Megan Fantozzi

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***Statement of Purpose***

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Nestled within the walls of today’s classrooms are the citizens of tomorrow’s world. These future citizens will encounter unique, potentially unparalleled demands and expectations as they enter our complex and dynamic global society. As a result, students must possess the skills and capabilities to interact effectively, respectfully, and positively with a myriad of diverse individuals within the context of a democratic society. A richly developed social studies curriculum provides children with the authentic, hands-on experiences needed to develop the character skills vital to success in future social contexts. Sadly, the onslaught of standards-based education has severely diminished the amount of time spent exploring moral character and the social studies, instead emphasizing subjects such as reading, science, and mathematics (Pace, 2007, p.26). Now more than ever, our students are in desperate need of contextualized learning experiences which will reestablish social studies as an esteemed, relevant, and vibrant curricular area. This proposed Pro-Social unit was constructed in response to that need, as well as the moral and interpersonal needs of our future citizens.

The purpose of this early childhood unit is to authentically explore fundamental concepts of character and social interaction such as kindness, respect, responsibility, and cooperation within a contextualized learning environment. The concept of emotional regulation will also be presented with the intent to teach children methods of emotional recognition and control, thus facilitating healthy, positive social interactions. The topics and concepts presented within this unit are vital to an individual’s life experiences. Beginning in early childhood and continuing on throughout the entirety of their education and lives, children will be expected to socially interact with peers, teachers, family members, community members, authority figures, and other diverse individuals. As a result, children must acquire basic, effective pro-social behavioral skills which will enable their success in school, friendships, family life, and future careers. A recent article published in the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s magazine corroborates the advantages of pro-social behavioral instruction during the early childhood years. “Learning to get along with others—adults and peers—is one of the single most important skills of childhood…Children who can behave pro-socially fare better in school, extracurricular activities, and other social aspects of daily living” (Petty, 2009, p.84).

Learning how to appropriately interact with others is the basis of citizenship development, a major component of the social studies content area. As children work within a group setting and practice cooperation, communication, respect, and negotiation skills, they simultaneously construct an understanding of civics. The proposed unit will develop these aforementioned skills within a safe, caring and contextualized environment which offers authentic, relevant and meaningful learning activities. This curriculum was developed in congruence with the Ohio Early Learning Content Standards for Social Studies, which state that by the end of the pre-kindergarten program students should be able to demonstrate cooperative pro-social behaviors such as helping, turn taking, and sharing (Ohio Department of Education, 2004, p. 50).

Teaching young children pro-social values will also establish a sense of respect for various cultures, genders, and ethnic groups. This is absolutely essential to the continuation and evolvement of our democratic, global society. Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) illuminate an undeniable link between the condition of our society and the inclusion of moral education within our schools. “Increasingly, educators and the general public are realizing that the challenges to our society are more than economic or academic. Many problems relate to a lack of moral character and conduct” (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2009, p. 323). This unit provides an invaluable link to our greater society and world, promoting moralistic ideals of acceptance, unity, and peace which are valued and translatable within a variety of cultures. It is imperative that we include this contextualized pro-social curriculum within our schools as to foster the development of respectful, cooperative, and competent citizens who will effectively shape and direct our future society and world.

**References**

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