

XI. Community Organizations

Subject(s):

Time Needed: two 50 minute class sessions

Objectives:

- ✓ recognize the importance of community organizations and community building
- ✓ understand the place of organizations in the functioning of a community or society
- ✓ investigate their community's groups/organizations
- ✓ develop and implement their own organizations

Areas/Disciplines Covered:

African American Studies (history, culture)
Cultural Studies (community formation)
Ethnic Studies (immigrants, benevolent organizations)
History (US, local)
Political Science (institutions)

Materials:

- chalk and chalkboard or marker and chart paper
- examples of Waterbury groups/organizations from “Brass City Life” [see Brooklyn/Town Plot: Flood and Renewal, “Wedding Party, 1990 (Lithuanian Club)”; North Square/Crownbrook: Urban Renewal, “NAACP Youth Center, 1970s”; South End: Urban Renewal, “Portuguese Mayor for a Day, 1997”] in some format which is accessible to all students (handout, overhead, etc.)
- writing utensils and paper for students

Procedure:

DAY ONE:

1. Start by asking the students: “What organizations do you belong to?” Give them examples to get the ball rolling, Boys and Girls Club, Boy/Girl Scouts, YMCA, etc. List them on the board or paper.

2. Next ask the students why they're involved. Why is it important to them? What would they be missing if they didn't participate? List these answers on the board too.

3. Tell them that you will be talking about those issues today--what organizations were/are in Waterbury and why they're important. Show the picture of the wedding at the Lithuanian Club. Make sure that the students can identify the place (as one of an ethnic group). Describe to them some facts about the club:

- It has served the Waterbury Lithuanian-American community for over 110 years.
- The bride in the photo was a prominent member and steward at one time.
- In 2003, the club had a fire that destroyed its building on 48 Green St in Brooklyn.

- It had (has?) hundreds of members across the city.
(http://www.javlb.org/bridges/2003/nov2003/nov2003_5-6.pdf)

You can bring out “Mayor for a Day, 1997” at this time and mention the similarities in function between the two organizations (both benevolent and cultural organizations). Ask the students why they think the organization was/is so important to the community.

4. Another example of a community organization that served cultural as well as political purposes was the NAACP (show photo). Highlight:

- NAACP stands for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.
- It was started in 1909 by a group of multi-racial intellectuals and activists, lead by Dr. WEB DuBois, who were responding to racism and racial terror (especially to lynching in the southern United States).
- The NAACP has been one of the premier racial justice organizations since its founding and is largely responsible for the *Brown v. Board* decision of 1954 which outlawed school segregation.
- There are 15 Connecticut branches.
- The Waterbury PRIDE Youth Council branch started in 1945 and is still going today.

What do they know about the NAACP? Have they seen its effects in Waterbury at all?

5. Develop a class dialogue about the importance of identity-based organizations. For examples of organizations that are non-ethnic and non-racial, you may include NOW (National Organization of Women), etc. What do these organizations provide that are so compelling? [safety (in numbers), a semblance of a community, support (emotional, sometimes financial), etc.]

6. End class by announcing that you will continue the discussion in the next session.

DAY TWO:

1. Reincarnate the last session’s discussion of the importance of organizations. Ask the students, “Based on all of the things that organizations provide to their communities, do you find those things in this school?” Give them a moment to respond.

2. Next, ask them to name the organizations in the school that they are a part of. Why are they important? What service do they provide to the students?

3. Make a list on the board of what is missing or lacking as far as organizational support for the students. What do they still need?

4. Divide the class into 2-3 groups. The responsibility of these groups is to develop a group or organization that could be implemented at your school to serve the students. Their group should reflect the necessities listed on the board as well as the goals of education. Some other questions they should consider are:

- Who is the group for? Who can join?
- How often will it meet and when?
- Will you need financial backing? If yes, how much?
- Will teachers, administrators or parents be actively involved? If so, in what way?
- Who will run the group? Will officials exist? If so, will they be elected?

- How does the group enhance your educational experience? (Ex: Will the group attend conferences or concerts? Will members participate in athletics?) How will the group further the cause of education?
- What makes your group/organization different from other school groups?

5. At the end of their group period, they should have a 5 minute presentation ready for the class. They should also be prepared for a Q&A session from their classmates. After every group has presented, the class can vote on which organization they feel would best meet the needs of their colleagues and school. The chosen organization should form a core group of students (from any group or class) who are willing to see it through so that they may institute it at their school.

6. End with a short list of volunteers who would be interested in the group and someone who would be willing to plan and lead the next discussion.

Related Resources: