Winter 2019

Fostering Students' Civic Skills: Education for Sustainable Democracy

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored factors that supported teachers in their efforts to promote students' critiquing, communicating, and collaborating skills. Despite the various challenges that public schools face today, they are most likely the very institutions to play a critical role in individuals' civic skills development. Individual in-depth interviews were the primary method used to understand the participants' perspectives on instruction and the factors that foster students' civic skills. Factors that supported the participants in their efforts to promote civic skills among their students were found to be teacher collaboration, planning, and teacher motivation. Details and the implications of the findings were discussed.

Keywords
teachers, schools, civic skills, democracy, case study

The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) aimed to activate the educational resources of the world to help create a more sustainable future. UNESCO (2016) declared that "education alone cannot achieve a more sustainable future; however, without education and learning for sustainable development, we will not be able to reach that [sustainability] goal" (para. 1). Many paths to sustainability had been listed at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, and education was already mentioned as one of the most vital paths. Towards the end of the Decade, in 2013, the 37th session of the General Conference of UNESCO endorsed the Global Action Program on Education for Sustainable Development as the follow-up to the Decade, and in 2015, the United Nations presented 17 goals for countries to implement a new sustainable development agenda. These goals – varying from *no poverty* to *climate action* and *gender equality* to *life below water* – included *quality education* and were adopted by world leaders at a UN Summit (UN, 2016). These goals officially came into force on 1 January 2016.

All these years with all these initiatives, the UN has called for quality education for all, and called for a change in the way we think and act. As the lead agency for Education on Sustainable Development, UNESCO (n.d.) indeed repeatedly stressed global citizenship and the promotion of civic skills as that "Empowering learners to live responsible lives and to address complex global challenges means that education has to promote competencies like critical thinking, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative way" (para. 5). These are common competencies that everyone believes are important to create more civilized communities, but in fact, we need to know more about how to promote such skills in our schools.

Education *should* promote skills like critical thinking or decision making or collaborating as also mentioned as civic skills, but the foundation for civic skills need a more grounded explanation in the literature. A comprehensive report by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (2003) highlighted that:

> Civic skills do not exist in a vacuum; they are part of a larger set of ideas about what is believed to be necessary for citizens to be engaged in public life. The notion that, in addition to knowledge, some type of 'skills' are required in order to effectively participate in public life makes intuitive sense (p. 3).

Policymakers and the society are concerned with preparing young people for college and a competitive, global job market. Therefore, schools have generally sidelined their civic mission in an era of standards and accountability, and focused

on other subjects such as math or reading (Levine, 2007). It is, however, vital to place emphasis on the youth's civic skills development because civic skills are life skills and are necessary for a sustainable future.

Despite the various challenges that public schools face today, they are most likely the very institutions to play a critical role in an individual's civic skills development (Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill, & Gallay, 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, but if the teachers are not prepared to teach the essential knowledge and the skills to the next generation, sustainability can be lost in a single generation. Indeed, in response to the continuing decline of youth political participation, scholars are questioning the sustainability of democracy (Kim & Khang, 2014; Levine, 2007).

It is often complained that the youth's civic competencies are steadily decreasing (Coley, & Sum, 2012; Levine, 2007), and we are quick to blame public schools for this decline (Levinson, 2012). However, there are few studies that have examined how school teachers *actually* promote civic skills and how school and various other factors influence teachers regarding promoting students' critiquing, communicating, and collaborating—all civic skills. Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to broaden our understanding of teachers' perspectives about factors that fostered students' civic skills development. To be able to understand the very root of the problem the following research question was asked: From teachers' perspectives, what school-level factors foster students' civic skills?

All teachers are supposed to contribute to the whole child development; however, social studies teachers were selected as participants in the study 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 of their learning (Amna, 2012; Kaviani, 2011). The middle school years come with major changes in adolescent development, including biological and cognitive, and social development. Moreover, the middle school houses a different context compared to elementary school, with many more teachers, peers, and curricular choices (Adams & Berzonsky, 2003; Grolnick, Price, Beiswenger, & Sauck, 2007; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Keating, 2004).

Civic Skills

A review of literature has showed that there is little 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 citizens in political participation (Kirlin, 2005; Patrick, 2003). They are sometimes even reduced to skills necessary to vote (Smith, 2012). It is not rare to see that voting rate alone is referred to civics (Coley & Sum, 2012) or civic engagement is represented by students' social studies knowledge levels.

Based on a report by Carnegie Foundation and CIRCLE (2003), Smith (2012) emphasized two key components of civic skills: active listening and a respect for diversity. Civic skills also include intellectual and participation skills, such as analyzing, evaluating, interacting, or observing (Komalasari, 2012). One of the ultimate goals of civic education where students' civic skills are fostered is to develop "competent 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 list of descriptions is provided in table 1.

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, writing a letter, making a speech or presentation. Knowledge of how to cope in an organizational setting. Attending meetings in which decisions are made, planning such meetings.	Communication Collaboration Collaboration
Battistoni (1997)	Listening to each other, understanding the places and interests of others in the community, achieving compromises and solving problems when conflict occurs. Thinking creatively about public problems.	Communication, Critiquing
Boyte (2000)	Public speaking, writing letters Planning strategies Working in a team	Communication, Collaboration

Morgan and Streb (2001)	Making important decisions	Critiquing
Torney-Purta (2002)	Skills tested in 14-year-olds include the ability to interpret political communication (leaflets and cartoons)	Critiquing
Schwadel (2002)	Writing, public speaking Organizing	Communication, Collaboration
Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan, and Landreman (2002)	"perspective taking skills" (p. 183)	Critiquing
Patrick (2003)	Monitoring public events and issues, influencing and implementing policy decisions on public issues, taking action to improve political and civic life. Influencing and implementing policy decisions on public issues and taking action to improve political and civic life. Interacting with other citizens to promote personal and common interests, deliberating and making decisions about public policy.	Critiquing Communication, Collaboration
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, and Molina, (2010)	Supporting a candidate for office, organizing a protest, locating information, and developing policy	Collaboration, Critiquing
Johnson (2011)	Monitoring events and understanding context, deliberating and appreciating other points of view, following a plan to reach a goal, and knowing who the decision makers are and how to work with others	Critiquing, Collaboration
Burchett-Gauna, and Paul (2016)	"…best way to work towards developing an "active citizenry" is to help our future students develop their critical-thinking, problem solving, and debate skills" (p. 20).	Critiquing, Communication

A broad content search was used to identify skills relating to or of a (responsible) citizen, citizenship or participation, and to formulate the operational definitions. After analyzing different definitions by different scholars, a pattern of categories of what constitutes civics emerges 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 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. The ability to work with others and problem-solving.

These categories and the specific skills in each category do not imply a comprehensive list of all civic skills but represent a general concept of the nature of civic skills needed for effective civic engagement in a democratic system. In a similar way, Comber (2003) categorized civic skills as personal communication skills, knowledge of political systems, and the ability to critically think about civic and political life. National Education Association (2012) also suggested that educators must incorporate critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity.

Methodology

This study used interpretive qualitative research tradition, and the method used was case study. Deductive methods (positivist approaches), such as laboratory experiments and survey research, are specifically intended for theory testing while inductive methods are intended for theory building (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Interpretive research views that social reality is not singular or objective but is shaped by human experiences and social contexts. Therefore, social reality is best studied within its socio-historic context by reconciling the subjective interpretations of its participants (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The most distinctive characteristic of interpretive case study research is the ability to understand a complex social phenomenon by asking how and why questions and delimiting the object of study (Yin, 2008). Bromley (1986, p. 23) wrote to support this idea that researchers "get as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can." Another characteristic of interpretive studies is the *discovery mode*. Merriam (1998) emphasized that interpretive 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.

Individual in-depth interviews were the primary method used to understand the participants' perspectives on instruction and the factors that foster students' civic skills. Field notes were taken during each interview. Each teacher was interviewed twice. Taking time between the first and the second interview helped the participants reflect in depth. The interview questions were created based on the literature review (Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Comber, 2003; Flanagan et al., 2007; Kirlin, 2005; Komalasari, 2012; Patrick, 2003) and the experts' opinions. Some of the interview questions are as follows:

Do you provide your students with opportunities to develop their collaboration skills?
Can you provide an example of helping your students recognize multiple perspectives on an issue/problem?
How would you describe critical thinking skills?
What affects your ability to promote critical thinking skills in school?

In total, 161 pages of transcript data were collected from September 2014 through January 2016. A thematic analysis method was used with NVIVO software to analyze the written transcripts of the conversations with six middle school teachers who taught in two schools within one district in a Southeastern U.S. state. During the interviews, participants were not given a list of factors. Rather, the participants were asked for anything that they believed supported their effort to promote students' civic skills. Although some themes (factors) had been expected to be discussed such as teacher collaboration, new themes also emerged as the interviews took place.

The Case and the Participants

This study was conducted with six social studies teachers from two different middle schools in the same school district located in a Southeastern U. S. state. These were Pinecrest Middle School and Clearwater Middle School (both pseudonyms). The reason these schools were chosen was that they were considered to be "average" schools that represented most of the middle schools in the Southeastern states. They were not underperforming nor outperforming schools. These schools also had a diversity within the students enrolled in them. Pinecrest's student body of approximately 600 students is diverse in multiple ways, including race and ethnicity (47% Black, 35% White, 12% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 4% mixed race), and identified instructional needs (28% gifted, 2% English-language learners). The largest ethnic group of the 582 students at Clearwater Middle School is Black (58%). This is followed by Hispanic (32%), White (6%), two or more ethnicities (3%), Asian (0.8 %) and Indian (0.2 %).

The participants (whose names are pseudonyms) described their roles and other relevant information about their teaching experiences during the interviews, and are profiled below so that the reader gains insight about each:

1. Mr. Baker began teaching in 1993. At the time of the study, he was teaching social studies, and is certified in English and math. He previously served in assistant principal and principal roles before going back to teaching.

2. Ms. Williams is passionate about teaching, and she loves her students. She is a social studies teacher with a certification in special education.

3. Mr. Miller served in the Army and worked for the Government, but he was not pleased with this type of work. He put his career on hold and went back to graduate school to pursue a master's degree in public administration. At the same time, he took a substitute teaching job and realized teaching had been the career he was looking for. At the time of this study, he had been teaching for 13 years.

4. Ms. Taylor was in her fifth year at her current school and had been teaching for seven years in total. She had a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, but she decided to teach government and history. She enjoyed teaching social studies because she believed that it was that course that helped students gain multiple perspectives on the world.

5. Mr. Thomas was also an experienced teacher. He had taught for 12 years in different subject areas such as Health, Physical Education and Visual Arts. At the time of this study, he had been teaching social studies for six years, and coaching kept him even busier. He had a master's degree in Kinesiology, and he was interested in research-based teaching practices.

6. Mr. Martinez had been teaching social studies and mathematics at his current school for seven years. He enjoyed teaching social studies because he believed it was interesting and there were always interesting discussions in social studies classes.

Findings

Findings show that teacher collaboration, planning, and teacher motivation are primary factors that supported teachers in their efforts to promote students' critiquing, communicating, and collaborating skills.

Teacher Collaboration

Collaboration among teachers had a positive impact on their efforts to promote students' civic skills. In conversations with the participants, teacher collaboration was mentioned frequently, and was listed as one of the primary support systems for doing something beyond presenting facts. When asked about where to seek help about promoting civic skills, Mr. Martinez immediately thought of his colleagues:

> *A lot of that [support] comes from things that my teammates and me find and put together ourselves [...] So we're pretty tightly paced and it's easier for us to plan together. That way, when it comes time for us to figure out something like a project or something like that or if we need material, then one of us will divide it up somehow. We'll go find it.*

An example of teachers collaborating to help students elaborate things they learn more deeply is when teachers "*divide the roles up.*" For example, when it comes to making an assignment, that's one teacher's job. "*She'll put the components of that together. She's very methodical.*" When it comes to finding reading resources, it is Mr. Martinez's job: "*I put together seven or eight or nine different articles. With some of them I had to do a little bit of editing to make them appropriate for my kids.*" Another example of teachers taking collaboration further is from Mr. Thomas:

> *What we do is, we take the three Social Studies classes down to the gym. All three of us. We all go to the gym. We have about 70 kids because the more kids the better.*

Mr. Thomas continued to explain how students gained practical information and benefited from the strong collaboration among teachers:

> *We have what we call the fruit bowl elections. We may change this next year, but it's just something generic. We have the Apple Party, the Banana Party and the Pear Party. We pull so many kids from each group and we give them 10 minutes and say, 'okay, come up with a platform of why people should vote for the Banana Party or the Apple.' They usually come up with neat things.*

Teacher collaboration creates a stable and consistent environment for civic skills to flourish, and for students to get the message that this is not just one teacher's idea, but that all the stakeholders in the building think that working on developing civic skills is important. Similarly, Mr. Martinez explained, "*I believe that it's really supportive or helpful to have my colleagues do the same things [engage kids using critical thinking, communication and collaboration] in their classrooms.*" Mr. Martinez continued to explain why:

So, students are saying, 'oh it's not just for this one hour a day I'm going to be doing this but it's really something that I'm doing in all my classes so it's really that important.' When you can get a school or a grade level or a team of teachers to work together and do that and so that when they're teaching all of the same students then those students really can kind of see how important that is.

Students with different types of learning style also benefit from collaboration among teachers because some students "*want you [teacher] to be quiet. They want to read about it and because I talk, talk, talk…*" as Ms. Williams stated. She further explained that she needed another teacher "*who has a calmer spirit to actually do that,*" and "*who can work with those students on the same subject by being attentive to their learning styles.*" When teachers can work together, "*that's collaboration!*" according to Ms. Williams.

As much as teacher collaboration is an effective way to increase productivity in promoting and fostering students' civic skills, it is not an easy thing to do and not every teacher might see the value in it. Even though Ms. Taylor strongly believed that collaboration would be a great way to help students improve 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.

Planning

Findings showed that planning was a theme that needed to be discussed as a factor that helped teachers with promoting civic skills; conversely 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 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. She 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 an indicator for well-thought out classroom instruction that created opportunities to promote civic skills. However, most of the participants stated that they have had to use more and more planning time for other administrative duties even though these personal planning times are designated for teachers to reflect upon their instruction and to work on collaborative curriculum projects.

Teacher motivation

The teacher is one of the most influential factors for a child's academic achievement (Baldy, Green, Raiford, Tsemunhu, & Lyons, 2014). Conversely, student academic achievement might influence teacher's motivation. Students can achieve high results in civic understanding because they could have a motivated teacher; or students can be left behind when their teacher is unmotivated. 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.*"

Also, from a perspective of presenting information/facts versus going way beyond that, Mr. Thomas explained why he was always trying his best to give his students skills that they would carry with them: "*I just think when I die, and I meet my maker, he's going to hold me accountable because I think I'm in a position to do a lot of harm or a lot of good, as a teacher.*" Further, Mr. Thomas tied his beliefs and how he acted because of these beliefs to his foundational requirements of his job as a teacher:

So yes, there is this pressure to – okay – they say, 'teach to the test,' and I make sure I cover what the test is going to have, but I also want to give them some confidence, and some skills and things beyond the test. I want them to walk out of my class and say, okay; 'I've left Mr. Thomas' class with something that I can use. I've got some skill or something I can carry with me. And it may not even be something that was based in Social Studies [...] I don't just teach to the test. I feel this moral obligation to teach beyond that.

Motivation also comes in other forms. Ms. Williams loves her students. She tries innovative ideas and goes beyond fact-giving because as she would say: "*This is not my career. It's my passion. I love it.*" Other participants also expressed that having the motivation to prepare our children for life was the key to the promotion of civic skills, but findings showed that motivation did not have one unique source such as high stakes test or performance evaluation.

Discussion

Collaboration among teachers has a strong positive influence on teachers' efforts to promote civic skills to their students. Going beyond fact-presenting in the classroom is challenging for teachers, and it becomes even more difficult when we consider the fast-paced curriculum teachers have to follow and the tests they prepare their students for. On top of all of these, providing instruction that nurtures students' communicating, collaborating, and critiquing skills requires much thought and time.

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 their students' skills development. 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 planned and well-thought of by more than one teacher. Indeed, it is known that "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 groups with two or more classes, students can realize in person how their engagement contributes to decision-making processes.

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). Differentiated instruction is commonly assessed in teacher evaluation as well. 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).

This study suggests that collaboration should also be extended to teachers of different subjects. Integrated content is more meaningful to students and saves teachers time on creating well-thought projects. Seeing their colleagues on board for collaboration encourages teachers toward more meaningful and differentiated instruction. For example, collaboration 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 teachers, but also gives a message to students that collaborative and meaningful work is encouraged across disciplines. Teachers create a consistent and stable environment and expect students to think, collaborate, and/or communicate on a higher level. Such expectations are documented to have a significant relation to social behavior and academic accomplishments (Bouchey & Harter, 2005; Simpkins, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2005).

Planning is tightly tied to collaboration. Teachers firmly believe that if a teacher wants a class where there is lots of collaborative learning and 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 while helping them deliver meaningful instruction that promotes the development of students' civic skills. Therefore, principals and other school administrators should not see planning time as an opportunity for teachers to do a task that is unrelated to their instruction. Moreover, school leaders should encourage teachers to use their planning time wisely and effectively.

Collaboration *and* planning empower teachers. This also aligns with the previous research. Teachers who engage in collaborative work are able to learn from one another (Tschannen-Moran, Uline, Hoy, & Mackley, 2000). Collaborative networks generate action plans for student achievement and school improvement (DuFour, DuFour, Eacker, & Karhanek, 2004; Rimpola, 2014), and teachers learn to re-conceptualize their roles as they work together with others (Rimpola, 2014). Principals have a significant role in bringing teachers together, and teacher observation is an invaluable tool for principals in this process. Also, a recent study by National Center on Time and Learning (2014, p.14) has found that "investing time for teachers to jointly plan lessons with their colleagues can raise the quality of instruction because lesson plans are produced through careful consideration by a team of experts who each bring varying skills and experience to the process."

Teacher motivation is another factor in the findings that fosters students' skills development. Previous studies showed that improvement in teacher motivation had benefits for students as well as teachers (Bishay, 1996). Tealdi and Bruni (2005) found that motivation was a required component for job retention and parallel to that, Filak (2003) concluded that the motivation of teachers was one of the biggest contributors in maximizing teachers' performance. Various motivations drive teachers. Motivated teachers try their best and go beyond what's expected whether its cause is religion or social justice. Teachers want to do more than just prepare their students for tests because they love their students, or they feel obligated to make a change for the better in students' lives, or they might even think that their "Maker" will hold them accountable.

Conclusion

Research in the last few decades (David, 2011; Hamilton et al., 2007; McMurrer, 2007) document that state testing can significantly affect curriculum and instruction. More than 80 percent of the studies in Au (2007)'s review found changes in curriculum content were based on tests and increases in teacher-centered instruction. Schools have sidelined their civic missions mostly because of high stakes accountability measures (Levine, 2007; Shultz, 2007). Teachers want to help their students live responsible lives and address complex social problems in the present and future, but often times, they find themselves teaching to tests. NCTE (2014) indeed found that standardized tests shaped and limited student learning, and it looks like tests are not going anywhere any time soon.

For a sustainable democracy, a change is needed in the way we think and act. The youth should be provided with the tools that promote their socialization and enable productive contribution to their community (Hands, 2008). Citizens

equipped with civic skills are the frontiers of democracy. As Kahne and Sporte (2008) claim, classrooms in which students have opportunities to develop a sense of civic agency, social relatedness, and political and moral understandings are places where the seeds of sustainable democracy are planted. Hands (2008), referring to Kohlberg (1975) stated that training for character development or active citizenry is not effectively provided through traditional instruction. Teachers should help students build civic skills, but as it was put forth in the current study, fostering students' civil skills takes a great deal of time and effort. These findings might serve school and district leaders as an indication that collaboration among teachers, teacher motivation, and teacher planning time, devoted to well-thought instruction are keys to strong civic skills.

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