

FOSTERING STUDENTS' CIVIC SKILLS: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ABOUT
SCHOOL AND EXTERNAL LEVEL FACTORS

by

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(Under the Direction of John Dayton)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study examined middle school teachers' beliefs about school and external level factors that fostered or impeded students' civic skills development. From the literature, civic skills are categorized for students and their ability to critique, communicate, and collaborate. Recent school reforms have placed emphasis on testing, often affecting the amount of time teachers might have to teach students the application and the integration of the skills needed to foster civic skills. Findings of this study revealed that collaboration among teachers, time for instructional planning, and parental involvement were influential factors that helped teachers promote civic skills to their students. On the other hand; tests, lack of parental involvement, and traditional practices in teacher observation were found to be factors that impeded teachers' efforts in the promotion of students' civic skills. Other factors and implications were also discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Democracy, civic engagement, skills and knowledge, public schools, case study

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funding programs which mostly require a state to adopt their policies if this state chooses to opt in these programs.

Race to the Top is the most recent federal grant program designed to spur state-level education innovation to boost student achievement, close achievement gaps, and prepare students for college and careers. Originally authorized in 2009 under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Race to the Top encourages states to develop and implement standards based on four core components: 1) Rigorous college- and career-ready standards and assessments, 2) Recruiting, evaluating, and retaining highly effective teachers and principals, 3) Building data systems that measure student success and inform teaching and learning, and 4) Turning around low-performing schools (Miller & Hanna, 2014). What does, for instance, Race to the Top mean for a teacher if the state she or he teaches in opts in the program? According to a study by Onosko (2011), Race to the Top means an increase in standardization, centralization, and test-based accountability, and a results-based system yields to narrowed curriculum (Amrein, 2002).

Many policymakers are hopeful that these rigorous new standards will fix whatever is wrong with American education and boost U.S. standing in international comparisons (Kuhn, 2013). However, the drive to create robust accountability systems places far too much emphasis on inspecting and testing. Costa, Garmston, and Zimmerman (2012, p. 1) argued that “a system of quality control founded on the belief that inspection and multiple-choice tests are valid measures of effectiveness is flawed.” Zhao (2013) recently pointed out that a decentralized education system that allowed local autonomy, the lack of a national curriculum, and teaching practices that respect individual differences have made American schools relatively ineffective in producing

Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate civic education and students, and they all have suggested that public schools need to increase the number of hours spent on social studies or extracurricular activities (Evans, 2004); however, there are few studies that have examined how school teachers actually promote civic skills. Besides, an increase in the amount of time a teacher engages students in civic education is significant; however, knowledge might make an individual a more informed citizen, but not necessarily a more engaged citizen. If we want a more engaged next generation, we have to understand how public school teachers promote civic skills for their students along with civic knowledge.

To broaden our understanding of teachers' beliefs, I hoped to discover school and external level factors that influence teachers regarding promoting students' critiquing, communicating, and collaborating—all civic skills. Teacher behavior is the most important factor in student learning in schools (Baldy et al., 2014), and teachers' beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning mainly shape how teachers teach (Yero, 2002). Therefore, it is important to understand teachers' beliefs about civic skills and the factors that are necessary or need to be eliminated to promote these skills.

Research Questions

Determining the research questions was an important step because these questions narrow the research objective and research purpose (Creswell, 2008). To be able to discover and understand school and external level factors that influence teachers' beliefs regarding promoting students' critiquing, communicating, and collaborating skills, this study was based on the following research questions:

(1998) emphasized that case study was likely to be the best choice if the variables were so embedded in the situation as to be impossible to identify ahead of time. Yin (2003, p. 13) defined a case study in a very precise way as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between and context are not clearly evident.”

Six social studies middle school teachers participated in this study. Individual in-depth interview was the primary method used to understand the participants’ perspectives on instruction and the factors that foster or impede students’ civic skills. Field notes were taken during each interview.

In-depth interviews were used for data collection, and a thematic analysis method was used to analyze the written transcripts of the conversations with the six middle school teachers who taught in two schools within one district in a southeastern state. In total, 161 pages of transcript data were collected from September through December 2015. All teachers are supposed to contribute to the whole child development; however, social studies teachers were selected because they are the ones who are primarily responsible for promoting instruction and activities that develop students’ civic skills. Public school teachers were chosen because they are representative of the majority (77.43%) of all K-12 schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Finally, teachers who teach 6th, 7th, and 8th grades participated in this study because students in these grades are at a critical stage for their learning (Amna, 2012; Kaviani, 2011).

Significance of the Study

First, lack of information in the literature about what civic skills is both surprising and not surprising at the same time. It is not, because the concept of civic skills is messy.

Democracy – Form of government in which people choose representatives by voting. It protects the interests of citizens and promotes equality, but democracy can be just an image without the true participation of the people. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.

Citizenship – Citizenship has its rights and privileges, but to be a citizen comes with responsibilities as well. We need to keep in mind that citizenship involves more than just voting every four years or paying taxes. It involves deliberating about the common good, participating in shaping the forces that govern the collective destiny (Libresco, n.d.).

Civic knowledge – The Civic Mission of Schools was one of the first organizations to formally conceptualize civic knowledge, and to them, it consisted of an understanding and awareness of: important historical events; issues and actors; the structures and process of government and the legal system; the role of social movements; and the relevant social and political networks for change (Smith, 2012).

Civic skills – Civic knowledge has a degree of certainty in its conceptualization, but civic skills do not (Smith, 2012). However, civic skills can be categorized under three common titles: Communication skills, collaboration skills, and critiquing skills. See chapter two for a more comprehensive description of civic skills.

Civic engagement – Individual and collective actions taken for public concern: It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Civic engagement is one of the pillars of democracy.

commission a constructor. The constructor is painting the windows frames blue. Without any objection from your side, you will get a house with blue window frames. The constructor needs to be reminded that you wanted your window frames brown. Here, what the intervention to the constructor is the engagement to democracy.

Despite the various challenges that public schools face today, they are most likely the very institutions to play a critical role in individuals' engagement in democratic practices (Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Flanagan et al., 2007) and schools have an equalizing effect in terms of civic engagement gap stemming from socioeconomic statuses (Kahne & Sporte, 2008). Schools are also the means by which the young generation are given opportunities to develop a sense of themselves as part of the body politic (Flanagan, P. Cumsille, S. Gill, & Gallay, 2007). Although schools have an important role in increasing students' knowledge (Flanagan et al., 2007; Niemi & Junn, 2005), they play an equally significant role in students' civic skills and commitment to the polity (Flanagan et al., 2007). Schools are the nurseries of the democracy, but if the teachers are not prepared to teach the essential knowledge and the skills to the next generation democracy can be lost in a single generation (Dayton, 2012).

Democracy is an on-going process. The greatest danger is when we think of our freedom given for granted and when we ignore the pieces of losses taken from our rights (Dayton, 2012). We are too busy with our personal lives to care about these small, but accumulating losses. Besides, individuals are not born with an understanding of the values of democracy. Therefore, democracy has to be born again in every generation, and education is its midwife (Dewey, 1916). Dayton and Glickman (1994) had reminded us that we could not expect children to develop a commitment to democratic principles if

these principles were not taught, modeled, and practiced in our public schools and other public institutions.

A true civic engagement is possible when one possesses both civic knowledge and civic skills. The concept of civic knowledge consists of an understanding of governmental structures, actors and processes; a comprehension of governmental outputs in the form of policies; knowledge of non-governmental forces such as the media, interest groups, and social movements; and familiarity with the prominent social networks within a given community setting (Smith, 2012). This conceptualization has consistency in the literature (Galston, 2001; Jennings & Niemi, 1974; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). However, the conceptualization of civic skills has no certainty. Besides, we have data regarding the political knowledge of many populations, yet few have investigated the extent to which youth have the skills necessary to be engaged, active citizens (Llewellyn et al, 2010).

The people of the United States are able to address the nation's fundamental problems, but again it requires both civic knowledge and civic skills to do so. Civic knowledge is a prerequisite to civic skills, and possession of civic skills is the key to civic engagement. Information and action are essential in this process. However, neither information nor action is satisfactory without the skills needed how to do what to do. Schools are the environments where students develop their civic skills, but do they get to develop their civic skills truly before they graduate? This is an essential question to be addressed, but first of all, what are the civic skills? Are they merely the knowledge of whom to vote and action of how to vote? Or are they beyond these?

A review of literature has showed that there is no consensus on what exactly civic skills are. However, there are descriptions for civic skills even though they vary greatly. Often times, academics discuss civic skills as skills necessary to be effective citizen in political participation. They are sometimes even reduced to skills necessary to vote (Smith, 2012). It is not rare that we actually see that voting rate alone is referred to describe civic engagement rate in certain publications (Coley & Sum, 2012) or civic engagement is represented by students' social studies knowledge levels. This is one of the main problems that needs to be resolved before we address the actual problems in civic engagement. Since definitions for civic engagement or skills have no boundaries, results that represent civic engagement are very easy to be manipulated in both ways.

If we expect an active and thoughtful civic engagement from the youth, we should understand that students' knowledge of democratic processes is of little use without the skills to put this knowledge into practice (Llewellyn et al., 2010). Beauvais, McKay, and Seddon (2001) argued that citizenship education rarely actually taught about political participation. Little attention within curriculum is paid to skills required to make political knowledge useful. For those who teach English or Mathematics, it is very important to have their students practice the knowledge they taught by making meaningful sentences or by multiplying numbers. Understanding the usefulness of knowledge is no different in civic literacy. The type of skills eventually varies depending on what society expects from the proper roles of democratic citizens. For people who consider voting is sufficient for civic engagement, few skills need to be developed in youth (Llewellyn et al., 2010). However, a survey conducted by Kubow (1997, p. 38) identified several skills for a strong citizenship

the ability to understand, accept, and tolerate cultural differences; the ability to work with others in a co-operative way and to take responsibility for one’s roles and duties within society; ... a willingness to resolve conflict in a nonviolent manner; the ability to be sensitive towards and to defend human rights; and the capacity to think in a critical and systemic way.

Based on a report by Carnegie Foundation and CIRCLE (2003), Smith (2012) emphasized two key components of civic skills: active listening and a respect to diverse approaches. One of the ultimate goals of civic education is to develop “component and responsible citizens” who are “concerned for the rights and welfare of others;” who are “socially responsible, and willing to listen to alternative perspectives” (Carnegie Foundation and CIRCLE, 2003, p. 10). A review of literature displayed various definitions for civic skills, and to be able to see the big picture, an exhaustive list of description is provided in table one.

Table 1

Civic skills defined in the literature by chronological order

| Author, year | Skills as defined by author(s) | Skill referred to |
|--|--|---|
| Morse (1993) | "dealing with difficult decisions for which there are no right or wrong answers" (p. 165) | Critiquing |
| Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) | Proficiency in English, vocabulary, write a letter, make a speech or presentation. Knowledge of how to cope in an organizational setting. Attend a meeting in which decisions are made, plan such a meeting. | Communication Collaboration Collaboration |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Patrick (2003) | <p>Monitoring public events and issues, influencing and implementing policy decisions on public issues, taking action to improve political and civic life.</p> <p>Influencing and implementing policy decisions on public issues and taking action to improve political and civic life.</p> <p>Interacting with other citizens to promote personal and common interests, deliberating and making decisions about public policy.</p> | <p>Critiquing</p> <p>Communication, Collaboration</p> |
| Kirlin (2005) | "civic skills are competencies that allow one to become a participant in democratic processes rather than an observer." (p. 308) | Collaboration |
| Llewellyn, Cook, & Molina, (2010) | Support a candidate for office, organize a protest, locate information, and develop policy | Collaboration, Critiquing |
| Johnson (2011) | <p>Skills to monitor events and understand context, to deliberate and appreciate other points of view, to follow a plan to reach a goal, and to know who the decision makers are and how to work with others</p> | <p>Critiquing, Collaboration</p> |

After analyzing different definitions by different scholars, I drew a pattern of categories as follows: 1) Critiquing: Critiquing ideas, and questioning positions. The

ability to gather, judge and distill information. The ability to identify multiple causes beneath problems and to interpret political communication; 2) Communication: Understanding and listening to others/other views are frequently mentioned. They come before expressing one's opinions. The ability to discuss controversial issues without demonizing others or their opinions; and 3) Collaboration: Participation in community matters or attending to meetings is one of the most important civic skills considered by many studies. This category also includes working with others and problem-solving. These categories and skills in each category do not imply a final draft for all civic skills, but unlike a simplified version of civic skills such as voting or volunteerism, based on a broad analysis of civic skills, they are comprehensive civic skills needed for an effective civic engagement in a democratic system.

School and External Level Factors

Factors that influence student achievement or the very core of schooling present a wide variety of characteristics, ranging from very global to very specific (Spade, Vanfossen, & Jones, 1985; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). Such a factor can be the culture in the building, school district leadership, principal, parents, or even the physical condition of the building. What factors are considered as school-level factors, and what factors are considered as external-level factors? Different studies listed different factors as school or external level factors (Marzano, 2003; Purkey & Smith, 1993). For example, the following list of school-level factors, which is widely used to this day, were developed by Daniel Levine and Lawrence Lezotte (1990):

- productive climate and culture,
- focus on central learning skills,

Hoy et al., (2012) gave a two-tier explanation to structures in schools: First tier is composed of two patterns and they are bureaucratic and professional patterns. The second tier is the four types of organization structures: 1) A Weberian school structure (described by Karl Weber as an ideal type) is a mixture of both professionalization and bureaucratization, 2) an authoritarian structure emphasizes bureaucratic authority and monopolizes the power, 3) a professional structure is where the organization members are treated as experts and competent of all job assignments, and 4) a chaotic structure is lack of both professionalization and bureaucratization, thus confusion and ineffectiveness are the common characteristic of chaotic structure.

An attempt from chaotic structure to authoritarian structure, from authoritarian structure to Weberian structure, and from Weberian structure to professional structure is a stable environment, but a change from professional structure to chaotic structure or from Weberian structure to authoritarian structure is a turbulent environment (Hoy et al., 2012). Change always happens in organizations, but it is a real challenge to determine how to successfully implement a planned change (Scherer & Spillane, 2011). Some scholars identified different aspects of the school organization as critical to planned change: For example, Seashore-Louis and Kruse (1995), Lee and Loeb (2000), McLaughlin and Talbert (2001), Bryk and Schneider (2002), and Seashore-Louis (2006) all pointed to the normative structure including norms of trust, collective responsibility and academic press. Frank, Zhao, and Borman (2004), Leana and Pil (2006), and Penuel, Frank, and Krause (2007) focused more on the behavior or interaction patterns among organizational members, underscoring the critical role of strong ties and ties that span the formal organizational structure in enabling planned change.

Drawing from various studies, Sherer and Spillane (2011, p. 615) explained different frames to study planned change in organizations and schools that “Some [scholars] focus on the leader, identifying, for example, behaviors along a developmental continuum, a set of behaviors, styles, or functions. Other scholars focus on building a culture of change or the need for people to learn together.” Organizational routines define the structure in the school, and they are a key component of everyday life in organizations (Sherer & Spillane, 2011). Organizational routines are often taken for granted, but they define work practices by enabling and constraining interactions among organizational members. Organizational routines contribute to constancy in organizational work practice, and reduce conflict about how work gets done and who has responsibility for what (Cohen & Bacdayan, 1996; Feldman, 2000; Feldman & Pentland, 2003). On the other hand, organizational routines also have a hitch as they allow organizational members to go through the motions of work with a certain degree of mindlessness, potentially contributing to deskilling and demotivation (Hannan & Freeman, 1984).

Bureaucracy in School Structure

Characteristics of bureaucratic structure became an integral part of the organizational blueprint for most public schools (George & Bishop, 1971). These characteristics are 1) division of labor, 2) professionalization, 3) hierarchy of authority, and 4) administrative staff of clerks (Blau, Heydebrand, & Stauffer, 1966), and this kind of structure empirically criticized as early as 1960s it being inadequate and not compatible with schools (Bennis, 1967; Golembiewski, 1966). Bidwell (1965) claimed that systems which were highly bureaucratic, and consequently emphasized

School Culture and Climate

Deal (1985), Sarason (1996), Hopkins (2001), Harris (2002), and many more asserted that culture or climate (used interchangeably in the literature) in schools is the center of planned change. However, research that explore the role of school climate and school culture in the school improvement process is surprisingly scarce (Lindahl, 2006), yet existing studies (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Deal & Peterson, 1994; Wilson & McGrail, 1987) are promising that understanding school culture and school climate, and measuring them will eventually help educators attain a planned change.

School culture and school climate are difficult terms to describe, and indeed, there are probably as many definitions as the number of authors attempting to define these constructs (Lindahl, 2006). Some drew sharp lines between two that, for example, Rousseau (1990) differentiated between these two constructs on the basis of climate being the descriptive beliefs and perceptions individuals hold of the organization, while culture is the shared values, beliefs, and expectations that develop from social interactions within the organization. Some, however, thought that the “boundaries between organizational climate and culture can appear to be artificial, arbitrary, and even largely unnecessary” (Lindahl, 2006, p. 2), and offered an integrated description for both constructs. Cited in Owens (2004) and Lindahl (2006), Tagiuri (1968)’s systemic model presented culture as one of four components of organizational climate, along with ecology, milieu, and structure.

Culture refers to norms, values, and beliefs that exist in school and can be very difficult to change or measure, while climate refers to perceived environmental factors that impact behavior, and thus may be more amenable to influence and change (Drago-

schools today have new dynamics and changed balances because of many factors including recent standardization and accountability practices. Therefore, based on Johnson, Stevens, and Zvoch's (2007) school climate study, I proposed a revised school climate where its quality is indicated by leadership, instructional innovation, decision-making, school resources, student relations, and collaboration.

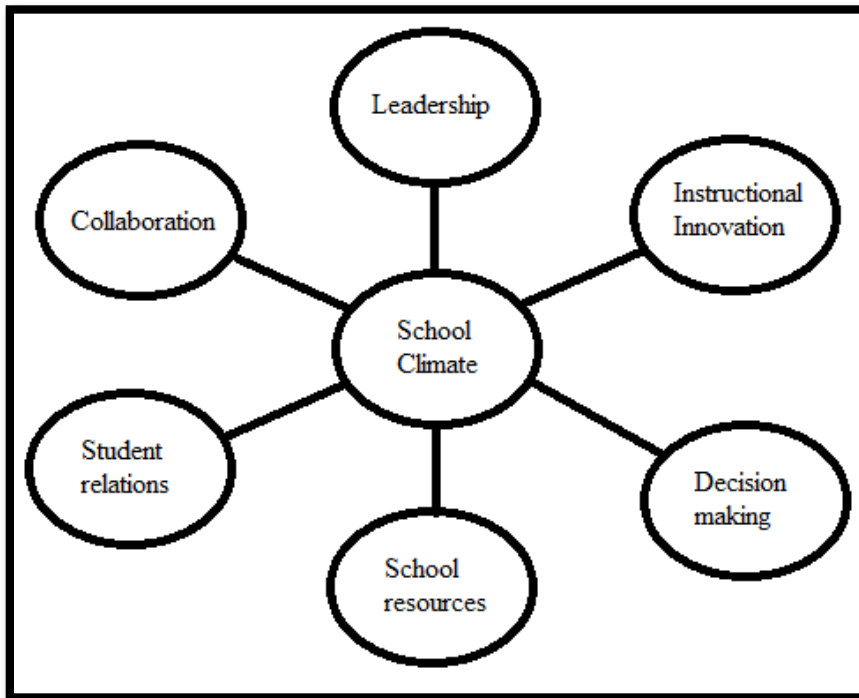


Figure 2. Revised school climate. Adapted from Johnson, Stevens, and Zvoch (2007)

Deal and Peterson (1994) claimed that dysfunctional school climates such as inward focus, short-term focus, low morale, fragmentation, inconsistency, emotional outbursts, and subculture values that surpass shared organizational values, can impede organizational improvement. The perception that teaching is an isolated and self-reliant profession is partly because of the school's organizational structure (Fallon & Barnett, 2009; Flinders, 1988), therefore, restructuring activities that are designed to break this

Edison, how did it feel to fail 999 times?” As the story goes, Thomas Edison just replied, “Young man, I have not failed 999 times. I have simply found 999 ways how not to create a light bulb.” (Chinsky, 2012, para. 2) Fostering civic skills requires patience, practice and participation. Fostering civic skills requires a school climate that encourages students to think and try; tells them that it is okay to make mistakes; and makes both teachers and students feel comfortable in unsettling the settled.

School climate also influences the nature of school leadership by utilizing leadership capacity (Camburn et al., 2003; Rutherford, 2006). Camburn et al. (2003, p. 350) described this utilization as an activation composed of “social processes that encourage incumbents of the formally-designated leadership positions to actively perform leadership functions.” On the other hand, principal as the school leader has a profound effect on school climate (Pepper & Thomas, 2002). Principals have the capacity to guide the direction a school wants to move forward to and the capacity to create relationships within the school community that impact the overall climate.

School Leadership

There is substantial evidence in the literature to suggest that a school principal must first understand the school’s climate before implementing change (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). School leaders should provide an atmosphere of optimism rather than an environment of competition and confrontation (Pepper & Thomas, 2002). Littrell and Billingsley (1994, p. 308) claimed that uniting the staff through a ‘we’ approach rather than a hierarchical approach helped teachers to feel esteemed and respected as well as committed to and satisfied with their jobs. In a recent study, Black (2010) also inserted that school leaders investing time and effort in assessing and improving their schools'

The second leadership type is transactional leadership in which the leaders promote compliance of their followers through both rewards and punishments. This type of leadership is also known as managerial leadership. Transactional leaders recognize what followers want from work and they provide them with what they want (Hoy et al., 2012). Bass and Riggio (2005) stated that transactional leadership can be very effective in most situations especially by providing followers with rewards contingent on the follower's performance. Transactional leadership is effective in industry organizations including schools with bureaucratic structure. The third type is transformational leadership which can be considered as an augmentation to transactional leadership. According to Hoy et al. (2012), transformational leaders go beyond simple exchanges and agreements. They are proactive and raise the awareness levels of followers about collective conscience.

Hauserman and Stick (2013) studied the leadership that teachers want from principals with a sample of 77 Canadian schools, and they supported Bass' (1985) idea that transactional and transformational leadership qualities were not dichotomous, but that elements of both styles were present in effective leaders, surfacing to greater or lesser degrees according to prevailing circumstances. More precisely, a transactional leader works within a defined system and follows its rules. Control is maintained through processes. On the other hand, transformational leaders seek new ways of doing things and are less likely to support the status quo. They shape an environment where followers are a part of the process (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

Transactional leadership skills is a foundation for the development of transformational leadership skills and the relationship between the two leadership styles

2013), teacher beliefs are considered as one of the most valuable constructs for teacher education (Kagan, 1992; Kim, Kim, Lee, Spector, & DeMeester, 2013; Pajares, 1992).

Ernest (1988) also argued that teachers' beliefs have an influential impact on instruction. For example, teachers' beliefs influence decisions about the specific lesson objectives and lesson content, as well as what instructional strategies are most appropriate for providing optimal learning opportunities for students (Belo, van Driel, van Veen, & Verloop, 2014; Meirink, Meijer, Verloop, & Bergen, 2009). Also, teachers hold complex beliefs that influence more or less every aspect of teaching, including defining and selecting instructional tasks, knowledge acquisition, choices of assessment, and interpreting course content (Belo et al., 2014; Keys, & Bryan, 2001). In brief, people act upon what they believe (Mansour, 2013). Even more, Nespor (1987) decisively stated that educational reforms could only succeed if and when teachers' beliefs are seriously taken into account and incorporated into the reform. Therefore, it is important to understand teachers' beliefs, and their beliefs on factors that might support or hinder their efforts in the promotion of civic skills.

On the other hand, school leadership (principal's behaviors that are recognized by the teachers) can influence teachers' beliefs in emphasizing accomplishment, giving frequent feedback, and promoting an academic emphasis in the school (Dumay & Galand, 2012; Ross & Gray, 2006). A principal is critical in creating organizational conditions under which teachers work best (Blase & Kirby, 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Recent reforms on school change call for successful educational leaders who have a deeper understanding of how to create sustainable organizational conditions. Hauserman and Stick (2013) emphasized that shifting leadership from a sole decision-

maker to greater teacher involvement fostered positive change among teachers. Teachers experienced a sense of empowerment when they viewed themselves capable of focusing on student learning (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

Leadership actions can help teachers in emphasizing student learning, giving frequent feedback and encouraging an academic emphasis in the school (Dumay & Galand, 2012). Transactional leaders, for example, seeks to manage and control organizational members to move toward a predetermined set of goals; however, for teachers' improvement, the leadership must transmit a vision of the improvement (Rhoden, 2012). High-functioning schools were found to have transformational principals who shaped the school vision and a principal's vision and the establishment of a collegial culture fostered teacher empowerment (Skalbeck, 1991). Hoy and Smith (2007) found that transformational leadership – unlike transactional leadership – empowered teachers. Blasé & Kirby's (2008) findings supported previous statement that teachers reported that principals who had the greatest influence were open, participatory, and effective. Principals demonstrating transformational leadership were also related to better student learning and more committed teachers (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

In their study on the mediating effects of teacher beliefs on school improvement, Ross and Gray (2006) found that teacher belief was connected to the context in which teachers work. For school leaders, it is very important to understand how climate influences teachers and overall school performance. Each school has its own culture that forms the climate of the school and sends a message to teachers and students about what is important (Wilén, Ishler, Hutchison, & Kindsvatter, 2000). A professional school climate provides teachers with collaboration in which they work together by offering

education, and go through some similar challenges that some oppressed groups have experienced in the past and critical theorists critiqued, but in a modern format. Again, there is no right or wrong theoretical framework to use when examining this research topic, but a critical theory perspective provided a practical guidance to me in investigating teachers' beliefs in fostering civic skills because as van Manen (1990) also emphasized critical theory tries to promote critical consciousness, and struggles to break down the institutional structures and arrangements which reproduce oppressive ideologies and the social inequalities that are sustained and produced by these social structures and ideologies.

In 1970, Marx and Engels outlined the idea of hegemony as how the ideas of the ruling class become universalized as the ideas of all. Brookfield (2005, p. 94) additionally explained that ideology “can be viewed as embedded in a system of practices — behaviors and actions that people learn to live out on a daily basis within personal relationships, institutions, work, and community.” Brookfield continued that “Ideology becomes hegemony when the dominant ideas are learned and lived everyday decisions and judgments and when these ideas pervade the whole of existence” (p. 94). As one of the central beliefs driving critical theory, hegemony has been also discussed by many scholars as false consciousness.

It should be noted that false consciousness is not ignorance, but is a state of “social life...systematically distorted by social forces” (Wood, 1988, p. 358). Therefore, among many, Certeau (1984), and Freeman and Vasconcelos (2010) emphasized that developing critical consciousness helps people see themselves as active subjects rather than people to act upon, and it is a reflective approach and a means to liberation.

Formation and development of critical consciousness is important for liberation (Gramsci, 1971) because “the oppressed have internalized the values, beliefs, and even world view of their oppressors... and willingly cooperate with those who oppress them in maintaining those social practices that result in their oppression” (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010, p. 12).

Another central concept of critical theory is commodification or objectification. Commodification is originally a Marxist notion that a human quality or relationship is regarded as a product, good, or commodity to be bought and sold, and in a such a setting, exchange value of a product (monetary worth) becomes more important than its use value (satisfaction of a human need or desire).

Critical theory informed and helped me frame the study in two ways. First, central to the phenomenon of this research, most high-stakes accountability policies suggest that student achievement is to be measured and this measurement is attributed to the teaching quality of teachers. There is a value that we ascribed to teaching in this sense. The concept of subjectification now can tell us that although the value of teaching (for example, teaching self-confidence or being a good citizen) is important, it is mainly the exchange value (for example, scoring high on Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) that policymakers or education interest groups consider when deciding on curriculum, funding, or evaluation. Among countless examples, one is a newspaper article that highlights the importance of international tests: “Fourth- and eighth-grade students in the United States continue to lag behind students in several East Asian countries and some European nations in math and science [...]” (Rich, 2012); thus, policymakers responded to this problem in the American education system by placing

understanding. Therefore, the important step is to find what the best tools are for a specific study, and to realize the strengths and the weaknesses of those tools in the research.

In a qualitative study, in-depth understating is a key feature where the researcher takes a wider step to investigate a phenomenon in depth. The deeper investigation is especially needed in social and educational sciences because educational phenomena are so much more complex than most natural phenomena. There are two constructs in my study, including 1) school and external level factors, and 2) public school teachers' beliefs in fostering civic skills among their students. I chose to conduct my study in a qualitative research tradition to understand teachers better, and how they do what they do and what they need, so I can see the relationship between the factors and teachers' beliefs. The overall design of my study was developed to understand this relationship is displayed in figure 3.

Although all teachers are supposed to contribute to a child's civic skills development, social studies teachers were selected because they are the ones who are primarily responsible for promoting instruction and activities that develop students' civic skills. Finally, teachers who teach 6th, 7th, and 8th grades participated in this study because students in these grades are at a critical stage for their learning (Amna, 2012; Kaviani, 2011). The participants (whose names are pseudonyms) are profiled so that the reader gains insight about each.

Mr. Baker

Mr. Baker began teaching in 1993. At the time of the study, he taught social studies, and was certified in English and math also. He previously served in assistant principal and principal roles, but went back to teaching. When I praised him because of his expansive experiences, he sarcastically spoke of the recent policies citing how there was no significance difference in performance between novice and senior teachers.

Ms. Williams

Ms. Williams was passionate about teaching, and she loved her students. She is a social studies teacher with a certification in special education. She is a veteran teacher, and taught in middle school for the majority of her teaching career.

Mr. Miller

Mr. Miller served in the Army and worked for the Government, but he was not pleased with this type of work. He gave a pause to his career by going back to graduate school for a master's degree in public administration. He took a substitute teaching job on the side while in school, and realized teaching had been the job he was looking for. At the time of this study, he had taught for 13 years. He described teachers as people with a

Once permissions to conduct a research study from the school district and an institutional review board were obtained, principals at Clearwater Middle and Pinecrest Middle were asked to distribute my recruitment mail to the social studies teachers. A total of six teachers from these two schools volunteered to participate in the study. An interview protocol was constructed to understand teachers' beliefs about school and external level factors, and how these factors affect teachers when attempting to foster civic skills among their students. Opinions from practitioners and experts were taken into consideration when I formed the interview questions. Questions that helped me structure an interview conversation are provided in table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Interview questions

1. Please tell me about you and your work.
2. Can you provide an example of helping your students to recognize multiple perspectives towards an issue/problem?
 - a. Can you provide other examples?
 - b. Are you able to accomplish this in most of your classes?
3. Are you able to show your students that it is okay to take risks, make mistakes, and think divergently?
 - a. Can you provide an example?
 - b. Are you able to show your students that there are often more than one correct answer to a question?
 - c. Can you provide an example?
 - d. What impact does heavy reliance on single correct answer multiple choice testing have on students' willingness to take chances or think divergently?
4. How would you describe critical thinking skills?
5. How do school-level factors affect your ability to promote critical thinking skills?
 - a. What helps you in promoting critical thinking skills in your students?
 - b. What impedes you from promoting critical thinking skills in your students?
6. Can you provide your students with opportunities to develop their collaboration skills?

- a. Can you provide an example?
 - b. Are you able to accomplish this in most of your classes?
 7. How can you promote respect for others' views in your students?
 8. What do you think the school's role is in promoting the following:
 - a. Listening to others/other views
 - b. Discussing controversial topics
 - c. Working with others
 - d. Participating in events
 - e. Judging and distilling information
 - f. Perspective-taking and interpreting problems
 9. What impact does the use of social media have on students in developing these skills?
-

As stated earlier, the interviews were semi-structured meaning that I did not follow the protocol verbatim. Each interview had its own dynamics, and there were times that the topic was very relevant to the study, so I dug out more and more information by following the stream of the participants. Also, the participants were not given a list of factors, so that they would talk about them. Instead, the participants came up with factors that they believed to supported or hindered civic skills. The participants were only reminded of a factor if it was a significant one and the participant had never mentioned it (e.g., "how about collaboration with your colleagues?").

First interviews with each participant were audio-recorded with their permissions. Each session ran between 30 to 90 minutes. Some themes began emerging as I talked with the participants. One or two weeks after the first interviews, the participants were interviewed again. Field notes and notes from the first interview recordings were used to frame the second interviews. Sometimes, it is difficult to come up with examples when we are asked about something, but our brains continue thinking about it afterwards. That's why, the second interview session rendered more productive and rich conversations with the participants. These interviews were also audio-recorded. At the

social media and web content. With the help of this software, common themes from each participant were coded and categorized. As an example, Table 3.2 shows how each transcription was analyzed for the participants' perspectives.

Table 3.2

Sample of Transcription Analysis

| Key words | Code | Factor originated | Comments |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| I think one of the challenges that we have is planning and the amount of time we have for planning. So in order to come up with activities and structure them in a way that's helpful to my kids... | Planning | Internally | Lack of planning time, impedes |
| A lot of that [support] comes from things that my teammates and me find and put together ourselves. | Collaboration | Internally | support |
| If parents don't make them be respectful toward adults and things like that at home, rarely are they going to come here and be respectful. If parents are at home and they can't read themselves, then most of the time their children can't read. | Parents | Externally | Potential to support or impede |
| It has to start with conversations with the parents and in our country we don't have a society of parents anymore that raise their children. | Parents | Externally | Impede |
| Kids don't like to think. These kids don't like to think. I don't know about all other kids but they do not like to think. They want you to do the thinking for them | Attitudes toward education/students | Internally | Impede |

students as informed and civilly engaged citizens, but this role is primarily given to social studies classes in our current education system. With the recent federal education initiatives such as No Child Left Behind or Common Core, courses including social studies have been regulated - or standardized - in terms of curriculum and evaluation.

Going back to the issue of subjectivity, I know that struggling for an objective perspective is not more than a bluff when I am looking at the problems with promoting democracy and civic empowerment among the youth. We are human beings, and we come with our own backgrounds, life experiences, and biases. Nonetheless, if I look beyond the positions of my objectivity or subjectivity and focus on how my subjectivity informs my ways of constructing and producing knowledge, then I can create compelling and convincing argument about how I write myself into my research as a valid form of scientific inquiry in qualitative methods. Peshkin (1988) believed that one's subjectivity cannot be removed and researcher should systematically seek out their subjectivity during the entire research process

Researchers should systematically identify their subjectivity throughout the course of their research. When researchers observe themselves in focused ways, they learn about the particular subset of personal qualities that contact with their research phenomenon has released. These qualities have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement. (p. 17)

Initially, there were two things to be identified for a researcher to be able to seek out their subjectivity: Bias and reactivity (Maxwell, 2012). I saw myself both biased and reactive in this study because the motive for this study came out to be a desire to change things and I decided not to continue teaching, but pursue my further studies to make some changes in teachers' lives and consequently in people's lives. I believed that taken their

autonomy away, public school teachers as a community resembled the characteristics of an oppressed community. Therefore, I knew I might have carried my research in a reactive or protective way.

This reactive or protective way of my stance had been also fueled by being a teacher and an intern at the United States Capitol and by seeing how policies are shaped: Education policies were not necessarily initiated by education specialists, and the process in which a policy was formed can be influenced by various factors such as political popularity, intellectual ignorance, or lack of time. Commonness of writings or popular beliefs about the ineffectiveness of bureaucratic practices of such government policies also gave me a feeling of alienating policymakers rather than seeing them the inevitable part of the education system in a democratic society.

In a traditional scientific discourse, subjectivity is often presented as a polar opposite to objectivity. In this sense, objectivity is often seen as an absence of bias, thus implicitly implying that subjectivity is equated with bias. However, subjectivity is highly dependent on one's epistemological and ontological assumptions, so I know its presence should be acknowledged and I worked out with my own subjectivities throughout this study.

Credibility, Transferability, and Dependability

Depending on their philosophical perspectives, some qualitative researchers reject the framework of validity or reliability that is commonly accepted in more quantitative research in the social sciences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Credibility, commonly known as internal validity, involves gathering accurate data, and establishing that the findings of the study are credible. Several procedures were employed to secure the credibility of this

degree. Interviewing method is a great tool for producing valuable knowledge especially when trying to understand a social phenomenon. However, it may limit the research because the researcher is the instrument to measure the construct and I might come with my biases and reactions that might change the direction of interview. Findings from the interviews are also limited in a sense that they are difficult to be generalized.

Nonetheless, this does not imply an insignificance. Education reforms have suffered greatly because we have long taken a position that only welcomes “generalizable” results. However, for educational phenomena, it is very important to understand issues in-depth and broadly, and with the help of the reflectivity of the interviews, this study aimed to do that.

The next chapter presents the findings of this study in an aggregate form as categorized by common themes, and as factors that either supported or hindered students’ civic skills development.

collaboration would be a great way to help students excel their skills, she did not experience the collaboration she wanted:

From my grade level and my other Social Studies teachers, we don't collaborate very well. So when I want to try a real activity or something, we don't have that collaboration. We're working on it. I think I have support from my principal and everything, but collaboration on a grade level is not great. I don't know why.

Having time for instructional planning was found to be as important as collaboration among teachers. Findings for planning are presented next.

Planning

Findings showed that *planning* was a theme that needed to be discussed as a factor that helped teachers with promoting civic skills, and its inexistence as a factor that impeded teachers. Mr. Thomas believed that "If you're going to be a good teacher, you need time to plan. It takes time to develop that lesson like you're talking about where there's a lot of collaborative learning, and it's well-thought out and it's critical thinking." Mr. Martinez gave an example that it showcases how and why planning was important in a class where students' civic skills flourish:

So in order to come up with activities, and structure them in a way that's helpful to my kids, I'm having my kids have roles so they learn how to collaborate for example. I want to think that through and plan those activities very well because I need to give them structure. I can't just say, 'Go work on this together' because some of them don't know how to do that yet. I need to teach them. So thinking through, that takes time.

Planning can be made stronger by collaboration among teachers, and findings showed that collaborative planning was one of the foundations for more meaningful instruction in classroom. Ms. Williams said that she collaborated with a Language Arts teacher for her social studies class where students talked about the Declaration of Independence letter after they worked on writing separation letters for the Language Arts

teacher. Students “had to write up information, but Language Arts teacher had given them the format to do it,” Ms. Williams said, and continued “The product was a finished product; they wrote a separation letter from something or someone. The Language Arts teacher looked for punctuation. How it was assembled and what not. So they received two grades for one assignment.”

Findings showed that planning was a strong indicator for well-thought out classroom instruction that promoted civic skills. Having some time for instructional preparation was mentioned by almost all participants, but something as they did not have anymore. Planning is again discussed more under the impediments section. The third and the last school level factor that was found to support teachers was teacher motivation.

Teacher motivation

We know that the teacher is one of the most influential factors for a child’s academic achievement (Baldy et al., 2014). This is a two-way direction, though: Students can achieve very high because they might have a motivated teacher; or students can be left behind because their teacher might be an unmotivated person in the classroom. Ms. Taylor expressed that she tried to make sure that her students were “not just learning the facts of the culture or the facts of the religion,” but they had a “chance to have an opinion,” and she gave an example: “We just talked about different economies in Europe. They had to decide which economy they thought worked the best and why.” Ms. Taylor asked her students “which type of economy would be the best for their country if they had their own country.” She believed that “this gives them an opportunity to express and come up with their own opinions and things.”

be lack of time for planning, teacher beliefs about education, and how systems deal with children's motor behaviors.

Lack of time for planning

As mentioned before, planning – having time to spend for classroom preparation - has a positive effect on promoting civic skills. Nonetheless, almost all the participants saw *time* as a problem, and they felt like their planning time was taken away day by day, and allotted for other tasks in the building. Mr. Thomas continued: “There are a lot of resources out there that you can use. You modify them for your class, but nevertheless that takes time. And our planning time has just been taken from us,” and he explained that school climate was compounded because of the tough times in economy. Mr. Thomas further elaborated that “People started acting like ‘you should just be glad you’ve got a job. Don’t complain about what we ask you to do because if you want to complain or rock the boat, we’ll find somebody else to come do it.’”

There is also a human side to teaching where it is sometimes very difficult to anticipate students’ interests or their motivations, so planning should be comprehensive and include alternatives in case something does not work with a certain group of students on a certain day. For instance, Mr. Miller stated that “I think lesson plans are great, but that’s what they should be is just a plan. So I know what I’m going to be doing on that day, but exactly how I’m going to be doing it, I really may not know.” He believed that he was more of “an artist painting with a brush than somebody who is working on a lathe.” Mr. Miller continued to explain further about planning: “I see how things go in the classroom. If I’m trying to do A and A doesn’t work and then suddenly some kid comes up with a B that all the kids go yeah! Well, that’s where I go.” Ms. Williams mentioned

the same issue with planning. Mr. Baker also said: “Sometimes I just stop what I’m doing and I just go, okay, this isn’t working, let’s do it this way. Let’s try it this way.”

However, for teachers to be able to say “let’s try something else,” they need time to think about what needs to change and why. The following two examples from other participants summarized what happened when teachers did not have planning time while they were in the building. Mr. Martinez shared:

Sometimes I just spend time thinking about how to set up groups so that my kids would be more successful or how to teach them to think critically and collaborate and I don’t have enough time to do that. So I’ll go with whatever maybe my first idea is instead of spending more time.

The second example supported the idea that having no time for preparation pushed teachers to “cut corners” and to create lessons plans that was prepared in minutes and were mainly “blah blah blah blah blah,” according to Mr. Thomas. He continued his explanation:

I understand there are going to be certain things you do outside this building, but it shouldn’t be a thing where the expectation is you go home and do all your planning at home. If you expect me to go home and do all this, then it’s going to be hard for me to come to work everyday with a lot of energy and a lot of enthusiasm and me taking that time to plan out that great lesson because let’s be realistic. When people are tired, they’re going to cut corners.

As discussed earlier and in this section, instructional planning time had a positive effect on promoting civic skills by helping teachers construct well-planned classes.

Nevertheless, ‘time’ was found to be a problem for the participants. The next factor is teacher beliefs about the education system in general.

Teacher beliefs about education

Findings showed that some teachers’ beliefs about the education in the United States in general are an invisible barrier to the promotion of civic skills. Even though all

the participants were motivated teachers, three teachers' attitudes toward education did not speak the same. Participants had the hope in students, but this sense of otherwise hopelessness seemed to come from things that bothered teachers such as lack of parental involvement or pressure to teach to the test. Mr. Miller raised his voice and showed some enthusiasm when he talked about education in general: "In this country, we have a huge challenge of students showing up who are not ready for school. So that's a real challenge. There are some unrealistic expectations on teachers. what I'm expected to actually do everyday is completely ludicrous."

Mr. Thomas' attitude toward education was also negative because he believed that everything became "very results-oriented" and teachers were just numbers to compare, and teachers had no control over results. Mr. Thomas further elaborated:

The educators that are closest to the system, the local board, the teachers, the administrators do not like a lot of the changes coming down. They're being made by legislators who are never in the classroom; who don't know anything about teaching other than the fact that when they were in school some of them 50 years ago. And they supposedly listen to recommendations, but what they're listening to are the political people that pay them money.

Unfortunately, Mr. Baker also believed that the students are not at a level where they can articulate original and critical ideas because they do not get enough support from their parents in terms of reading and academic motivation. Mr. Baker shared, "I don't know about other countries but these kids do not like to think. They want you to do the thinking for them and when you ask them a 'why?' or a 'how?' question smoke comes out of their ears."

The third and last factor that impeded the promotion of civic skills was how we deal with children's motor behaviors, and is presented next.

Table 4.5

External-level factors

| Factors | II. External-level: |
|------------------|---|
| a. Foster | 1. Teacher observation 2. School district 3. Parental involvement |
| b. Impede | 1. Lack of parental involvement 2. Teacher observation 3. School district 4. Testing |

Table 4.5 displays the categorized factors that originated outside of the school such as the school district, or policies from a state department of education.

External level factors that foster the promotion of civic skills

Factors that are externally motivated, and supported the participants in their efforts to promote critiquing, communicating, and collaborating skills among their students were found to be teacher collaboration, school district, and parental involvement.

Teacher observation

Teachers are observed as part of their job performance evaluation. Findings showed that teachers welcomed observations, and thought they were necessary. Observations also helped teachers promote skills such as critiquing, collaborating and communicating with their students. However, findings also indicated that teachers benefited from classroom observations “done” by administrators when they were done

right. Here Mr. Thomas explained an observation he would want to see and have benefited from: “Some schools have hundreds of teachers in a building and four administrators. That’s an unrealistic ratio for them to constantly be in classrooms all the time. Get middle level people like instructional coaches trained with it.” And he continued to explain how instructional coaches could conduct their observations: “They don’t have to have anything to write down, just come in and talk to kids. Do that a couple of times a week. You don’t have to have that checklist in front of you. That intimidates people.”

A good example of teacher observation is where a teacher is visited frequently in an unthreatening manner, and is comforted that the observations are carried out to create opportunities for professional development. Mr. Martinez also thought it promoted student engagement: “What our administrators do on walk-throughs, a lot of times they pick certain things they’re looking for. For the first quarter of the year they’ll be looking for differentiation, for example, but they always want our students to be engaged.” Even though teacher observation is an effective tool to help teachers with their instructional and classroom strategies, malpractice during observations negatively influence the learning environment. Findings about teacher observation experienced by the participants are discussed further in the impediments section. The next external factor that, even though little, helped teachers with their efforts was school district.

School district

Looking at the data, we see that the school district has little effect on teachers’ beliefs about promoting civic skills. The commentary of Ms. Williams was illustrative of this finding: “I don’t know at this point if I see a lot of just direct support from that level,

we don't have a ton of parent support here and that has always been a struggle, which is sad, very sad.

Supporting Mr. Taylor's stance, Mr. Miller touched on how parents' disengagement created further problems: "They have one parent who is maybe working two jobs. They've been exposed to little that helps them academically. They show up and they don't have any reading skills. Education is not high on the to-do list in their home."

Mr. Baker also brought up some disturbing facts about parents:

We work with some kids that don't know where their dinner is coming from. The only food that they eat is what they get at school. And it's hard to make them see multiple perspectives of things. When they're worried about, 'Okay, where am I going to eat?' It's – it's not just here. It's everywhere. That, that, the -- we are expected to raise the children. We have to teach the children how to behave, how to think, how to read, how to write... Nothing is done in the home. Nothing.

Just like teacher collaboration where students should see a stable and constant environment where they are expected to think harder and collaborate with other students, findings suggest that this should also be the case for teacher and parent, but findings also showed that it was not the case.

While parental involvement had a positive effect on teachers, lack of it made the same effect in a negative way. This was also true for teacher observation. Lack of effective practice during teacher observations experienced by the participants was found to be hindering teachers.

Teacher observation

As discussed about the factors that foster the promotion of civic skills, teacher observation was welcomed by teachers. Findings showed that teachers thought they were necessary, and helped them promote skills such as critiquing, collaborating and communicating with their students. However, the participants expressed that the way they

were observed sometimes created impediments for working on students' communication, collaboration, and critiquing skills. Moreover, it sometimes made teachers adopt an attitude toward teacher observation in general as Mr. Miller would describe:

They [district] printed out the standards on paper about this long [spreading arms half way]. They had us hang it in the front. They say, 'this is what the District requires. Take your standards. Put them in the front prominently displayed.' I say, 'all right.' If that's what they want, I did it. They hang around for about 10 minutes and then I get this piece of paper and it tells me that my standards were not clearly visible.

Mr. Miller continued to explain how this incident permanently affected him in regard to teacher observation: "I tore down that stupid thing and it's in that closet over there. That's crazy-making. That was one of the things that made me decide to just tune that stuff out: Worry about the students in my classroom being successful." Mr. Miller said that he stopped worrying about it forever because he believed that he was a good teacher and always worked "hard enough trying to teach these kids to be successful." He, however, added: "I really don't care what they say to me about my job performance. But, yeah, it's a big stressor for a lot of people in the building."

Ms. Taylor thought, generally, that teacher observation was helpful. However, she added that "honestly" they "are going to come in for 10 minutes;" this is going to be a "snapshot" and "that's frustrating." Mr. Thomas was also frustrated that the observation checklist system was not the best way to help promote civic skills: "Some places have tried to move away from that [checklist] a little bit, but that mentality is still out there and they've replaced the checklist with other things in some ways that still function like a checklist."

Findings showed that although the participants believed that school district had a positive effect, even though it was little, school district had also negative effects on teachers regarding the promotion of civic skills. This was also connected to the issue of testing which is presented next.

Testing

There was an agreement among the participants that there was too much testing in public schools. Mr. Baker enthusiastically stated that “We are over tested. These kids are tested to death. They are -- by the time they hit the end of the year they are sick and tired of tests.” Mr. Baker then summarized the journey of a student’s testing experience:

You got a reading test [for placement]. Then we have to test them on where they are in math and other subjects. Then, every time I start a unit we got to pretest. Every time I end a unit we got to pretest. Every three or four months we have a benchmark test because we got to know where they are in the content. Then you got end of course tests. Then you got end of the year tests. Then you got SAT tests. Then you've got the [international] standardized tests. And they get tired of it. I mean, it's like every time we turn around we're tested.

Findings showed that testing was a factor that impeded teachers from promoting civic skills to their students. Other external-level factors had something to be discussed under the factors that foster civic skills, but testing only falls under the section of impediments for the promotion of civic skills as Mr. Martinez would describe that “I think the tests are a constraint that we have to work within because the tests don’t do a good job of assessing students on whether or not they can think critically or come up with solutions.” Participants saw the tests as a check system whether students knew the facts or the basic concepts rather than a system that would promote higher order thinking.

Continuing on the discussion that teachers' professionalism is limited because so many things are tied to the tests, Mr. Thomas gave more information on how this really affected efforts of going beyond the fact-giving:

Some information you need to give students some background. So you've got a kind of – 'this is going to be a little more traditional today.' You give them some background information, some notes, explaining, and then the next day you'd be able to come in – 'all right, now that you have this information, let's do something with it.' And that would be more of the collaborative side.

But, according to the curriculum map which is based on testing, teachers may not have two days to spend on it as Mr. Thomas provided an example: "We just have to give them the basic information – 'hey, this is what you're going to be responsible for on the test' and move on."

Findings also showed that an accountability system was needed and teachers agreed on this. However, from the data we see that testing is not doing a good job in terms of accountability. Mr. Miller said that "Real skills that they'll learn in class are how to read in-depth material, how to think critically, how to construction arguments and argue with one another and support their reasoning and things like that, those aren't measured on the test." The participants expressed that they would not mind the accountability, but they wanted to be held accountable fairly because as Mr. Thomas put: "We're one of the only professions where we're evaluated on factors that more than 50% of them are out of our control." Here he explained the logic behind it: "Students who come from middle and upper incomes whose families go on vacation, who take them and travel, things like that, they perform better because they're exposed to the world more and they get these more real-world hands-on experiences." He then gave a real-life

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to broaden our understanding of teachers' perspectives about external and school level factors that fostered or impeded students' civic skills development. I hoped to discover what external and school level factors influenced teachers' beliefs about promoting students' critiquing, communicating, and collaborating skills. The following questions framed the study:

- 1) From public school teachers' perspectives, what school-level factors foster students' civic skills?
- 2) From public school teachers' perspectives, what school-level factors impede students' civic skills?
- 3) From public school teachers' perspectives, what external-level factors foster students' civic skills?
- 4) From public school teachers' perspectives, what external-level factors impede students' civic skills?

In this chapter, I presented a discussion of the research study and the data analysis to answer each research question. Implications for future research and final thoughts completed the chapter.

During the interviews, the participants were not given a list of school or external level factors. Rather, the participants were asked for anything that helped or hindered

Findings show that teacher collaboration is an effective way to overcome most of these challenges as teachers work together as a team and each member of the team contributes in a certain way to students' skills development efforts. This can be an assignment for the same grade level and the same subject, so that the assignment will be more than, for example, asking for a definition of oligarchy, but it will be multifaceted and trigger students' thinking because it is invested and well-thought by more than one teacher. Indeed, "teacher isolation is the enemy of improvement" (Kanold, Toncheff, & Douglas, 2008, p. 23).

Collaboration also allows things to happen that one teacher cannot do alone. Simulating civic engagement sometimes takes more than a classroom of students. Voting, for instance, is one of the fundamentals of democracy, and by making up masses with two or more classes, students can realize in person how their engagement makes final decision such as choosing a leader.

When different "brains" contribute to the development of an assignment or a project, it will also be likely a project that appeals to students' various learning capacities. Differentiation of instruction is a phenomenon that educators and policymakers agreed to be significant for students (Tomlinson, 2005). It is also cared much in teacher evaluation. By looking at the data, we see that teachers believe that creating differentiated instruction is difficult. It involves offering several different learning experiences in response to students' varied needs (Ravitch, 2014; Tomlinson, 2005). However, by the help of collaboration among teachers, teachers can "vary learning activities and materials by difficulty, so as to challenge students at different readiness levels; by topic, in response to

students' interests; and by students' preferred ways of learning or expressing themselves" (Ravitch, 2014, p. 75).

Data suggests that collaboration should also be extended to teachers of different subjects. An integrated content is more meaningful to students, and saves teacher time on creating well-thought projects. Data also suggests that seeing their colleagues on board for collaboration encourage teachers toward a more meaningful and differentiated instruction. A collaboration for example between a Social Studies teacher and a Language Arts teacher can allow students to work on one assignment that is comprehensive and helps students develop their skills in expressing ideas. This collaborative planning not only serves to teachers, but also gives a message to students that collaborative and meaningful work is encouraged across different classes. It creates a consistent and stable environment for students to reason that higher order thinking, collaboration, and/or communication are always encouraged and expected. Expectations are documented to have a significant relation to social behavior and academic accomplishments (Bouchev & Harter, 2005; Simpkins, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2005).

Planning is tightly tied to collaboration. Based on the data, teachers firmly believe that if a teacher wants a class where there is a lot of collaborative learning, and it is well-thought, and there is critical thinking, this teacher needs time to plan. Two main barriers to collaboration and planning have been identified to be lack of time and poor administrative support (Leonard & Leonard, 2003; Prytula, Hellsten, & McIntyre, 2010). Instructional planning time is vital to teachers, and the purpose of this time is to prepare for upcoming lessons, discuss data, or call parents (Barney & Deutsch, 2012). Planning prevents teachers from having students work on ill-thought activities, and helps them

plan that helps students to think critically or to collaborate, they teach with the first idea in their lesson plans.

Another factor that slows teachers down in the promotion of civic skills is the teachers themselves, or their beliefs about education. Findings show that teachers are hopeful about their students' achievements, but they have negative ideas about various dynamics of education such as parents or testing, or the politics in the education systems. They believe that some of the issues, for example, lack of parental involvement, or results-oriented educational policies negatively impact their efforts to promote their students' civic skills development.

Lastly, teachers believe that the instruction they are using is against the nature of children's motor behaviors. Findings show that teachers are well aware that their instruction needs to incorporate physical or engaging activities. They, however, feel that they can better meet the needs of what the system wants from teachers (adequate progress on tests) by making their students sit and not to engage in distracting behaviors. The Center on Education Policy (2007) found that some school districts in the United States in 2006 to 2007 reduced recess time by an average of 50 minutes per week to allocate more instructional time. Ramstetter, Murray, and Garner (2010, p. 524) highlighted that recess provided "a unique contribution to a child's creative, social, and emotional development." However, from the data, we can conclude that teachers are under pressure to get their students ready for tests that measure students' knowledge levels over recess in incorporating physical activity. External level factors that helped teacher foster students' civic skills are discussed next.

Insight into Research Question Three

Research question three focused on external-level factors that helped teachers teach their students communicating, collaborating, and critiquing skills. Factors under this category have either minimal positive effect on the teachers' efforts to develop students' civic skills, or they have a potential to help teachers rather than an actual contribution. These factors are teacher observation (as part of teacher evaluation), school district, and parental involvement.

Teachers are observed as part of their job performance evaluations. Data suggests that teachers welcome observations, and believe that they can potentially help them increase their students' achievement. Teachers also think that they can use the feedback to improve their instruction for the students' civic skills development. However, findings show current teacher observation practices do not help teachers in promoting students' civic skills. What are, then, the teacher observation practices that help teachers promote students' communication, collaboration, and critiquing skills? The literature (Range, Finch, Young, & Hvidston, 2014; Zepeda, 2014) suggested that informal teacher observations might promote professional growth and student achievement. Informal observations are brief, and simultaneous, yet it is not a "gotcha moment." Ponticell, Zepeda, Jimenez, Lanoue, Ata, & Haines (in press) also concluded that informal visitation, non-evaluative in nature, provided valuable information about the school's instructional statutes and, it allowed principals to show their presences and extend their assistance when needed in a non-threatening environment.

Even though the school district seems to have little influence on teachers regarding the students' civic skills development, teachers believe that people at the

themselves and how they perform academically (Hamachek, 1995). The last research question is answered next.

Insight into Research Question Four

Research question four focused on external-level factors that impeded teachers from fostering their students' communicating, collaborating, and critiquing skills. These factors were found to be lack of parental involvement, traditional practices in teacher observation, school district, and testing.

As discussed earlier, parental involvement, or in other words, parents' cooperation with teachers in students' academic lives is crucially significant. Therefore, lack of their involvement makes the same weight of its effect, in a negative way. Teachers have little support from their students' parents. Teachers believe that their students are not motivated or assisted at home, and that this creates an adverse situation in their learning processes. This also triggers discipline issues in the building that interrupt orderly learning environments because students know that teachers can not do much about discipline problems.

The second factor under this category is traditional practices in teacher observation. I refrain to call this factor teacher observation because as discussed earlier, teacher observation - described by experts - has a positive influence on teachers' efforts to promote students' civic skills. Nonetheless, observers' inspector-like practices and dwelling on things like the sizes of standards posted on walls frustrate teachers and discourage them.

The school district has little direct or indirect support for teacher regarding students' civic skills development. School district personnel also want teachers to go

beyond presenting facts in their classrooms, but teachers find district workshops or seminars inadequate or meaningless. Moreover, the school district becomes a disliked authority when it implements state-mandated regulations such as benchmark tests or teacher evaluations. Teachers also think that the district's common curriculum that teachers must follow for testing purposes takes away their professionalism and autonomy.

Lastly, testing was found to be an influential factor that teachers believed to be hindering their efforts in promoting civic skills to their students. Students are tested too much, and success (label) both for student and the teacher has become the score students get on the tests. Teachers believe that testing encourages them to focus on knowledge and getting their students ready for tests, and that the tests do not do a good job measuring students' skills. Results from a large-scale study done by Duckworth, Quinn, and Tsukayama (2012) are in align with the current findings that student grades (from homework, projects, etc.) are a better predictor than SAT test scores for a successful graduation or admittance into a university because grades reveal much more than mastery of content. High-stakes tests cause creative interdisciplinary activities and project-based investigations to be left out (Minarechova, 2012) because teachers prefer more traditional models over innovative instructional strategies to maximize students' test scores (Blazer, 2011). High-stakes testing also leads to an increased emphasis on tested content (Blazer, 2011). Levin (2004, p. ix) also argued that "much of what is done under No Child Left Behind is done to increase scores on stultified tests, not to engage students in a world which they will succeed."

The climate is that teachers see tests as a constraint that they cannot do anything about and have to work within. Teachers also see tests as a check system whether

originate at the state or federal level have often times no distinction for different regional settings. Also, civic skills are related to the subject of social studies, but students' development in communicating, collaborating, and critiquing can be improved in any subject matter. Therefore, researchers can obtain a better understating of the promotion of these skills by studying teachers across different subjects and grade-level configurations.

Lastly, a qualitative case study design was used for this study to be able to identify and understand better the factors that may help or may impede teachers' efforts in promoting students' civic skills. A quantitative study in order to assess factors that support or impede civic engagement skills with a larger sample size. This study should also be replicated with a similar size in different geographical regions to see if the results would be similar or different from the present study.

Concluding Thoughts

We want our children to be skilled for the future, but in terms of job skills, we do not know what specific skills they need because most future positions have not yet even been created, or maybe thought about. However, we know what skills children do need to become active citizens in their societies, and they are civic skills. People with critiquing, collaborating, and communicating skills display a strong civic engagement and establish a working democracy. We often complain that civic engagement in the Unites States is decreasing, and we are hurried to blame public schools for this decline. Before we come to a quick conclusion that schools should increase the number of hours spent on social studies, we need to understand what works or does not work with the efforts of fostering civic skills.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Researcher's Statement

We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

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Purpose of the Study

You are asked to participate in this study because you are a public school teacher. The purpose of this research study is to explore teachers' beliefs in fostering civic skills among students and how school and external-level factors have an influence on it.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to meet with one of the researchers to talk about your teaching experiences and how school level factors support or impede your beliefs in fostering civic skills. This interview is expected to take an hour and the entire conversation will be recorded if you agree. Any identifiable information will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used when we are publishing the findings from this study.

Risks and discomforts

We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.

Benefits

Participation may help you reflect on your quality of teaching and influence on your students' growth of skills. You may also benefit from the results of this study as an educator.

The findings from this project may provide information to public including education policy-makers or educational leaders about teachers' beliefs in the promotion of critical thinking, communication and collaboration skills. This is important to improve the quality of public education overall.

Incentives for participation

You will receive \$20 gift certificate for your time spent during this interview.

Audio Recording

Interview will be audio-recorded. This procedure is required because we want to pay attention to the actual conversation and its development rather than focusing on taking notes of what you will be saying. Recording will also help us analyze the conversation more accurately. Recorded and transcribed materials will be kept confidential, archived securely and destroyed after 5 years.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____ I do not want to have this interview recorded.

_____ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality

You will disclose your name and your contact information in this interview. Any identifiable information will be kept confidential on a password protected electronic device or a locked file cabinet. Pseudonyms will be also used for any identifiers in this study.

Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may ask to skip any question that you do not feel comfortable answering. Your decision to participate or not will have no bearing on your employment or employment evaluations.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Sally Zepeda, a professor at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Zepeda at szepeda@uga.edu or at 706-542-0408. If you have any questions

or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

| | | |
|---------------------|-----------|------|
| _____ | _____ | |
| Name of Researcher | Signature | Date |
| _____ | _____ | |
| Name of Participant | Signature | Date |

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview protocol

Hello, my name is _____ and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy at the University of Georgia. We are studying public school teachers' beliefs in fostering students' civic skills. Civic skills can be categorized as critiquing, collaboration, and communication. This study aims to see how school and external-level factors have an effect on the teachers' beliefs in fostering civic skills. Because you are a public school teacher, we are interested in hearing about your classroom experiences.

Before we began the interview, I would like to go over a few things with you. With your permission, I will make an audio recording of this interview, which will be transcribed. It is very important that you answer questions with full honesty. As detailed in the consent form, your name will not be used in the transcription and any other identifying information will also be removed. You reserve the right to stop participating in the interview at any time. Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Ok, let's start our conversation by getting to know you:

1. Please tell me about you and your work.
2. Can you provide an example of helping your students to recognize multiple perspectives towards an issue/problem?
 - a. Can you provide other examples?
 - b. Are you able to accomplish this in most of your classes?
3. Are you able to show your students that it is okay to take risks, make mistakes, and think divergently?
 - a. Can you provide an example?
 - b. Are you able to show your students that there are often more than one correct answer to a question?
 - c. Can you provide an example?
 - d. What impact does heavy reliance on single correct answer multiple choice testing have on students' willingness to take chances or think divergently?
4. How would you describe critical thinking skills?
5. How do school-level factors affect your ability to promote critical thinking skills?
 - a. What helps you in promoting critical thinking skills in your students?

- b. What impedes you from promoting critical thinking skills in your students?
- 6. Can you provide your students with opportunities to develop their collaboration skills?
 - a. Can you provide an example?
 - b. Are you able to accomplish this in most of your classes?
- 7. How can you promote respect for others' views in your students?
- 8. What do you think the school's role is in promoting the following:
 - a. Listening to others/other views
 - b. Discussing controversial topics
 - c. Working with others
 - d. Participating in events
 - e. Judging and distilling information
 - f. Perspective-taking and interpreting problems
- 9. What impact does the use of social media have on students in developing these skills?