The Taft Institute
FOR GOVERNMENT & CIVIC EDUCATION

# Social Capital And Educational Organizing In Low Income, Minority, And New Immigrant Communities:

## CAN THE UNIVERSITY STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS?


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**Introduction**

Since the 1940s, community organizing has been an important method by which poor communities create new avenues for democratic discourse and political power. In this paper we explore the use of community organization regarding public education in a conceptual framework based on the idea of social capital. Fisher and Shragge (2001), and Williams (1985) note that organizing is a tool to challenge social inequalities and oppressive power by contributing to a process of mobilizing new constituencies that would have been otherwise voiceless. For Boyte, Booth, and Max (1986) community organizing is essentially "an alternative to feelings of despair and defeat that afflict many Americans in our times" (1986:5). The Civil Rights movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s created conditions for a radical form of organizing through protests, marches, sit-ins, direct confrontation, and mass demonstrations. However, in the 1970s and 80s, as organizations began to consolidate the gains of the Civil Rights movement, they moved from protests to incorporation. The form of incorporation ranged from faith-based organizations to neighborhood associations.

In particular, organizing for school improvement has been one of the most effective means through which low income and minority parents challenge the traditional power structure that dominates the education system (Gittell, 1998). The relevance of effective community organizing has become greater in large urban school systems such as New York City where more than two-thirds of the students are members of a minority group. (In 2005, according to the official statistics of the New York City Department of Education, 33.1% of the public-school students in New York City were black, 38.6% were Hispanic, 13.2% were Asian or Pacific Islander, .5% were American Indian or Alaska Native, and 14.6% were White.) (New York City Department of Education Web Site, School Matters, 2007) Successful community organizing not only provides parents the skills and tools to participate in the decision-making process (in other words with the requisite social capital), but also holds school authorities and public officials accountable for their policies and actions.

Community organizing is essentially a participatory process. It involves countless meetings with constituents on a one-to-one basis, focused conversations on issues that affect members of the community, and collective action whose main purpose is to find solutions to major problems while developing local leadership through public speaking, research, and negotiations. Community organizing is a journey that ordinary people embark on in the hope that it will transform them by the time it ends. This transformation consists of better living conditions in their community, additional resources, new skills, and increased capacity that will arm them to face life challenges.

In this paper we describe and analyze a program that attempts to use the resources of the university to strengthen community organizing efforts by groups representing poor, immigrant, and minority communities to gain influence in the politics of New York City's public schools. We argue that the participation of parents in the leadership program has increased their individual levels of political knowledge and efficacy, their capacity to address key policy issues, their leadership skills, and their ability to generate essential aspects of social capital. Because the program is unique and therefore unfamiliar, we begin with our conceptual framework, move to a detailed description of the program itself, and then discuss our methods and present our conclusions.

**Conceptual Framework**

Long ago, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in Democracy in America that: "Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general, or restricted, enormous, or diminutive" (1990: 106). The need to create organizations to address local problems became more urgent in the late 19th century as more immigrants came to America and the country experienced rapid industrialization (Fisher, 1994). Although the growth of neighborhoods provided helpful conditions for the emergence of organizations and new leadership, the impact of these organizations on the democratic process was predicated on victories won over neighborhood issues that range from education to housing. Organizing for "little things," contributes cumulatively to the democratic process by encouraging more people to participate and by holding policy makers accountable to the citizenry.

As a process that emphasizes participation, relationship, trust and networking, community organizing in its most basic elements reflects the concept of social capital which illuminates the role that relationship and non-tangible assets play in social relations and citizen participation. Social capital also offers an overarching framework for analyzing the systematic relations among traditional political science concepts that relate to individuals such as political efficacy and the variables that relate to relations among individuals such as trust and networking. In fact, we would argue, as Putnam (2000, 35)

suggests in passing, that such individual attributes as political efficacy and political knowledge should themselves be considered precursors of political capital, since they enhance the capacity and confidence of individuals and prepare and incline them to join the networks in which they participate to gain political power, which is the stated function of social capital.

As adumbrated by Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1994) and others, social capital has become the keystone of an important approach to studying political power. Coleman in his original article defines social capital as a variety of entities that contain two basic elements. One is related to some aspect of social structures, and the other facilitates certain actions of actors within the structure. According to the author, social capital is: "productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible (1988:98)." Since social capital is a set of resources that a person possesses which enables him to act positively in the interest of the self as well as the collectivity, these same resources can also enable the person to act negatively to the detriment of the community or herself. Therefore, social capital can be both positive and negative. However, the distinctive aspect of the concept resides in the fact that individuals may possess some form of it, but they cannot use it in isolation since its potential resides in its capacity to draw on the collectivity and the quality of the relationships that are established within it. As a result, group activities are needed for social capital to be expressed among individuals in a community. Without organizations, the stock of social capital that an individual possesses can be worthless.

In their effort to understand the role that social capital plays in encouraging civic participation, other scholars have elaborated the concept further. In his study of Italian society, Robert Putnam

found that the stock of social capital among the people in the northern regions enabled them to implement governmental reforms more successfully than those who live in the south. The author defines social capital as "features of social life networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (1993: 64-5).

Putnam argues that the northern Italian regions that have been successful in implementing a series of institutional reforms possessed a greater level of trust, networking and norms than the southern regions. He emphasizes the three key components of social capital: trust, social relationships, and networks that have enabled individuals within a collectivity to act positively. The community's history and the individuals who are trying to implement them usually determine how these three components of social capital are developed. For example, Putnam notes that trust is a resource that tends to increase as members of the community use it more often. Reciprocal action is an important aspect to the creation of trust. As more people trust others, the tendency for trust to increase in the community will be more prevalent. Trust is also a state of development that is most often linked to shared experiences.

As Coleman notes in his original article, the level of trustworthiness that is developed among the Jewish diamond merchants in New York is based on the fact that the community has close family, religious and working ties which prevents them from defecting. Trust in such a case is the result of multiple relationships that exist among members of the community. Social relationship is an attribute that everyone in society possesses in one form or another. However, its potential to create positive outcomes is dependent on several factors such as the composition of the relationship and how it is played out among the individuals.

One of the important aspects of social capital is its emphasis on horizontal relationship since it "helps participants solve dilemmas of collective action" by fostering institutional success in the broader community. Putnam argues that individuals who belong to organizations that emphasize horizontal relationships will be more likely to generate greater social capital than those that belong to hierarchical groups. Horizontal relationship in an organization reflects the individuals desire to participate on a voluntary basis, but not as a result of short-term rational choice need. The author notes that "networks of civic engagement are an essential form of social capital" since the denser is the network, the more likely that individuals will cooperate for mutual benefit. A network of civic engagement is powerful because it comes with a series of beneficial advantages such as robust norms of reciprocity and it allows those who interact in many social contexts to develop norms of behavior that are more acceptable. A network of civic engagement also conveys a mutual expectation to one another by allowing reputations to be transmitted and refined.

As scholars have investigated different forms of relationships involving social capital, they have noted that social capital not only promotes the well-being of the members of a particular group but can also bridge the gap between groups and individuals that are outside of one's network. These relationships are called "bonding" and "bridging" social capital, respectively. Whereas bonding social capital "brings together people who are like one another in term of class, gender, race, and ethnicity; bridging social capital tends to bring people who are outside of their social networks together"

(Putnam and Goss, 2002).

Our model of engaging parents through community organizing entails both the bonding and bridging aspects of social capital. Since all the parents who participate in the program are primarily working class and immigrants, they share common issues that most recent immigrants in New York City are struggling with. This entail striving to understand the complex system of the New York City Department of Education, overcoming language barriers, and fulfilling their role as parents in a system that has not been friendly and open to their involvement. They often have similar stories regarding their frustration in trying to get teachers and administrators to pay attention to the needs of their children. Although most of the parents who took the class are immigrants from all over the world, they often bonded with their African-American counterparts as soon as they entered the room since they are all interested in acquiring skills and resources to improve their children's education.

The interaction between the parents and faculty members of the College facilitated the creation of bridging capital. Parents are exposed to new forms of acquiring knowledge in a setting that is different from what they are used to. Parents enter a relationship with faculty members and speakers from various agencies that are not in their traditional social network. The presence of new networks provides them access to other agencies and resources that they were either unaware of or could not relate to due to the absence of an entry point. The program therefore becomes the vehicle to generate new opportunities.

A recent large-scale evaluation of community groups across the United States, indicates the role that "intermediary organizations" may play in creating bridging capital across class, race and ethnic lines. In their assessment of recent community organizing efforts sponsored by the Ford Foundation, Marilyn Gittell, et. al. (2006) describes the role and effects organizations that mobilize professional trainers, other experts, and resources in support of community organizations. Such intermediary organizations "regrant…monies to community-based organizations (283)," and provide "training and technical assistance on topics such as the use of media…the fundamentals of organizing and engaging in public policy campaigns (284)." The training programs promote participation and association, thus strengthening both kinds of social capital.

This description recounts precisely what The Taft Institute's Community Leadership Training Programs have done. As Gittell, et. al. (2006) also argues, such an approach does not abandon, but also does not privilege confrontational tactics. Instead, a wide range of tactics is contemplated with confrontation held in reserve as a last resort.

Mass mobilization tactics such as rallies may portend confrontation if legitimate aims are denied.

In sum, the involvement of the Institute and the College served as a source of expertise, of training in community organizing skills, and of money to hire organizers and carry out organizing campaigns.

**History and Components**

The 2002 decision by the co-authors to invite community leaders to the Queens College campus* was a result of the changing demographics of the City and the need to link the College more closely to the new immigrants who currently make up more than 1/3 of the borough residents. (New

York City consists of five boroughs—Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island) Brooklyn and Queens are the two boroughs that have received the largest number of new immigrants in New York City.

According to the 2000 Census, Queens is the most diverse of the five boroughs, with over 140 languages spoken. The Asian population, which was in 1990 11.8% of the 2 million residents of Queens, has jumped to 17.5% in the 2000 census. Although many of these residents are recent immigrants, they have managed to create civic associations in their neighborhoods to address the issues that confront their communities. Roger Sanjek in his book, The Future of Us All, captures the essence of neighborhood dynamics in New York City by noting that despite the changing political, social, and cultural nature of life in Queens, everyone believes that through their participation in neighborhood organizations, they can improve their quality of life and the future of their children (Sanjek, 1998).

However, without trained and tested leaders that have the capacity to organize and advocate, many opportunities will be missed. For example, the borough of Queens has the highest rate of school overcrowding in the city. Of the ten school districts that the City's Office of the Public Advocate has cited for overcrowding, six are located in the borough. As a premier public institution whose mission is to develop leaders and serve the residents of Queens and the city, Queens College is in a privileged position to assist organizations and their leaders, primarily new immigrants, who are organizing to improve the quality of education in their community.

*Although our program drew on the resources of Queens College, CUNY, the actual institutional link between the community groups and the campus was the Taft Institute for Government, an independent 501 C 3 organization that is physically located on the Queens College campus but remains legally distinct from the College. One co-author is the Co-director of the Institute and the other, the Associate Director.

**Implementation**

We started the program by recruiting three community organizations that had a history of activism and organizing on education issues: *Central Brooklyn Churches*, a mainly African American group from the Bedford-Stuyvesant area; the *Community Action Program*, a predominantly Haitian-American group from Flatbush and East Flatbush in Brooklyn; and *Acción Latina*, based in the Corona/Elmhurst/Jackson Heights area of Queens. As the project advanced to its third year, we recruited three other organizations that met the program's objectives. They included *Queens Congregations United for Action (QCUA)*—a faith-based organization founded in 2003 by clergy and community organizations in the Corona/Elmhurst/ Jackson Heights area of Queens, which works with a multi-ethnic, multi-religious population that includes South Asians, African-Americans, whites, and Latinos; *Centro Hispano "Cuzcatlán"*—the only Hispanic community organization in downtown Jamaica (Queens), which emphasizes stimulating community participation in civic life, especially housing and immigration issues; and *Chhaya*, a South Asian group based in Flushing, Queens.

Our program combines three elements--direct support to community organizations; training

provided by the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing, both on-site, and at its national workshops; and an eight-session, bi-weekly course for parents and organizers conducted at Queens College of the City University of New York.

Support for the program has come from grants from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Hazen Foundation, New York Community Trust, and the Rockefeller Foundation. These grants flow through the Taft Institute, an independent 501 (c) 3 based on the Queens College Campus, which provides the institutional framework for the program and contributes logistical and administrative support and some funding.

Direct support, which consumes the bulk of the grants that fund our project, allows participating community organizations to hire (or expand the hours of) an organizer who works with parents on public school issues. In this way, direct support gives the groups organizing resources that would not otherwise have been available for education, with organizers hired who devote from thirty to fifty percent of their time to organizing parents and community groups around public-school issues. More specifically, direct assistance enabled the groups involved to:

- Develop strategies for enhancing parent involvement
- Devote resources to understanding and disseminating the implications of the reorganized school system: structure, process, and organizational details
- Identify opportunities for parent involvement in the new system
- Identify the most pressing issues at the level of individual parents, groups of parents, entire schools, and regions
- Create local training workshops
- Create social spaces in which parents could interact to increase knowledge, self-confidence, skills, and social capital

***PICO*** provides broad and intensive training in leadership skills. At their seven-day National Training Institute and at their local workshops PICO instructors cover a wide range of topics including power analysis—figuring out which agencies and officials have the power to help the community; identifying and distinguishing problems and issues — drawing the distinction between an "inoperable" social condition, and a situation that can

be improved; creating alliances--building relations with other groups, institutions, officials and individuals; conducting one-to-one meetings—the most important technique for recruiting and retaining members; fundraising – including both local sources and others such as foundations; recruiting and training new leaders – in order to prevent overload of existing leaders and burnout and group dysfunction; and maintaining and strengthening a grass roots organization – combining all of the above, but also attending to communications, social relations, and administration.

The leadership training course at the college provides essential background information on history and government before turning to hands-on training on community organizing. The former includes the following topics:

- The governmental and political forces influencing New York City public school politics including

an overview of the federal system and the relevant details of federal/state/city relations; New York City's government and politics.

- The History of School Politics in New York City including the struggle for integration – 1954-68; the subsequent conflict over community control; The Decentralization Act of 1969 and the system of Community School Boards, 1970- 1996.
- The new system of New York City public school governance initiated at the behest of Mayor Bloomberg and its reorganization in 2007 including elementary and middle school curricula and the opportunities and obstacles to parent participation in the new system.

The latter includes basic organizing strategies and techniques, Internet research on government and issues, media relations, and lobbying.

As this outline suggests, this set of classes combines a crash course in American politics that emphasizes the possibilities for citizen participation with a crash course in how to take advantage of those possibilities. The attached summary pages from the course readings (Appendix C) show how each description of a level of government culminates with a discussion of pressure points for ordinary citizens.

The rest of the course teaches how to mobilize and apply the needed resources to take advantage of the knowledge gained.

Participants in the course are recruited by the participating community organizations or organizers. Typically, a basic class has had about thirty people. Parents and organizers travel to the college campus for the evening sessions, arriving between six and six-thirty. A full course hot meal is provided, buffet style, in a room of the cafeteria that we use exclusively. Around seven the classes begin in the same room and usually last until nine, with a short break around eight for people to get coffee, use the toilets, etc. Translation is provided by the organizers for parents who lack fluent English.

The classes are taught mainly by Professors Krasner and Pierre-Louis. The early classes on the levels of government and the history and politics of the New York City school system use a lecture format, with frequent questions and comments from the class. The classes on research, lobbying, and community organizing utilize hands-on exercises in which students practice skills that have been modeled and discussed. These include one-on-ones in which new members are recruited, conducting research on and defining an organizing issue, researching the details of a policy proposal, lobbying an elected official, and writing a press release and making follow-up phone calls to create a relationship with a local journalist.

In the three basic courses already completed, we've used one guest speaker each time. Twice the speaker focused on curriculum and relations between classroom teachers and the central administration. Once, the speaker, who was himself an outstanding high school teacher, discussed a recent report on high schools done by the citywide advisory panel of which he was a member. At the end of the eight-week session we ask parents to complete an anonymous evaluation questionnaire, and we award certificates in a ceremony to which people invite family and friends. The certificates, issued under the imprimatur of the Taft Institute, recognize the recipient's

completion of a course in community leadership training. The evaluations, administered anonymously, have been overwhelmingly positive.

Seventy-nine parents, community leaders, and staff members from these groups have participated in the basic eight-session training courses at the College, and many others have participated in PICO training sessions.

**Unanticipated Outcomes**

In part perhaps because of previous connections between Professor Pierre-Louis and one of the participating groups, in part perhaps because of the personal ties that were formed during the training sessions, and in part because both professors expressed their willingness to consult after the course was over, a steady stream of phone calls and e mails followed the completion of the course. Though the project (and the grants) did not anticipate this need for continued technical assistance and support, we provided what we could on an ad hoc basis. This pattern also led us to the next development in the project, described in the following section.

**The Advanced Course**

Given the enthusiastic response of participants in the basic course and the demonstrated need for further training, we developed an advanced course, geared to people who had completed the basic course and to groups that were involved in specific projects that could become the focus of the advanced training. CAP and CBC, the two Brooklyn groups described above, brought twelve individuals who previously completed the basic course to the first round of the eight-session Advanced Course at Queens College. These sessions provided greater depth on topics such as Internet research and linked in-class and out-of-class activities directly to campaigns with which the groups were involved. In the spring of 2006, another nine people from El Centro and QCUA participated in the advanced course.

As noted, the advanced course takes up topics similar to the basic course but pursues them in greater depth and detail and also links them specifically and concretely to the groups' campaigns. For example, in the first round of advanced training, CAP waged a successful campaign to replace one of the elementary schools in its area, with a series of public actions culminating in a meeting with the relevant officials at which a commitment was made.

We turn now to the underlying conceptual framework for our program and our research.

**The Research Questions**

Our research and programmatic questions included the following:

1) Does leadership training enhance the precursors to social capital—political knowledge and political efficacy?

2) What are the benefits of additional leadership training to the organization, specifically, improving the ability of an organization's leaders to respond to the needs of their community? In particular, is there an increase in social capital, both bonding and binding, in an organization that provides

focused leadership training to its members?

**Method**

To capture as much of the impact of the program as possible, we created three categories: Empowerment of individuals acting alone; Empowerment of group leaders; and Strengthening the groups themselves, especially through increases in social capital. Obviously, the latter categories will overlap. Subcategories for the empowerment of individuals, either considered alone or acting alone, included challenging school officials, and advancing the interest of a child in a complicated administrative program as well as attitude and knowledge changes. Empowerment of group leaders includes Improved Recruitment Skills; Improved Research, Lobbying, and Media skills; and Improved Organizational Skills – e.g., running meetings, scheduling events, coordinating the work of staff and volunteers. Most directly related to social capital, the category of strengthening groups includes increased membership, increased participation, increased trust, and stronger relations among those participating, more contact with school officials, more contact with elected officials, more contact with journalists, more and better research, and more focused and effective campaigns.

As part of the evaluation of the program, we distributed an exit questionnaire to each participant (Appendix A) and a bilingual research assistant carried out in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a random sample of fifteen of the participants a year after they had participated in the program. The interviews included questions designed to elicit responses on the effects of the program on both the individual and the group (See Addendum B).

## Effects and Conclusions

**Survey Results**

An evaluation questionnaire was distributed at the final class session and completed anonymously. Statements were posed and participants were asked to respond by choosing among five alternatives from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The results were so overwhelmingly and consistently positive across all the courses that we will simply report the results from the 2003 survey.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section (four items) dealt with topics and instruction, the second with the personal value to the participant, and the third with organization and logistics. The first section's four items stated that subjects were well chosen, the instructors very knowledgeable, the methods of instruction appropriate, and the instructional materials useful. With twenty-three respondents and four unanswered questions, 83 out of 92 possible responses (90%) were in the "strongly agree" category.

A similar strongly favorable pattern prevailed regarding how useful the course was to the person (six items). Twenty-two of twenty-three respondents strongly agreed that they had gained

new knowledge and insights. Twenty-one thought the quality of their life/work would be improved, while twenty-two expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to participate and the benefits of informal conversations. Twenty strongly approved the amount of interaction between the participants and the presenters. Twenty- two of twenty-three strongly agreed that they would recommend the course to others.

Twenty-two of twenty-three also thought the course was well organized and coordinated. (There were six items in this section) There were fewer responses and less consensus on the logistics of the course. While thirteen of twenty thought the schedule convenient, six were neutral and one disagreed. Two people, presumably from the Brooklyn contingent, wrote in comments expressing a preference for a Brooklyn venue. Nine of eleven respondents agreed that the length of sessions was suitable. Most thought the process of getting information and joining the course worked well.

## Interview Evidence

**Individual Results:** Echoing the positive evaluations on the end-of-session questionnaires, we had many reports of changes in attitude and knowledge. One organizer reported that her parents had become aware, angry, and motivated to act because they learned in the course that "not all schools have the same resources." Another organizer, a Parent Coordinator (the official liaison between the parents and principal in a specific school) in an elementary school in a Latino neighborhood, said that his group of parents had learned that they could make changes if they came together and that the course had made him even more motivated to help. A second organizer said that the group which participated in the training had become a core group that was very motivated to make changes in the schools.

A second parent coordinator in a predominantly Haitian-American area offered the following assessment:

The result is in the meetings….If I have you talk with those who went to the training, and you had met them before it, I don't have to tell you nothing else. These were parents who knew that they had to take their children to the school; that's all they know, but after the training, they know their rights. *They know their rights!* Let me give you a concrete example. If one of them is told, "Your child is at risk, because of this and this," they can ask for the portfolio, the files, because they know that the teacher gives reports based on class work. Maybe you won't get what I say; you should have known these parents before…after the training, you see that they do advocate for their children!

Q.: Do you see them empowered?

A.: *Yes,* because they know what they are talking about. They know what they're talking about! *Yes!* …I don't have to go any more every time with them, they do many things themselves!

All the participants interviewed praised the knowledge they gained of the "big picture." This phrase encompassed the history of the public schools, the current structure of the public schools' administration, and the larger "structures of power." One noted that he had learned, "how much power parents have." Another said she had gained an understanding of how systems of power rather than bad people produced obstacles to parents' participation. A third noted the historical importance of discrimination and the role of the Mayor as important elements in the system. A parent coordinator emphasized how the Board of Ed made policy. A PTA president and longtime activist said repeatedly that she had learned where to apply pressure (and had done so successfully).

Individual actions included two challenges to school principals. In one case the PTA president quoted above (who was not then the president) demanded to know why a closetful of brand-new musical instruments was not being used in a school that called itself a middle school for the arts. Rebuffed by the principal, she took her case to the district superintendent, repeatedly sending letters and e mails. Eventually, the instruments were liberated, and the principal was forced to depart.

In another case, a group of Latino parents confronted their local state senator on the issue of overcrowding. In a public meeting devoted to the subject, the Senator said

that there were no overcrowded schools in his district. The parents voiced immediate and specific objections, pointing out the overcrowded conditions in their children's schools to the embarrassment of the elected official, who proceeded to visit their school eight times in the next few months.

In two other reported cases, parents intervened for their own children or for other children in the complex processes by which children are assigned to high schools or allowed to transfer to other schools. Finally, in a third case, we quote at length from the interview of the parent coordinator who described the transformation of one of the parents in his school, a first-generation Latina immigrant.

This is a woman that when you talked to her, she would answer like almost whispering, with her head turned shyly downward, "Yes, Mr. Lopez." [After the course] She walked in there [to the principal's office] and said, "Mrs. Murphy, I want an answer to my question. My question is: if my child cannot go to kindergarten because there is no seat (and she is on the waiting list), and considering that kindergarten is not 'mandated,' then why is it that my other child was left back in kindergarten? Why, if it is *not mandated?* Why didn't you put my other child in first grade, and not leave my other child out on the street waiting for a seat?" And she was very strong, she was aggressive, but she was controlled, level-toned, levelheaded, in a very proper question, on that was very hard to answer...!

So, yes: this is my best example! From a woman who used to whisper to a woman who was assertive enough, who felt empowered to stand up to the principal of the school, who she had dreaded just to see at one time. Mrs. Murphy went from being a goddess, the ruler of the school,

untouchable, unapproachable, to the principal of the school that we must talk to when we have a problem.

It's difficult to imagine a better example of increased political efficacy, one of the key political attitudes associated with participation. Similarly, the increased knowledge of the political system described by our participants in the phrase, "the big picture," represents a gain that the literature associates with increased efficacy and participation

(Della Carpini, 1996). These results also raise interesting questions about adult political socialization, which we hope to explore in further research.

**Empowerment of Group Leaders**

In the category of empowerment of group leaders, we find three instances in which leaders reported improved recruiting skills. One organizer commented that the parents who participated in the program had helped to recruit and organize other parents and that attendance at PTA meetings had gone from eight to 160. One PTA president said that the course had awakened her to the need to listen more to parents rather than just taking action by herself. Two interviewees said that the course had improved their media and lobbying skills, and one added that his planning skills had also improved. The same organizer said that he had learned from the course how to aggressively advance the interests of his parents without endangering his position as parent coordinator. Another organizer said that his group used the one-on-one technique to go door to door and recruit new members. A parent coordinator gave credit to the one-on-one technique for enhancing her ability to involve parents. In her view meeting one-on-one demonstrated that she valued the parent involved and produced greater participation and commitment.

The leader of one of the Brooklyn groups emphasized the research aspect of the training. “We were taught how to dig deep to look for what can help us in our efforts,” he said, and added, “So that when we meet ‘the powers that be’ and try to pressure them, we have all our homework done.” He then altered the metaphor drastically by saying, “We don’t want to get there with a half-cocked gun, but with a gun fully loaded, if you understand what I mean.”

**Social Capital—Strengthening the Groups**

In the category of social capital, strong testimony came from one leader who said that the experience of traveling to and from the eight training sessions in the same bus had created a friendship among the people on the bus, one that led to connections among organizing groups. "[w]e had a relationship with three other local organizing groups through the people on the bus. Now if I go to that church and I say, "you know, we really need your support on this issue," I have an advocate there who would say "I know Charlene. She is a good person, we worked together, she's smart, she's on time…We need to support that group in this effort." The quotation indicates the creation of relationships and of trust, crucial elements of social capital.

A second leader affirmed a similar pattern in milder terms. “Sometimes our training started on the train! People started talking about what was going on…We bound together…If something

happened in our school, then we talked about it and what we've been taught."

In an interesting variation on this theme, another leader reported that her son now made her aware of everything that happened in his school. She attributed his greater trust of her and willingness to inform her to the training, saying "He knows that I stand for them." This suggests the strengthening and broadening of the mother-child relationship to include a political dimension.

Finally, and most impressively, one of the groups involved carried through a major successful campaign to replace a neighborhood school located in an old industrial building where the students complained of headaches, nausea, and dizziness. In addition, the school lacked windows, a library, an auditorium, and a yard for recess. With participants involved in the advanced course, the group applied the course's practical lessons to research both who had the power to make the decision and the building's deficiencies, to create a long-term relationship with the local news media, to lobby successfully for the support of local elected officials, and to plan the culminating event, a presentation at a meeting with the relevant school officials. At the meeting the officials committed to replacing the school and later announced that a recently closed local parochial school would be purchased and renovated for that purpose. This success story indicates the power of the social capital gained, especially in horizontal relations.

**General Conclusions and Speculation**

Overall, the program worked quite effectively to promote the knowledge and attitudes associated with effective political participation, improve the skills of leaders, and the effectiveness of groups, and increase their store of social capital. While there were also instances in which groups, because of unrelated internal conflicts, or the relocation of leaders, made little progress, the successes far outweigh the failures. It seems clear that this program effectively strengthened the groups involved, in part by building networks of trust and reciprocity.

The interaction among these parents who come from various social, ethnic, and racial backgrounds created greater solidarity among them even after the classes were over. Two of these organizations continued to network with one another a year after their leaders had participated in the program. The relationship that has been established among the leaders of these organizations will have a long-lasting impact on the education of their children and on their own lives and political participation.

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**APPENDIX A**

# The Taft Institute General Program Critique

This critique will be used in assessing the overall effectiveness of the program in which you have participated. Please put a check in the column that best represents your rating. You may use a #2 pencil, blue or black pen on this form. Thank you. ***Please note: responses are ranked negative to positive!***

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Topics and Instruction** | | | | | |
| 1. The subjects were well-chosen. | | | | | |
| 2. The instructors were very knowledgeable. | | | | | |
| 3. The methods of instruction were most appropriate. | | | | | |
| 4. The instructional materials were very useful. | | | | | |
| 5. Comments: | | | | | |
| **Personal Value** | | | | | |
| 6. I gained new knowledge and insights. | | | | | |
| 7. The quality of my life/work will be enhanced as a result of participating in this program. | | | | | |
| 8. I am satisfied with the opportunity I had to participate. | | | | | |
| 9. The amount of interaction between the participants and the presenter was ideal. | | | | | |
| 10. Informal conversations with other participants were beneficial. | | | | | |
| 11. I would recommend this course to others. | | | | | |
| 12. Comments: | | | | | |
| **Organization and Coordination** | | | | | |
| 13. The program was well organized and coordinated. | | | | | |
| 14. The time of the program (month, day, hour) was convenient. | | | | | |
| 15. The length of the program was appropriate. | | | | | |
| 16. The length of the individual sessions was suitable. | | | | | |
| 17. Conference registration was efficient. | | | | | |
| 18. Pre-conference information was helpful. | | | | | |
| 19. Comments: | | | | | |

**APPENDIX B**

# Sample Questions for Interviews

## Parent Leadership Training at Queens College

Name: _____ Date: _____

1) What is the name of your organization?

2) How long have you been a member?

3) Why did you join the organization?

4) Tell me about your experience in the organization since you have been a member?

5) Were you involved with the organization's education program before you attended the program at Queens?

6) How have you been involved with the organization's education program?

7) Do you think that you have learned something from the education program at Queens?

8) What do you think that you have learned?

9) Have you been able to apply your knowledge of the education system in the organization?

10) How have you been able to do so?

11) Have you been successful in recruiting new members for the organization?

12) Have you taken any successful action related to the topics that we discussed in the program? (list them)

13) Do you think that you are more knowledgeable about the NYC Board of Education today than before you attended the program?

14) What are some of the topics that sparked your interest in the program?

15) Do you think that your organization has successfully applied the learning from the program to develop and recruit new leaders?

16) What would you have done differently to apply the learning from the program to your organization?

**Appendix C**

# ❖ AMERICAN GOVERNMENT: THE BASICS

## The United States has a federal system of government.

1. **What does that mean?**
   - Federalism means power is shared.

2. **Who shares it?**
   - The federal government in Washington (President, Congress)
   - The fifty state governments (Albany)
   - The local governments--cities, towns, counties, and so forth. (New York City, your borough)

3. **What does that mean for education?**
   - The old system--1800's, early 1900's-- Local governments pay for and run schools.
   - The system in the 1960's-2002--The Federal Government has some power. It gives money to the states with certain rules and limitations, and the states pass the money on to local governments. (Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA] and other laws.
   - The Current System--The No Child Left Behind Act gives the Federal Government a lot of power. The federal government sets standards and penalties and requires annual testing.

4. **Who exactly sets the standards?**
   - Congress and the President pass the law that sets the general standards, but the Department of Education, which is mainly controlled by the President, makes the detailed rules and enforces them. They decide what the standards are; they decide on exceptions. They decide on who gets money and who doesn't.

5. **Who can you try to influence?**
   - Your local congressperson and your senators, the president, and, perhaps, the officials in the Department of Education.

# ❖ NEW YORK STATE GOVERNMENT: THE BASICS

## PART ONE – THE FORMAL SYSTEM

1. **What is New York State, legally?**
   One of the fifty states recognized by the U.S. constitution. A state cannot be changed in any way unless it agrees.

2. **Why is this important?**
   It gives New York State and all other states a guaranteed existence and authority that cities and other local governments don't have.

## PART TWO – POWER

1. **Who has power in New York State Government?**
   Elected officials:
   - The Governor – above everyone else
   - The Comptroller
   - The Attorney General
   - The Legislature--Two Parts: The Senate and The Assembly
   - The Speaker of the Assembly
   - The Majority Leader of the Senate
   - On major issues it's: "Three Men in a Room" – The Governor, Speaker and Majority Leader

2. **Appointed officials such as the heads of the big agencies and the civil servants who work in the agencies.**

3. **The Courts**

4. **Who has the power to get the government to do what they want?**
   1. Big business groups like manufacturers, banks, and real estate groups.
   2. Big unions.
   3. Other groups like environmentalists, religious groups, ethnic and racial groups.
   4. The media.

5. **Who can you try to influence?**
   - The governor or comptroller, your local state assembly member or state senator, your local party officials, the media.

# NEW YORK CITY GOVERNMENT: THE BASICS

## PART ONE – THE FORMAL SYSTEM

1. **What is New York City, legally?**
   A not-for-profit corporation, chartered by the state.

2. **Why does that matter?**
   - It gives the state power over the City. Most often, when the city wants to do something important, like put a tax on commuters, it has to get permission from the state government
   - New York City also consists of five counties. Each of the boroughs--Queens, Brooklyn, Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island--is a county of the state of New York.
   - This is important because it limits New York City's ability to raise money. The setup of other big cities is that the city is within a larger county, like Miami in Dade County or Chicago in Cook County. Sometimes, these cities can get money help from the wealthy suburbs in their counties. But New York City is five counties by itself, and its suburbs are in different counties like Westchester or Nassau, so there's no help from them.

## PART TWO—POWER

1. **Who has power in New York City government?**
   - Elected officials: the Mayor above everybody else, then the Controller, then the City Council and its Speaker, and then, quite far below, the Public Advocate and the Borough Presidents.
   - Appointed officials like the Chancellor of Schools and civil servants.

2. **Who has the power to get City government to do what they want?**
   - Big interest groups like the financial industry (banks and Wall Street), the real estate industry, and the insurance industry.
   - Big labor unions like the teacher's union (UFT) and the hospital workers union (1199) and religious, racial, and ethnic groups.
   - Organized movements of citizens -- the civil rights movement of the 1950's and early 60's and the community control movement of the 1960's.
   - The media.

3. **Who can you try to influence?**
   - The mayor or comptroller, your local councilperson, or the entire council or the speaker, the public advocate, your borough president.