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Teaching Transition: Organizing Sustainably Through Service-Learning

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TEACHING TRANSITION:
ORGANIZING SUSTAINABLY
THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING

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PREVIEW

- Background
- Transition Towns & Origins
- Local Transition Towns
- Principles & Teaching Transition
  - Service Learning
- Sustainability Experiment
- Questions & Take-aways
BACKGROUND

- Food security and policy (research)
- Local, sustainable systems and organizations (teaching)
- West Chester Green Team (service)
Transition – climate change, peak oil, labor movement that started in 2005 (Totnes, England)

In practice, individuals reclaiming economy (local currencies/free stores), sparking entrepreneurship (CSAs/pantries/food hubs), reimagining work (voluntary or credited labor), reskilling themselves (repair cafes, teaching, networking)

Goal: weave webs of connection and support

Spread to 50+ countries

Power of story - https://transitionnetwork.org/
ORIGINS

- 2007 by Rob Hopkins, Peter Lipman, and Ben Brangwyn in Totnes, England
- Permaculture designer, in concert with his community, concerned about peak oil, diminishing local economies, and sustainable energy
LOCAL TRANSITION TOWNS IN PA

Phoenixville, Media, and now, West Chester
WHY FOCUS ON TRANSITION TOWNS?

- New direction for WCGT
- Way to connect to other communities statewide, nationwide, internationally
- Recognition for sustainability work (umbrella)
- Alternative organizing/organizational structure
- Frame sustainability issues facing municipalities on a micro- to meso-level
PRINCIPLES OF & TEACHING TRANSITION
SERVICE-LEARNING THROUGH TRANSITION

Fall 2020:

1. Create videos about sustainability initiatives in WCU Office of Sustainability

2. Plan, promote, and execute 3 virtual events (panel and film discussions)
   - Water Panel in October 2020
   - Warrior Women Panel (based on film, Woman at War) in November
   - Sustainability Activism Panel

Spring 2021: Research, promote, communicate with local organizations about Borough Sustainable Storefronts Program
“I am glad I was introduced to the experience of using less and opting to a more meaningful solution to my plastic problems. I will definitely continue to use these methods, as they are easy steps that can make a huge difference. I look forward to my continued use of my Starbucks cups and really cute reusable grocery bags. I will be putting the rest of my family on to my new changes, and I hope that they will follow suit in living life sustainably. I plan to expand my knowledge of sustainability and how it fits into my life on a bigger spectrum.”

-Student #1
“I think that this experiment has helped me to **better understand just how easy it can be to make a change for the better**. I have stated in some of my other submissions that it has always been hard for me to make changes like this to my everyday life, due to a feeling that I can’t make a difference by myself. Personally, I am someone who needs to see results from a project to stay committed to something, so I can’t undoubtably say that I’ll continue with these experiments forever. However, I am also very routine-oriented, so if I do them for long enough, I may never stop. I enjoyed participating in this experiment because it **made me make these changes** to my everyday life, and sometimes I just need a little push to get myself motivated.”
“However, I did face one mental challenge. Carrying items out of a store as a black woman can be nerve-wracking. I never wanted to get racially profiled, so I made sure to have the receipt visible at all times. This mental challenge was a disappointment and eye opener. Although I am trying to help the earth, I could be risking my life. Another challenge I faced were mandatory plastic bags. Although I insisted the cashier at Qdoba did not need to bag my food, she stated it was policy.”
QUESTIONS & TAKE-AWAYS

- Critical approach to Transition Towns
- Action-oriented framework functions well in classroom
- Approach through alternative organizing lens
- BIPOC communities and indigenous community engagement
  - Who are we leaving out?
  - How do students build resiliency through their courses?
  - Power and equity in partnership
THANK YOU

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