town hall meeting from member institutions, affiliate organizations, and community residents. Outreach efforts also involved the organizing of transportation to bring participants to the event. Despite outreach efforts and pressure from PNF, only one senator attended the event. The most recent PNF newsletter also celebrated the outreach efforts for the budget crisis town hall meeting:
PNF leaders took two trips to Springfield, met with 8 senators, and representatives from the area, participated in 10 rallies and protests across the city, collected over 300 petitions, and phone banked and door knocked in the neighborhood to engage PNF community to plead to our officials to say No to the cuts, wrote letters to the editor, and more (October 2009 E-Newsletter).

In addition to outreach to community members and elected officials, PNF has engaged in creative outreach with alternative stakeholders in the community such as landlords, who were normally thought of as opposition to the affordable housing committee. The housing committee focus was on preserving large rental buildings that were being targeted for condo conversion. Lee explains:

So we actually did a lot of outreach to local landlords, which was kind of a new strategy. You know we had never worked with landlords before. Often time they were the enemy so we did outreach and conducted a lot of one-on-one interviews with local landlords to find out what are the big issues for them. What leads them to sell their building or why do they, why are they raising the rent? And, um, we had a big meeting with them where we were able to provide a bunch of information on some existing program that kind of looked to address a lot of the issues that they had mentioned.

Through outreach efforts, Lee and the housing committee learned that the landlords were a potential ally in the fight for affordable housing. Many landlords did not want to raise the rent, especially on tenants they had for over 20 years. PNF learned that
they were pressured by their mortgage, increasing property taxes, and heating costs.

PNF demonstrates that outreach can be conducted in many ways, targeted at different groups of people within a community, and have many purposes. Outreach is to inform and connect people on a shared issue or cause. PNF uses creative outreach strategies to unite people to work towards making changes through action in the community.

A Call to Action

PNF demonstrates that community people take action through collective confrontation through rallies and protests and holding elected officials accountable through meetings, phone calls, emails, and letters.

As an organizer, Lee tries to tap into peoples’ emotions and anger about a situation to stimulate action and change. Lee stated:

One of the things we do is agitation. So we try to take things out of just the normal day-to-day mode where you are just accepting problems and trying to deal with them the best you can and actually looking for the more proactive, grassroots level changes.

For example, at the state budget crisis town hall meeting, the goal was to inform the PNF community and local senators and representatives on the changes PNF and the budget coalition wanted made to the state budget through a state income tax increase. Unfortunately only one senator attended the meeting, and confirmed her support to PNF and the budget coalition’s goals. PNF leaders held the absent elected officials accountable to the community through audio and visual tactics by
informing the community audience and senator of community generated requests. A PNF leader would state the community request to the senator in front of everyone, while the questions were also shown on a large screen for all to see. A PNF employee would mark a large check box on the screen to indicate whether the senator said yes or no to a question. As an audience member, I could see this was a strong visual for the 200 or so community members, which enabled them to hold the senator accountable. After each request the crowd cheered with enthusiasm as the senator stated her support.

In addition to holding the senator in attendance accountable, a PNF leader and minister from one of the member churches voiced his concern over the lack of attendance by one of the representatives. He said he was not disappointed, he was angry that the representative was too sick to attend such an important community event. He said, even when a person is sick they should be able to come to a community meeting on such an important issue. He said as a minister he never misses a service, wedding, or funeral even if he is sick. This leader’s approach may seem unreasonable considering he did not know how sick the representative was, but it was clear that his point was that nothing is more important than attending this meeting and listening to the community. His sentiment also embodied the confrontational approach to organizing. In addition, he read the community requests out loud for the crowd to hear and asked the crowd to reply loudly with the answer they would want the representative to say. After stating his anger and getting the crowd riled up, he asked the crowd to take action by calling the senator’s cell phone to voice their opinion on the state budget crisis. He also asked the
community to continue door knocking to educate voters and for all member institutions to continue holding meetings on a humane budget. In addition, letters were handed out by PNF and an affiliate organization for town hall attendees to sign and send to the representatives and senators on the budget coalition’s proposed state budget.

Community outreach and calls to action are important parts of community organizing and creating community change based on collective community efforts. PNF engages in outreach efforts to learn from the community, to inform the community, and to create involvement and unite people on current issues. PNF taps into peoples’ anger and uses confrontation to create change. PNF’s leadership led and its outreach and action contributes to PNF’s accomplishments.

**PNF Accomplishments**

A sense of accomplishment and success can be defined and understood in many ways by different people within the context of a community organization. Success can be measured by bringing people together, building relationships, developing local leaders, and creating community led outreach, action, and change. According to Joe, community and organizational success is temporary because there will always be a new issue. Joe states:

...I mean my feeling is you’re always going to end up fighting. There’s always, I don’t know if there is any, maybe it is my pessimistic outlook but I think you’re always going to look at any...there’s always going to be resistance to change and uh, there’s always going to be new confrontations. So I think that any of the uh battles that we won are victories that are temporary.
Although there may always be confrontation and resistance, PNF employees, leaders and participants manage to celebrate successes throughout their fight for change. For example, at a planning meeting in which leaders and affiliate organizations were asked how many participants they were able to account for to bring to an event, regardless of the response, organizers and leaders always cheered and applauded for encouragement. These little bits of encouragement are necessary for boosting morale and acknowledgement of peoples' hard work.

**Uniting People and Building Relationships**

Bringing people together to fight for a cause can inspire and motivate community change. Bringing people together can be thought of as successful for uniting a diverse group of people, building social capital, and creating opportunities for community voice.

According to Lee and the leaders I interviewed, they identified success based on the unity of people. Lee stated:

*Our goal as organizers is to bring people together who are affected by issues and facilitate them to decide, you know, come up with their own solutions and to take action to make those solutions happen.*

One of Lee’s first successes as an organizer was brought about through a coalition with many groups around the city to pass an ordinance that would require a percentage of new condos to be affordable for low-income people. Lee started as an organizer at PNF at the end of a 5 to 6 year battle for this ordinance. This taught her that organizing can be slow but unity through coalitions can bring people together to create change.
Another way of identifying success through bringing people together is to be heard collectively through rallies. Lisa explained:

Well what make it a success is besides getting all these people together from Southside, North side, Westside together is...what make it nice is eventually they have to hear somebody. They gonna have to hear us. You do all this and people say well what for? But you know we are the ones who put these people in the House and uh if we just sit home and you know root for them and do this and to that, you know take it for granted. That if you go and march and let them know what we want, there’s always more people adding to it, more people added up to it. So it’s one way of getting their attention and letting them know, that we are not backing down.

Uniting people can create a collective voice to be heard by decision-makers and community members, which can create change in the way people think, act, and vote on issue in their community.

In addition to uniting large groups of people, Joe and Lee both identified PNF’s success in a creative approach to organizing by bringing a diverse group of people together to work on an issue and build relationships. Joe stated:

We reached out to all of the owners of multi-unit places and asked if they would like to attend a meeting with the alderman and with the different agencies, not necessarily agencies, well both private and public that would help them with uh, trying to get money to help or to assist in keeping kind of their units affordable. So those people came over and I think that’s kind of a victory in that we got people that might not, they might think that we were
just somehow or just people that wanted cheap apartment um, to recognize that we understand their concern on their part. It’s not that we’re unsympathetic. Um, and so that’s a victory I think.

In addition to building relationships with lots of different people and organizations working on an issue, Tina identified the success of building relationships with elected officials. Tina explained:

I think it’s a huge success when you are able to build a relationship with an elected official. And not that you ever lower your guard down with an elected official but if you are able to meet at a middle ground with them I think that, that’s a huge victory because that is something that you know, maybe not a hundred percent you can count on but if you have things, if you have the respect of your elected official and they are willing to work with you on things, at least listen to what you have to say is huge.

PNF’s approach to organizing usually focuses on people’s anger by confronting those with power. Though PNF identified success, it is apparent another approach is talking and building relationships with those in power such as elected officials and landlords. Uniting people, allows different groups to realize they are not alone in the fight for social justice. Building relationships can also create unexpected allies and with stakeholders in the community. Community change occurs through collective community voice and action.

**Community Change**

Each participant that I interviewed from the housing committee talked about their most recent victory of keeping tenants in the Spencer building. The Spencer
building is an example of a unique foreclosure situation in which the landlord was involved with condo fraud with multiple banks. Without the tenants’ knowledge of their landlord’s fraud and imminent foreclosure of the building, tenants were given a seven-day notice that they were being evicted. Some tenants had lived in the building for over 20 years and had no idea their building was in foreclosure. Luckily, one of the tenants was a leader at PNF and brought it to the housing committee’s attention. Through PNF’s research, marches, and communication with the sheriff, a new ordinance was passed which made it mandatory for banks to give tenants adequate notice of eviction. Through the efforts of Lee and the housing committee, which at the time included a majority of the Spencer tenants, the Spencer building tenants are still able to live in their building through a receivership with the hopes of a new owner that will keep it an affordable rental unit. Lee explained:

Recently our biggest victory is definitely around the sheriff and the moratorium on the foreclosure evictions. You know we were there after tenants were threatened by the sheriff, we were the only one who brought this issue to his attention, who said this is wrong. You know what you are doing is wrong.

Joe stated:

…I think it was a victory that people are still in the Spencer building all be it that this issue hasn’t necessarily resolved itself, but they are still there.

PNF’s efforts to protect renters from inadequate eviction notice from banks, demonstrates community change through the protection of renters living in
foreclosed buildings. The tenants of the Spencer building are an example of successful community change that allowed the tenants to remain in their home.

Another success of community change can be seen through voting. Joe discussed the success of registering 100 new American voters with the hope that one day those people will vote in a way that is sympathetic to their community. Tina identified a victory of putting a referendum on the ballot to hold hospitals accountable. In addition, she saw success in educating people to vote on ballot issues through door knocking efforts and information meetings. In Tina’s ten years at PNF she has seen that outreach and education can create community change through community members voting on laws and ordinances. In addition, leaders identified the organization and community’s successes through quarterly newsletters.

Each newsletter gives an update on each committee by celebrating success and community change. The most recent newsletter highlighted the success of the housing committee by stating, “...housing leaders pass two state-wide bills to protect renters of foreclosed properties!” In addition, the newsletter highlights their outreach and action by stating housing leaders worked to support these bills through rallies, trips to Springfield, and meetings with legislators.

Each leader identified their individual concept of success, which helped them stay motivated and engaged in the community organizing process. Without continued acknowledgement of success, community efforts might feel like a long battle with limited end results. Thanks to the positive PNF leaders and organizers,
encouragement and success is seen and heard on a regular basis through meetings, conversations, and newsletters.

PNF’s organizing approach focuses on local leadership development, community led outreach and action, organization identified successes. Each process involves democratic engagement, informal education, and empowerment.

**Analysis: Democracy, Education, and Empowerment**

PNF supports a bottom-up approach to organizing that focuses on developing local leaders and uniting diverse groups of people to work together for collective community change. PNF participants engage in a democratic process that allows space for informal learning. This democratic space and informal learning process provides the opportunity for individual and collective empowerment. The following section includes an analysis of PNF’s processes of democratic engagement, informal education, and empowerment.

**Democracy**

PNF intentionally creates an environment in which all participants have the opportunity to voice their opinion in the decision-making process, which allows for ownership of community issues. A democratic space is established through local leadership development, community-led outreach efforts, and a safe respectful space for open discussions and decisions based on group consensus within committees, campaigns, coalitions, meetings, and events. PNF organizers facilitate PNF leaders in a combination of participatory and representative democracy that
promotes a bottom-up decision-making process (Haus & Sweeting, 2006; McCoy & Scully, 2002).

PNF promotes representative democracy through local leadership representation of community interests and concern. PNF believes the community of neighborhood residents and member institutions to be the experts on identifying and acting upon community issues. PNF identifies leaders who think critically about community issues and have the desire to create community change. According to Baum (1999), organizations must continually recruit new participants to contribute to their legitimacy by increasing the representation of diverse interests of people in the neighborhood. PNF identifies new leaders through outreach efforts including announcements and flyers at member institutions, door knocking and open invitation informational meetings. These outreach efforts encourage community involvement based on peoples’ interests and frustrations in the community.

PNF’s promotion of leadership representation from member institutions has advantages and disadvantages within a community-organizing context. An advantage being PNF has access to a large diverse population through the members of each institution, which allows for diverse perspectives to be involved in the discourse around community issues. PNF’s switch seven years ago from individual membership to institutional membership provides a space for a broad perspective on community issues. A possible disadvantage this representative democracy is whether PNF leaders from member institutions represent the collective concerns of the institution. PNF helped establish leadership roles in the Social Justice Committees within religious institutions, but it is unclear within the other member
institutions, whether PNF leaders are formal or informal leaders. This highlights the issue of how effective leaders are in communicating to and learning from the larger institutional population. To ensure diverse leadership representation, PNF organizers continually look for new leaders that have a fresh perspective on community issues and want to participate in community change.

According to Haus and Sweeting (2006), participatory democracy is based on the notion, “The construction, articulation and promotion of the common good cannot be delegated, but must evolve from the communicative interactions of active citizens (p.278). PNF’s strategy to motivate action through anger and agitation exemplifies a power-based confrontational style of organizing with an emphasis on community building (Smock, 2004; Stoecker (2003); Gittel & Vidal, 1998). PNF’s community of organizers, board members, leaders, and volunteers represent those who are shut out of the powerful decision-making positions within their neighborhood, city and nation. The PNF community continually fights for the redistribution of power at the community level through meetings and protests with those in positions of power. PNF provides a safe space for participatory democracy by community members sharing personal stories at meetings, making decisions based on group consensus, door-knocking, handing out flyers, and becoming a PNF leader. This participatory process allows for action-oriented community development.

PNF’s community organizing strategy of forming a group (the housing committee) led by a professional (Lee, the organizer) represents Ruud van der Veen’s (2003) notion of action-oriented community development. PNF’s
relationship between action and learning reflects “...the professional supports residents informally in their action” (Rudd van der Veen, 2003, p. 587). Within the housing committee, Lee does a lot of the behind the scenes preparation for meetings and events but allows the leaders to define issues and action needed. PNF’s leadership led meetings and discussions represents Ruud van der Veen’s notion of consciousness raising followed by action.

PNF’s process of democratic engagement promotes leadership representation, which allows PNF to learn from and inform the community. In addition, PNF provides a safe space for democratic participation, which allows for action-oriented community development and consciousness raising. Throughout PNF’s democratic processes, participants are engaged in an informal learning process, which involves community-initiated processes of action.

**Education**

PNF’s democratic process creates a space within which participants have the opportunity to learn from each other, learn from grassroots outreach efforts, and to learn through action-oriented confrontation. This allows for an informal bottom up approach to learning as opposed to the more formal top down approach within formal schooling. This bottom up approach allows for a collective process in social change.

PNF’s organizing process allows for informal learning that reflects Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993) and notions of transformative and popular education. This education process consists of participants engaged in a dialogical process, which promotes consciousness raising, collective knowledge, and
action (Freire, 1993; Beder, 1996). PNF provides a safe space for PNF participants to meet on a regular basis to discuss current community issues and share their personal experiences and opinions. Promotion of individual opinions and experiences reflects Myles Horton’s view that groups should value individual experiences so that decisions and goals are based on knowledge gained from shared experiences (Ebert, Burford & Brian, 2003). This allows for consciousness raising of both PNF and the community, by PNF learning from the community and the community members learning from one another. The collective knowledge of PNF involves leaders, organizers, community volunteers, and affiliate organizations who share the same interests and concerns towards issues such as affordable housing. The group combines multiple perspectives to create a collective knowledge that informs their action. PNF’s action consists of events and meetings that involve community-led confrontation with those in powerful positions to create action oriented social justice. This bottom up approach provides an opportunity for participants to learn about effective outreach strategies, confrontational strategies for change, and building relationships and communicating with both the community and those in powerful positions through the guidance of PNF organizers.

PNF’s informal learning process allows the PNF community to be engaged in a process that promotes the individual and collective voice through listening and learning from others and learning through community action. This informal learning space promotes individual and community empowerment.
**Empowerment**

PNF’s bottom-up approach to organizing allows for empowerment at the individual and collective level. PNF’s individual empowerment reflects Hur’s (2006) identification of individual empowerment as mastery and self-determination. PNF’s collective empowerment exemplifies Rocha’s notion of socio-political empowerment (Rocha, 1997).

Hur (2006) defines individual empowerment as self-determination and empowerment. He states that mastery is associated with power within and self-determination allows individuals to meet challenges in different situations. Self-determination is, “(a) consistency and perseverance in activities, (b) the courage to take risks, (c) initiative and proactivity, and (d) the ability to voice one’s opinion” (p. 531). Individual empowerment as self-determination is reflected in Tina’s perseverance as a PNF leader for the past 10 years, her ability to take risks through overcoming her fear of public speaking and confronting legislative leaders. Each leader demonstrates individual self-determination empowerment by taking an initiative facilitating meetings, conducting outreach, sharing personal testimonies with others, and by voicing their opinions within PNF’s decision-making processes. In addition to self-determination, Hur (2006) also identifies individual empowerment as mastery. Mastery is defined as in depth understanding or increased skills and mastery of information and decision-making. PNF leaders’ exemplify individual mastery empowerment through their in depth understanding of the processes of confrontational organizing. In addition, each leader partakes in
mastering community-derived information to make informed decisions. PNF’s individual empowerment is closely connected to its collective empowerment.

PNF’s organizing process demonstrates collective empowerment through Rocha’s (1997) notion of socio-political empowerment, which promotes community development through developing the people within the community and the physical neighborhood in which they live. This type of collective empowerment is connected to PNF’s informal learning process, which reflects Freire’s notion of transformation through education. “Socio-political community empowerment consists of two core elements: (1) critical reflection by the community and members-of-community (individuals) rethinking their relationship to structures of power and (2) collective action upon those structures” (Rocha, 1997, p. 38); these are both consistent with Freire’s orientation. PNF’s participants (members-of-community) engage in ongoing discussions about community concerns in relation to structures of power in their neighborhood. PNF responded to community issues through collective action by saving the Spencer building tenants from being evicted. PNF experienced collective empowerment through group protests, which resulted in an ordinance being passed, in which banks are mandated to give tenants adequate notice of evictions in foreclosed buildings. The housing committee experienced Rocha’s notion of socio-political empowerment through the power of collective protests against power structures, which resulted in community change by protecting renters in foreclosed buildings.

PNF’s organizing process allows for individual empowerment through mastery and self-determination (Hur, 2006). These collective processes also provide
opportunity for socio-political empowerment through local leadership development and collective action through group protests and meetings, which confront those in positions of power (Rocha, 1997).

PNF's individual and collective empowerment is closely connected to individual and collective processes of decision-making in PNF. The democratic process involves representative and participatory democracy (Haus & Sweeting, 2006; McCoy & Scully, 2002). The participatory democracy process is based on group consensus. Community engagement in the democratic process allows for informal learning through participants engaged in a dialogical process, which promotes conscientization, collective knowledge, and action (Freire, 1993; Beder 1996). Therefore, PNF’s organizing processes consists of representative and participatory democracy, informal education, and forms of individual and collective empowerment.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

PNF demonstrates a confrontational, power-based model of organizing that focuses on strengthening the community and creating community change through local leadership development, community-led outreach and action, and recognition of organizational and community accomplishments. PNF organizers help facilitate PNF’s mission through the facilitation of community led initiatives for change. PNF motivates collective, community involvement through tapping into people’s common interests and frustrations with community issues.

PNF demonstrates that the development of local leaders is an essential element of organizing because local leaders live, breathe and experience community issues on a daily basis. They are the experts on what is best for them and their community. PNF’s development of diverse leadership allows for various community perspectives, which represents various languages, religions, and non-profit missions. Despite PNF’s formal recognition of members based on member institutions, PNF’s leaders represent individual neighborhood residents, non-residents, and member institutions. The diversity of PNF leaders indicates that their formal membership does not encompass all leaders. Which means that individuals that are not associated with a member institutions including, individual residents and non-residents passionate about community issues, do not have decision-making powers within the board of directors.

PNF’s participatory processes around planning, outreach, and action based on group consensus, provide a rich environment for informal learning through
discussions that promote consciousness raising and collective knowledge, which informs community action. In addition, PNF’s bottom-up approach creates a space for individuals to be empowered through personal, social and cognitive empowerment. Individual empowerment contributes to PNF’s collective processes, which provide a space for group empowerment through reflection and action.

Reflections on Research Questions

• (1) What are the problem-solving and decision-making processes and how are participants involved in these processes?

PNF’s problem-solving and decision-making processes reflect a representative and participatory democracy (Haus & Sweeting, 2006; McCoy & Scully, 2002). PNF community leaders represent the diverse community perspectives of member institutions such as schools, religious institutions, and non-profit organizations. PNF employees, leaders, board members, and volunteers engage in a non-hierarchal participatory decision-making process, which involves decisions based on group consensus. PNF participants are involved in every level of the decision-making process from identifying issues, setting the agenda for planning meetings, deciding on outreach strategies and action through confrontation. PNF organizers facilitate this process through community-led meetings and one-on-one meetings with leaders to continue learning about emerging community issues.

• (2) What is the informal education process embedded in a community organization’s problem-solving and decision-making processes?
PNF participants have the opportunity to learn from each other, learn from grassroots outreach efforts, and to learn through action-oriented confrontation PNF’s collective participatory decision-making process provides a space within which participants have the opportunity to engage in a dialogical process, which promotes consciousness raising and collective knowledge, which informs community action (Freire, 1993; Beder, 1996; Ebert, Burford & Brian, 2003).

- (3) What are the various forms of empowerment that exist within a community organization?

PNF provides the opportunity for both individual and group empowerment. Individual empowerment consists of mastery and self-determination (Hur, 2006). Collective empowerment consists of group reflections on community issues in relationship to power structures followed by collective action (Rocha, 1997).

PNF’s confrontational style of organizing promotes local leaders and community-led outreach and action. PNF encourages diverse leadership through membership institutions including religious institutions, schools, and non-profit organizations. PNF leaders engage in a decision-making process that reflects both representative and participatory democracy (Haus & Sweeting, 2006; McCoy & Scully, 2002). This democratic process allows for an informal learning space in which participants partake in community discussions, which raise individual and group consciousness, contributing to the collective knowledge that informs community action (Freire, 1993; Beder, 1996; Ebert, Burford & Brian, 2003). These
democratic, informal learning processes allow for individual and collective empowerment. Individual empowerment is based on mastery and self-determination while the collective reflects socio-political empowerment (Hur, 2006, Rocha, 1997).

**Implications for Future Practice and Research**

PNF’s organizing process consists of developing local leaders, community-led outreach and action, and recognition of small and large accomplishments. Although PNF celebrates accomplishments, it is unclear whether organizers and leaders engage in a reflective process analyzing effective outreach and action. A reflective process could contribute to PNF’s informal learning and decision-making process by providing a space to reflect on successes and challenges. In addition, reflection would allow participants and the organization to think critically about each experience allowing a space for change and improvement within the organization, and the community.

My study identifies the important role organizers play in facilitating community driven outreach, action, and change. Organizers conduct the behind the scenes work involved with local leadership development, research of community issues, and the preparation of the logistics involved in meetings and events. I believe a future study that explores the process of becoming an organizer could be beneficial to organizers and organizations by reflecting on what makes an effective organizer. It would be informative to conduct a future study of PNF or a similar organization to understand the organizers’ development process and how each organizer uniquely engages in the organizing process. Some important questions for
a future study include: How did they come to be an organizer? How have they changed overtime and why? What was their education and development process in becoming an organizer? What are the essential qualities of an effective organizer? In addition to exploring community organizers, it would be interesting to study an alternative to the confrontational approach to community change to learn about collective processes through a different organizing approach.

PNF is an organization that focuses on community change through community identified issues and outreach and action rooted in confrontation with those in power. Although PNF focuses on community strengths through community leaders it would be interesting to study an organization that focuses on Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993) through the identification of community assets. An asset-based approach focuses on connecting and developing existing strengths in a community as opposed to the confrontational approach, which focuses on peoples’ frustrations and anger with community issues. An asset-based lens approach to community change will allow organizers, community members, and legislative leaders to learn about community change strategies through existing assets rather than community deficits. Questions for a future study on the ABCD approach to community change include: What is the informal learning process for community residents within ABCD? What forms of empowerment exist within an asset-based approach? What does community change look like with ABCD?

Within PNF neighborhood communities, PNF demonstrates a unique approach to organizing. PNF demonstrates the power that local leadership
development and confrontational organizing has on uniting people to fight for a
cause, while learning from each other, with the opportunity to feel empowered.
Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

1.) How would you describe the purpose of APNC and your team?
   - How did you come to be involved in this organization?
   - Why did you choose to be a part of APNC?
   - How long have you been involved in the organization and what has your role been? Has your role changed over time?

2.) Tell me more about your participation in the organization?
   - Paint a picture of what you do at the organization.

3.) Tell me about how you and APNC identify problems in your community?
   - Were you involved in this process? Explain.
   - How did you and APNC approach solving these problems?
   - What do you think are the main causes for these issues?

4.) What accomplishments has APNC made in the past in the communities it works with?
   - How? At what point did you consider it a success...why?
   - Who was involved in this process?

5.) When you step back and think of your experience and participation at APNC, what have you learned along the way?
   - What opportunities helped you learn?
   - Walk me through the process or experiences that relate to your learning process.
-What do you think influences how and what leaders/volunteers/ and organizers learn?

6.) Is there anything else you think I may want to know about PNF? Thank you.
Appendix B: IRB Approval

DEPaul UNIVERSITY

Research Involving Human Subjects
NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

To: Maurya Delaney, Graduate Student, School of Education
    Karen Monkman, PhD., Faculty Sponsor, School of Education

Date: August 21, 2009

Re: Research Protocol #MD061109EDU
    “Community Access to Problem-Solving, Decision-Making, and Empowerment in a Community Organization”

Please review the following important information about the review of your proposed research activity.

Review Details
☐ Full Committee Review
☒ Expedited Review, under 45 CFR 46.110
☐ Original Review
☐ Continuing Review (Renewal)
☐ Amendment
☐ Incident Report/Adverse Event

Your research meets the criteria for expedited review under the following categories:

Category of Review: 6, 7

“(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.”

“(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.”

Approval Details
☐ Approved
☒ Approved (Previous contingencies have been resolved.)

Review Date: August 21, 2009
Approval Period: August 21, 2009 – August 20, 2010
Consent Documents: #09-202, Version 7/18/09, Adult Consent (enclosed)

Reminders
• Only the most recent IRB-approved versions of assent/consent forms may be used in association with this project.
• Prior to implementing revisions to project materials or procedures, you must submit an amendment application detailing the changes to the IRB for review and receive notification of approval.
• You must promptly report any problems that have occurred involving research participants to the IRB in writing.
• If your project will continue beyond the approval period, you are responsible for submitting a request for renewal to the IRB at least 3 weeks prior to the expiration date. The renewal form can be downloaded from the IRB web page at http://research.depaul.edu.

• Once the research is completed, you must send a final report closing the research to the IRB.

The Board would like to thank you for your efforts and cooperation and wishes you the best of luck on your research. If you have any questions, please contact me by telephone at (312) 362-7593 or by email at sloesspe@depaul.edu.

For the Board,

Susan M. Laess-Perez, MS, CIP, CCRC
Director, Office of Research Protections
References List


Ebert, Olga; Burford, Michael & Brian, Donna Jg. (2003). Highlander education for


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