ENGAGING YOUNG CITIZENS

Is There a Citizenship Crisis?

- In 2004, only 47% of 18-25 year-olds voted.(1)

- Only 24% of 15-25 year olds say that they follow government and public affairs "very often".(2)

- Research among younger citizens reveals low levels of public-sphere political conversation and community problem solving.(3)

What accounts for this change?

Changing Ideas of Citizenship – Youth

Decreased youth participation in politics reflects the changing generational character of citizenship in the U.S.

- Unlike the "dutiful citizen" of past generations, the contemporary "actualizing citizen" has relatively little interest in conventional politics, voting, and mass media.

- Actualizers are no less passionate about political issues, but their emphasis on individuality prevents them from connecting personal concerns to the larger public sphere.

- Actualizers favor more personal behavior to correct social problems, like volunteerism, internet-mobilized action, consumer activism like boycotting and buycotting.(4)

Approaches to Civic Education

- While civic education has been shown to increase political knowledge (5), it often fails to increase the likelihood that one will vote or participate.(6)

- Studies have shown that the *type* of civic education matters: *different styles of civic education* can have *different effects* in promoting civic engagement.

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Two Traditional Approaches to Civic Education

Individual Development

Information and knowledge, personal skills (writing or speaking), individual character, leadership

Apolitical Service

Volunteer opportunities & general service not keyed to issues, or contact with government or politics

What can we do to turn the tide of youth civic disengagement?

- Research suggests that civic education can help, if the approach is attuned to youth's changing needs and realities.

Is it possible for civic education to create an *Active Political Experience* civic education without a service component?

- Peer discussions, debate, journalism, and encouraging students to vote are effective classroom strategies to promote civic values.(7)

- Open and respectful class discussion and an active, civic-minded curriculum can have a significant civic impact.(8)

- Active teaching techniques (debates, mock trials, and role playing, cooperative learning, and media analysis) do most for promoting civic values. (9)

Active Political Experience

An *Active Political Experience* type of civic education can also integrate community service with classroom activities. This may have the greatest impact on students.

- Active participation in planning and implementation enhances the civic effects of service learning.(10)

- Teacher involvement and classroom discussion enhance the effects of service-learning.(11)

- Justice-oriented programs that encourage students to think about fundamental institutional sources of social problems and how to engage these institutions promote student interest in politics while participatory (volunteer and leadership) oriented programs fail to increase this measure.(12)

- The more students feel they have responsibilities, challenging tasks, and help plan and make important decisions in community service projects, the more their self-reported scores on self-efficacy, political attentiveness, and social action increase. (13)

- Students with service learning show greater attitudinal change on different civic beliefs and values such as helping and tolerating others than those with only civics classroom experience.(14)

- Service learning may increase the level of attachment one has towards the community.(15)

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