



LAES has developed a series of immigrant issue instructional modules entitled "Tierra de Oportunidad" for orientation to our complex society.

LAES - Civic Participation

Tierra de Oportunidad - Module 15

To the instructor:

RE: PROBLEM-SOLVING FOR THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION MODULE

Administrators, instructors, and students may be unsure how issues related to immigrants' political participation fit into the process of basic skills development. There is often uncertainty whether actual and literal participation in the democratic process is appropriate. While anonymous individual participation in the electoral process is seen as a civic duty, the active participation in setting community political agendas, participation in community dialogue, questioning and debating issues are seen as questionable. Some of the possible reasons for actually following through on the abstract ideal of empowerment as a valid and practical learning objective or political participation as a valid and practical mode of community involvement are discussed below.

Issue 1. The Relevance of Political Participation

Objection 1: "I'm here in class to learn English, not politics. What does this have to do with learning English?"

Answer to Objection 1: Politics always involves dialogue, talking back and forth, orally, and on paper. Using language is more than knowing words and good grammar, it's also knowing how to interact with people. Class exercises discussing, writing, analyzing, and observing are all part of building one's basic ability to function in U.S. society. On careful observation, many of the interactions which are important at work are, in fact, "political" in that they deal with common issues, differing perspectives, and dialogue oriented toward solving the problem.

Objection 2: "I'm not interested in this particular issue (e.g. better child care in the community). It's a woman's issue and doesn't affect me".

Answer to Objection 2: A basic political lesson is the importance of trade-offs. If you listen to other people's concerns, they will be willing to listen to yours. This is also a basic principle of communication. How about a compromise? What issues do you think are important? Let's see if we can get the other people in the group to include your issue in their agenda.

Issue 2. The Feasibility of Political Participation

Objection 1: "Immigrants have no power. It doesn't matter what they do."

Answer to Objection 1: For examples of instances where immigrants individually or as groups have made a difference, discuss Cesar Chavez well documented struggle to unionize farm workers.

Objection 2: "I'm just a simple person with no education and couldn't make a difference."

Answer to Objection 2: Discuss Rigoberta Menchu's life story and her receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her political activism.

Issue 3. How can the Political Participation Module be used with Limited-English, Limited Literacy or Multi-Level ESL Classes?

For limited-English groups of learners, conduct discussions in Spanish but use discussion as the basis for introducing new English terms, with an emphasis on terms related to the high-priority issue chosen by the class. Ask class volunteers to summarize discussions or deliberations in English

For limited-literacy groups, emphasize oral activities, but introduce list-making and outlining (in English or Spanish) as uses of written language as appropriate.

For multi-level groups, emphasize activities which involve projects based on team or small-group work, assigning roles to learners which reflect their skills, e.g. writing, communicating with others, translating.

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