



Erie Neighborhood House
Chicago, IL
“Health Promoters”
2007-2008

Program Summary

Established in 1870 in the settlement house tradition, Erie Neighborhood House is a community service agency that assists and empowers low-income, primarily Latino families through a range of educational programs. Erie House conducted six two-and-a-half-hour civic reflection discussions with seventeen participants, on adjoining Friday evenings and Saturday mornings, once a month for three months. The participants were internal and external “health promoters” from Erie Neighborhood House. In an innovative program, Erie charged them with responsibility for programs to increase the wellness of Erie House employees and community residents. The health promoters are Mexican-American or of other Hispanic-American descent. They were encouraged through this series to think about the attitudes toward health that characterize the Mexican-American and Hispanic-American individuals and groups whose health they aim to improve, about their own attitudes toward health and the extent to which they are consistent with or different from the attitudes of those they will be working with, and about how those sets of attitudes comport with more mainstream American civic values related to health.

It was hoped that the participants’ reflection would manifest itself in decisions and actions they undertook in their roles as health promoters. The sessions were extremely valuable for creating shared perspectives, and the health promoters undertook many innovative and productive activities—including creating a food-buying club, creating a monthly newsletter, and starting programs for youth and women—after their civic reflection experience, with energy that the organizer believes to be in part a result of that experience.

Readings and Films

- Octavio Paz, “Mexico and the United States” (essay)
- Luis Rodriguez, *Trochemoche* (poems)
- Ana Castillo, *So Far from God* (novel)
- Alfonso Arau, *Like Water for Chocolate* (film)
- Michael Moore, *Sicko* (film)

Facilitators

The main facilitator was Patricia Novick, who was assisted at different times by leaders of community organizations: Jesus Garcia, executive director of Little Village Community Development Corporation; and Rafael Ravelo and Ricardo Estrada, senior advisor and executive director (respectively) of Erie Neighborhood House.