

Civics Education: Statement of Purpose

The Problem

The great experiment in Democracy that is America is dying; our youth have forgotten, or worse never been taught the importance of citizen participation in a participatory democracy. Since 1972 voter turnout of eighteen to twenty-five year olds has fallen by 15% (Boulard, 2003). Only 34% of generation Xer's and 24% of generation .comers (those born after 1976) bother to vote (Boulard, 2003). This trend is alarming and indeed detrimental to democracy. One can only hope that as these groups age voter participation will increase but only time will tell; and perhaps by the time we realize that they are not involved in the democratic process it will be too late. This alarming trend adds up to a democracy where fewer and fewer of the citizens are making the decisions for the many.

This trend is exacerbated by the decline of civics education in public schools. As the era of standardized tests has increased the focus and emphasis on math scores has led to an overall de-emphasis on civics education (O'Connor, 2008). This de-emphasis on civics has had disastrous effect on our students. In a recent survey not even a third of eight graders could identify the historical purpose of the Declaration of Independence (O'Connor, 2008). As educators we need to re-emphasize civics education if for no other reason than to ensure that as future generations age and become the ruling generation that they are prepared with the background knowledge and skills necessary to run a complex democracy with over three hundred million people.

Needs of the Learner

Civics education, at its core, prepares students to participate in the world around them. Functioning in society is more than going to work and contributing to the overall economy. Our democracy has flourished for over two hundred years because of the energy, ideas and effort of our citizens. The leaders of tomorrow must be prepared today for future challenges. A well rounded education, including Civics helps ensure this. How can we expect citizens to understand and participate in a meaningful way in both the micro and macro decision making of our society if they have no frame of reference as to how we arrived where we are, the ideas that formed our nation or how our system works?

Needs of Society

Furthermore society as a whole benefits as more and more people participate in our democracy in a meaningful way. The American people time and time again have been proven right with our choices as to where and how our democracy develops. The distinctiveness of our culture has insured us a unique place in history. If we wish to continue our role as world leaders we must cultivate the next generation of leaders.

Value of the Subject Matter

In order to ensure that we cultivate this new group of leaders requires a deep understanding of not just Americanism, in terms of our culture, economy and government, but what separates us and sets up apart from the rest of the world. There is a reason that we are the world's oldest democracy with the oldest written Constitution. Understanding the unique course of events that have led us to this point in history must be not only understood as facts to be recited but understood and applied to the problems

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of tomorrow. This can only be accomplished with an intimate knowledge of what it means to be an American.

Educational Goals

The goals of Civics are simple. To create students who understand our system of governance, the history behind its creation, the nuts and bolts of its operation and how these ideas have set the United States apart from the rest of the world. Upon completion of the course the learner will understand our Federal system of government including the Constitution and the three branches that make up our government. The learner will understand how the inner-workings of the three branches make us unique in the world and how the principals of the Constitution have allowed us to develop the most free and prosperous nation the world has ever seen.

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