To Mom & Dad
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I cannot express enough gratitude for my doctoral chair, Dr. Elizabeth Washington. There is no doubt in my mind that without her support, enthusiasm, and guidance I would not have been able to pull off this amazing feat. Her encouragement allowed me to realize this personal dream of mine, and provided me with "one last chance to make it real." She inspires me as an instructor, researcher, and a person. Every day she seeks to leave the world a better place, and we can all learn a lesson or two from her outlook on life. She is simply the best, and a shining example of how to lead by example. Namaste.

Second, I believe I have the assembled the “Avengers” of all doctoral committees. Each member is an absolute champion of higher education. I am incredibly grateful for the members of my doctoral committee: Dr. Sevan Terzian, Dr. Alyson Adams, and Dr. Catherine Emihovich. Their combined knowledge, experience, and approach has helped me grow as a student, researcher, teacher, and person. Each committee member provided me with indispensable wisdom and has helped make this a far more enjoyable and productive process. I am also thankful for their invaluable insight into navigating the labyrinth of academia. Each of their courses has influenced my teaching philosophy and has helped me flourish as a professional educator.

Finally, I would not be where I am today without the love, support, and sacrifice of my parents, Mike & Lisa. My parents are the kindest, smartest, and most generous people I know. Simply put, I could not have done this without them (although I know they would argue otherwise). They each inspire me every day, and I have learned a great deal from their good nature. My mother’s compassion has showed me the transformative power of kindness, and my father’s determination has showed me the
fruits of hard work. I’d also thank them for dealing with my “Peter Pan” like proclivities and supporting my prolonged efforts to avoid the real world. There is no question my accomplishments are shared and they are deserving of the appropriate recognition. I love you both!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework: The Six Proven Practices</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proven Practices and Best Practices</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Chapters</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Perspectives on Contemporary Civic Education</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Cold War (1945-1960)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Rights Movements and the Great Society (1960-1980)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards and Accountability Movements (1980-present)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Education in Florida</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whither Civic Education and Testing?</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proven Practice One: Classroom Instruction</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proven Practice Two: Discussion of Current Events and Controversial Issues</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proven Practice Three: Service-learning Opportunities</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proven Practice Four: Simulations</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proven Practice Five: Student Governance</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proven Practice Six: Extracurricular Activities</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Reflection, Personal Bias</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 METHODS</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Perspectives</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Research</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivism</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Setting</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of Participants</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Participants</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 FINDINGS .......................................................................................................................... 83

Introductory Remarks ........................................................................................................ 83
Theme: Defining Civic Education ......................................................................................... 85

Kelly ................................................................................................................................. 86
Kelly’s background and its influence on defining civic education – “I was homeschooled so…” .................................................................................................................. 86
Kelly’s definition of civic education – “creating active and engaged citizens who can discuss the issues” ........................................................................................................... 87
Kelly’s definition of “best practices” in civic education – “Active learning, anything that keeps them engaged” ...................................................................................... 88
Kelly’s definition of poor practices in civic education – “Indoctrination is the problem” ............................................................................................................................. 89

Olivia ................................................................................................................................. 90
Olivia’s background and its influence on defining civic education – “I realize not everyone was raised like me” .......................................................................................... 90
Olivia: Defining the purpose of civic education – “We want involved citizens” .................. 92
Olivia: Best Practices in Civic Education – “Being active helps them learn best” ................... 93
Olivia: Poor Practices in Civic Education – “They need to see the connections” ............... 93

Sandra ............................................................................................................................... 95
Sandra’s background and its influence on defining civic education – “She was the best government teacher I ever had” ................................................................................ 95
Sandra – Defining the Purpose – “It’s all about being a good, active person” .................. 96
Sandra: Best Practices in Civic Education – “Hands-on and up and moving” .................. 98
Sandra – Poor Practice in Civic Education – “If you worksheet them to death…” .............. 99

Theme: Conflict ................................................................................................................ 100
Kelly ................................................................................................................................. 101
Kelly – Conflict with the District: “Thank God somebody showed me the right way” ........ 101
Kelly – Conflict within the School – “It’s really kinda crazy” ...................... 104
Kelly – Conflict with the Standards – “There are definitely changes that
could be made” .......................................................................................... 105
Kelly – Conflict within the School – “Where is the student council?” .... 108
Kelly – Conflict with the EOCA – “It’s a stupid test” ......................... 108
Olivia ................................................................. 111
Olivia – Conflict with the School District – “I don’t know what they were
thinking” ....................................................................................................... 111
Olivia – Conflict with the school – “So now that’s less time for me” ....... 113
Olivia – Conflict with the Standards – “Too much and why?” ............ 115
Olivia – Conflict with the EOCA – “I’m not a fan of it” .................... 118
Sandra ................................................................. 122
Sandra – Conflict with the District – “It’s the worst” ......................... 122
Sandra – Conflict with the school – “It’s not very encouraging” ....... 126
Sandra – Conflict with the EOCA – “I can see the struggles with it” .... 130
Theme: Negotiations of Time ..................................................................... 132
Kelly ................................................................. 133
Kelly – Decisions about time for coverage of content – Kelly – “If I know
something is not on the test, then I’m not teaching it.” .......................... 133
Kelly – Time for EOCA practice ............................................................. 141
Olivia ................................................................. 142
Olivia – Decisions about time for coverage of content – “I’ve got a lot to
do and a short window to do it in” .............................................................. 142
Olivia – Time for EOCA practice ............................................................. 150
Sandra ................................................................. 152
Sandra – Decisions about time for coverage of content – Because of
my situation, it’s not as hard for me as it could be” .............................. 152
Sandra – Time for EOCA practice – “I include it as much as I can” ....... 159
Concluding Remarks .................................................................................. 160

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS ................................................................. 161
Sense Making and Instructional Choices: Content Instruction ................ 162
Sense-Making and Instructional Choices: Class Discussion ................... 164
Sense Making and Instructional Choices: Simulations of Democratic Processes 166
Sense-Making and Instructional Choices: Service-Learning .................... 168
Sense-Making and Instructional Choices: Extracurricular Activities ......... 169
Where Do We Go from Here? ................................................................. 170
Other Issues and Considerations .............................................................. 172
   Additional Qualitative and Quantitative Research .............................. 172
   More Research on the Proven Practices ............................................. 173
   Simulations Research Needed ........................................................... 174
   School Governance Research Needed .............................................. 175
   An Interesting Direction for Research on Civic Education? ............... 175
Final Comments ......................................................................................... 176
APPENDIX

A  IRB PROTOCOL ........................................................................................................178
B  EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT ............................................................................181
C  INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS ..................................................................182
LIST OF REFERENCES ..................................................................................................185
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .............................................................................................200
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCMS</td>
<td>Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIRCLE</td>
<td>Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EOC</td>
<td>End-of-course assessment as abbreviated by teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EOCA</td>
<td>End-of-course assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FJCC</td>
<td>Florida Joint Center for Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCSS</td>
<td>National Council for the Social Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This constructivist study investigates and captures the lived experiences of three social studies educators as they make sense of civic education in a climate of high stakes testing and accountability. In spite of the deterioration of civic education over the years (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2011), Florida was among the first states to develop a renewed interest in civic education with the enactment of the “Justice Sandra Day O’Connor Civics Education Act” in 2010. The legislation sought to increase civic education in public schools and require accountability measures to ensure its instruction. In addition to requiring students to pass a civics course in the middle school (most of which are taught in 7th grade), an end-of-course assessment (EOCA) is also required. The EOCA is worth 30% of a student’s final course grade and is tied to teacher evaluations. Bucking a national trend of requiring mastery of a citizenship test based on the naturalization exam issued by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, Florida finds itself in a unique position.

This study aims to shed light on questions regarding civic educators’ instructional choices and planning as they face the challenges of assessment. Understanding why and how teachers make sense of civic education tied to an EOCA has the potential to
demonstrate the kind of civic learning children are receiving in their schools. For six months, three teachers reflected on their sense making experiences in casual and formal conversations with me about their civics instruction. I analyzed each participant's constructions of meaning using a narrative thematic analysis, with the intention of capturing substantive themes from each participant's narrative. This study provides significant insights into the experiences, beliefs, and practices of these civic educators, which has the potential to assist preservice and practicing teachers, teacher preparation programs, professional development designers, curriculum developers, and policymakers. It is my hope that this study will contribute to thoughtful dialogue about civic education.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

As the secretive proceedings of the Constitutional Convention concluded, a Philadelphia woman supposedly approached Dr. Benjamin Franklin and asked, “Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?” Franklin retorted, “A republic, madam, if you can keep it.” Franklin’s hopes for an educated, informed citizenry might have been on his mind. The widespread, mandatory public education system of today did not exist in 18th century America, but Franklin believed “the good education of youth has been esteemed by wise men in all ages…” (1749, p.1).

American history is deeply rooted in concerns about the preservation of our democratic republic through citizenship education. Other significant founding fathers such as Benjamin Rush, Thomas Jefferson, and Noah Webster all strongly advocated for an educated citizenry to sustain the fledgling democracy in the years to come (Tyack, 2003). They and other founders believed that “the democratic political community was to be the binding element of social cohesion and that this political community was to be based upon liberty, equality, and justice…They decided that the most appropriate means of education to achieve and preserve such a political community was through public education” (Butts, 1980, p. 364). The rhetoric regarding schooling as vital to democracy is not unique to the founding era; it has become pervasive among American educators. Many educational theorists, policymakers, politicians, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders have tended to agree throughout the years upon the necessity of schooling for the preservation of democracy and the betterment of society (Niemi & Junn, 1998; Rury, 2002; Urban & Wagoner, 2009).
Historically, when most Americans have been asked about the purpose of schooling, many have responded with some variation on the idea of emphasizing the development of good citizens. According to annual polls conducted by Phi Delta Kappa and Gallup, “educating young people for responsible citizenship” as the essential purpose of public education is a belief the vast majority of Americans have consistently shared in previous years (Rose & Gallup, 2000). However, as the political climate has shifted in the recent past, so too have American views on public education and civic education. Although preparing knowledgeable and engaged citizens still figures into American opinion regarding the purpose of education, a 2016 Phi Delta Kappa poll indicates only 26% of Americans believe preparing students to be good citizens is the main goal of public education. The idea of “civic education” has been relegated to the background in the national emphasis on tested subjects (e.g., reading and math) and on career preparation. Since 2001, the marginalization of social studies can best be attributed to the No Child Left Behind Act, the 2001 federal education legislation that failed to mention any social studies subject areas. Since social studies would not be tested for student achievement, virtually no funding would be tied to it (National Council for the Social Studies, 2007).

Nonetheless, social studies researchers have created a vast body of work on the concepts of democratic citizenship education and civic education. Parker (1990) contends that democratic citizenship education ought to exist formally and informally in all aspects of schooling, with the purpose of not just preserving democracy but making it a way of life, a lifelong journey rather than a destination. Democratic citizenship moves beyond the walls of a singular classroom or course; it exists as a continual experience.
of being in our society. It is the transfer of knowledge into all the daily processes of a
democratic republic. These process and experiences of democracy speak directly to
John Dewey’s belief that schools should exist as microcosms of democracy (1916).

The word “civics” is derivative of the Latin word *civis*, meaning citizen. In its most
basic definition, civic education is the study of the rights, duties, and responsibilities of
citizenship. Although the purposes and the curriculum of civic education are interpreted
and implemented in many ways, it is essentially formal instruction in self-government
(Branson & Quigley, 1998). The formal instruction of civic education in the social studies
is part of the larger concept of democratic citizenship education.

Civic education is the embodiment of three integral components: civic
knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions. Civic knowledge is the primary component
of civic education, providing students with a working knowledge of the structure and
function of government, the law, the nature of politics, the democratic ideals of
citizenship, and the foundational history of their country (Murphy, 2004). Civic skills are
the “intellectual and participatory skills” that allow students to apply their civic
knowledge in a meaningful way (Branson & Quigley, 1998; CCMS, 2011). Critical
thinking, active listening, identifying public problems, organizing groups, lobbying,
protesting, and petitioning are just a few examples of civic skills in action (CCMS 2011;
Kirlin, 2003; CIRCLE Staff, 2010). Finally, civic dispositions are all “orientations related
to democratic character formation” (Owen, 2015, p.4). Civic dispositions are built upon a
foundation of applying their civic knowledge and skills in a democratic, open-minded,
and civil manner. Examples of civic dispositions are a respect and adherence to the rule
of law, commitment to justice, equality, and equity, reasonable trust in government, civic
duty, attentiveness to political matters, political efficacy, personal efficacy, political tolerance, respect for human rights, concern for the welfare of others, rejection of violence, civility, social responsibility, and community connectedness (Morgan and Streb, 2001; Owen, 2015; Torney-Purta, 2004; Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2011).

Most students today are required only to pass a one-semester, 12th grade course in U.S. government that focuses primarily on factual, superficial knowledge of government structure and processes (Niemi & Smith, 2001), not on civic values, knowledge, skills, and dispositions. This unfortunate situation has greatly impacted our students. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) evaluated students’ civic knowledge and attitudes in 2014 and discovered some troubling trends. Among them, only 23% of all public-school students received an acceptable score of civic proficiency. For example, only 32% of eighth graders were able to determine that “our government should be a democracy” as a common sentiment of the majority of Americans. Rather, 52% believed “the government should provide every American with a job” as the most common belief. Clearly there is much work to be done in improving civic education for our students.

However, civic deficiency is not only limited to students. Although many adults may have taken a civics or government course at some point during their schooling, the quality of their civic education is suspect (Butts, 1978). For example, a survey conducted by the American Bar Association showed that just over half of American adults could name the three branches of government (Bookman, 2008). Another troubling study by Conover, Searing, and Crew (2002) suggests only 30% of Americans
engage in any kind of public political discussion – perhaps an unsurprising finding, given the lack of foundational civic knowledge.

Florida has former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor to thank for the shift in the civics landscape in Florida. Her national advocacy of more and better civic education seemed to improve Florida’s prospects when, in July 2010, the state legislature unanimously passed the Justice Sandra Day O’Connor Civics Education Act, and the Florida Department of Education subsequently developed the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards and Benchmarks in Civics. In a working paper by CIRCLE Staff (2014), Dr. Doug Dobson, Executive Director of the Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government at the University of Central Florida, stated, “The purpose of the legislation was to return civics to the Florida curriculum in a systematic way, in hopes that by doing that we strengthen Florida’s overall civic health and the level of civic involvement across the state. What that means, of course, is producing students with the combination of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be active citizens in their communities” (p. 2).

The Florida civics legislation:

- required that the reading portion of language arts curriculum include civics education content for all grade levels;
- required that students pass the civics education course for promotion to high school;
- required the administration of an end-of-course assessment in civic education;
- specified requirements for course grades and course credit;
Although some of these requirements have been modified since the passage of the original legislation, the essence of it remains the same: a required middle school course and a standardized End Of Course Exam (EOCA) statewide. With civics now required in all Florida public middle schools, it is now considered a critical component of the curriculum. As a course that is now linked to a high stakes test, the time, focus, and resources for civics have increased. Civics is no longer marginalized, as is typical of social studies courses without a linkage to high stakes testing (Soder, 2004). Such a high stakes mandate holds districts and schools accountable for providing civic education (CCMS/CIRCLE, 2010). In other words, civics is now tested, so it is now taught. Nonetheless, creating a civics requirement has presented some challenges for teachers and has raised serious questions for consideration regarding the future of civic education.

For Florida teachers, the “new normal” is that they have now joined the ranks of teachers of other tested subjects with rigid standards and benchmarks that must be covered to prepare for a high-stakes test. However, in Florida not all standards are treated equally (Florida Department of Education, 2012). Out of the 40 benchmarks in the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, a few are not tested because they are experiential in nature – e.g., service-learning projects, mock trials, and mock elections. With 35 benchmarks to get through by the administration of the test in May, teachers may find themselves “teaching to the test” and being forced to neglect the experiential standards that promote a more well-rounded civic education. Predictably, although to some degree civic content knowledge can be measured, civic skills and dispositions cannot (Education Commission of the States, 2013; Godsay, Henderson, Levine, &
Littenberg-Tobias, 2012; Saye, 2013). Levine (2012) also states that merely requiring one civics course or one high-stakes test is unlikely to improve civic learning and engagement.

**Purpose of the Study**

Understanding the definition of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions is crucial to understanding how standardized testing can limit aspects of civic education. Civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions are the core components of civic education as recommended by the literature and supported and continually researched by two highly respected non-profit “think tanks” for civic education: Campaign for the Civic Mission of School (CCMS) at the University of Pennsylvania; and CIRCLE, or the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University. These organizations work in partnership with other prominent entities such as the American Bar Association and the Center for Civic Education. Their scholarly research helps informs policy and practice for civic education, as it focuses primarily on the civic and political engagement of American youth. For purposes of this paper, I will refer to the “umbrella” term CCMS; the year of their major report is 2011 (retrieved 6/1/17 at https://civicmission.s3.amazonaws.com/118/f0/5/171/1/Guardian-of-Democracy-report.pdf).

According to CCMS (2011), civic knowledge provides students with a fundamental understanding of how our government and civic institutions work and encourages civic action by understanding how “history continues to shape the present, aspects of geography that are vital to understanding America and the world, and the economics that is necessary to assess public policy options” (p. 16). Simply put, students need civic knowledge that is useful and foundational, and encourages civic
awareness and participation. Such participation, in turn, may be ineffective without valuable civic skills, that provide students with civic abilities (such as speaking, listening, public advocacy, and cooperation/collaboration) to be successful in civic life. And of course, civic knowledge and skills will not compel students to be active and engaged without civic dispositions. A sense of public duty, concern for others, reasonable trust, and societal fairness are all tenets of dispositions for a democratic society (CCMS, 2011).

Although the purposes and definitions for civic education may be continually be argued and varied, research has overwhelmingly supported “Six Proven Practices” for civic education. The CCMS’s report *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools* (2011) recommends the following essential, proven practices to provide students with a high-quality civic learning experience:

- *Provide instruction in government, history, law, and democracy.*
- *Incorporate discussion of current, local, national, and international issues and events in the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives.*
- *Design and implement programs that provide students with the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.*
- *Offer extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities.*
- *Encourage student participation in school governance.*
- *Encourage students’ participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.* (CCMS, 2011)

Proponents of civic education in Florida argue that following these guidelines will help develop students’ civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Civic education research has continued to rely on, support, and recommend the aforementioned
practices regarding civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Furthermore, it continues to emphasize the role the teacher plays as a civic educator. Since civics teachers are the ones who are making instructional choices as they make sense of the test, it is important to understand how teachers they make their instructional choices. Research remains scant regarding teachers’ beliefs about best practices and poor practices in civics, their sense-making of the civics standards and benchmarks, and their sense-making of how the EOCA impacts their teaching. How do these issues impact their instructional choices? What do they believe they are emphasizing and deemphasizing in their civics teaching? What do they need as part of their sense-making? Hence, my research questions are as follows:

Research Question 1: How do civic instructors make sense of teaching civics under the pressures of high stakes standardized testing?

Research Question 2: How does a high stakes test impact civic educators’ instructional choices in their classrooms?

Conceptual Framework: The Six Proven Practices

Schools have become a weak instrument for measuring and promoting civic health, mainly because the typical public school experience fails to engage students in meaningful civic instruction and participation. If schools are to truly become laboratories of civic experiences and growth for students, civic educational progress must stem from the “development of new attitudes towards and new interests in experience” (Dewey, 1897, p. 37). Providing students with a fully immersive civic experience, as opposed to temporary enrollment in a civics course, is the best way to cultivate new experiences for students while helping to create capable, effective citizens inside and outside the classroom. High quality civic instruction lends itself to Dewey’s (1897) “continuing
reconstruction of experience” by becoming a permanent fixture and evolving experience throughout the course of a student’s public education (p. 37).

The task of trying to create a truly immersive and powerful civic experience for PK-12 classrooms is challenging, but manageable. Research on civic education has gone in many directions, but there seem to be some agreed-upon absolutes regarding high quality civic education. First, the National Council for the Social Studies is the largest and most prominent association in the country devoted solely to social studies education. The mission statement of the NCSS is “to provide leadership, service, and support for all social studies educators” (2015). NCSS seeks to provide frameworks of study to help teachers and researchers to conduct their ongoing work with social studies education. As part of a position statement released and approved by the NCSS board in 2013 on revitalizing civic learning in schools, the NCSS makes strong recommendations for civic education. Adopted from Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools (2011), the NCSS recommendations identify and promote characteristics of effective civic learning implementation.

Proven Practices and Best Practices

The CCMS’s (2011) Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of School (2011) is perhaps the “gold standard” of recommendations for essential practices to provide students with the most holistic civic learning experience possible. Classroom instruction, discussion of current events and controversial issues, service-learning, school governance, simulations of democratic processes, and extracurricular activities all contribute to an overall high quality experience of civic education, according to the CCMS. This study will focus on the six CCMS’s “proven practices” as a conceptual framework. Although extracurricular offerings and student government participation,
while essential components of a high quality civic education (Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003), are not overt measures of civic pedagogy, they will be discussed only briefly in this work.

It is important to note that the participants in this study were somewhat familiar with the CCMS Guardian of Democracy Report because they had all attended civics training conducted by the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship that referenced the proven practices. One of the teachers had been to numerous social studies-related events around Florida when the proven practices were discussed. I found that the teachers often used “proven practices” and “best practices” interchangeably in our interviews. It was never my intent to compare or criticize the teachers based on their use of these practices. For the interviews, I acknowledge that the proven practices informed and helped me flesh out some of my interview questions. As often happens in qualitative and constructive research, I sometimes strayed from the interview protocol to refer to the proven practices when appropriate. I believe I have done this, in a non-judgmental way, as a framework for understanding the “big picture” of the participants' sense-making narratives.

**Methods**

To best answer these questions, I employed qualitative research methods from a constructivist perspective. My choices for research were directly informed by my questions. The purpose of qualitative research is to engender greater depth of inquiry into a particular question. Chapter 3 goes into detail about the qualitative methods that I used for this study.

I recruited three civic educators in the same school district in the state of Florida to share with me their experiences as civic educators. For the purposes of anonymity, I
have provided pseudonyms for each educator. Each of these teachers taught civics every day in a middle school setting to 7th graders. All three participants were White females and had a distinctive range of teaching experience, from a one-year novice to a veteran of almost 30 years. The participants agreed to meet with me formally for four semi-structured interviews over the course of two semesters. Additionally, I maintained informal communications with each of these participants via e-mail, text, phone, and an occasional site visit. Participants were also asked to share with me their lesson plans over the course of our time together so that I could gain a great sense of detail of their day to day work as civics educators.

**Significance**

Overall, the aim of my study is to capture and provide insight into the lived experiences of a few civic educators as they teach in an environment of high stakes testing and accountability. Understanding how civic educators make sense of teaching civics in this environment has the potential to illuminate their beliefs and challenges as they work to nurture future citizens. Insights from teachers’ experiences can help us to better understand the needs of our civic educators, and perhaps to provide food for thought about policy considerations for civic education. As one of the few states attempting to revitalize civic education, ostensibly for the purposes of greater civic engagement, Florida is in a unique position for examination and consideration (CCMS/CIRCLE Staff, 2014).

**Description of Chapters**

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two of the dissertation will explore the “six proven practices” of highly effective civics instruction, offer a discussion of social studies testing in Florida, and provide a brief narrative of civic education in the 20th
century. The chapter will focus on key aspects of civics instruction and how the research has reached a consensus on the general guidelines of their implementation. The primary focus of the research centers on four of the six proven practices, as teachers are directly involved with their implementation in their classrooms. The chapter also offers insights into areas of research stagnation and weakness and considerations for the future of civic education research. In addition to reviewing “best practices” in civic education, a section detailing current trends in high stakes testing and their recorded impact on social studies educators is also provided. The last section will provide a brief history of civic education situated within the context of contemporary U.S. history. Chapter Three will describe the research procedures and methods used in this study as well as offer detailed accounts of each of the participants and the contexts of their teaching. Analysis and data collection will be discussed in detail throughout this chapter. Chapter Four will present my findings from my study, and will expand into several narrative themes from each of my participants. The final chapter offers conclusions and considerations for future civic research and teaching practices.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Historical Perspectives on Contemporary Civic Education

Founding fathers such as Benjamin Rush, Thomas Jefferson, and Noah Webster all strongly advocated for an educated citizenry to sustain the fledgling democratic republic in the years to come (Tyack, 2003). These and other founders believed “the democratic political community was to be the binding element of social cohesion and that this political community was to be based upon liberty, equality, and justice. And they decided that the most appropriate means of education to achieve and preserve such a political community was through public education” (Butts, 1980, p. 364). The rhetoric regarding public schooling as vital to democracy is not distinctive to the founding era. It has become a pervasive fixture of educational thought for decades. Educational theorists, policymakers, politicians, parents, teachers, and students have all continued to agree on the necessity of schooling for the preservation of the democratic republic and the betterment of society (Niemi & Junn, 1998; Rury, 2002; Urban & Wagoner, 2009).

Since the founding era, the institution of public education has undergone vast changes when it comes to purpose and implementation of reforms. Thinking about how schools can best serve the nation has changed throughout history in response to various political, social, and economic factors. At the heart of all educational reforms remains a desire to imbue citizens with specific characteristics to serve the needs of the nation at a particular time and in a larger context. The mid-twentieth century to the present is no exception. By understanding and analyzing the distinct purposes of
education throughout three major periods in the past sixty years, the cultivation of a specific type of citizen and of civic education become more readily apparent.

Carr (2008) supports this fluid view of citizenship in American society, explaining how the myriad rights, duties, and responsibilities of a citizen are interpreted as a direct result of the nature of the demands of society. A variety of historical events have shaped and dominated the educational landscape of the second half of the twentieth century, all of them with different agendas for the type of citizens our public schools should be creating. This has been especially true when events have unfolded within an atmosphere of perceived crisis that has ushered in a new age of reform and purpose for education, and along with it a new kind of citizen (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Such events would also impact the nature of civic education and its role in the school curriculum (Butts, 1978). Concerns over civic education – or lack thereof – help to illustrate the societal values of each distinct era. Below, I examine several types of citizens this country has sought to create within the public schools – and the roles that the schools have played in civic education – over the past seventy years.

**Early Cold War (1945-1960)**

The period immediately following World War II in in the U.S. brought about a marked change in society as the country transitioned to a peacetime economy. Victory over the Axis Powers had created a sense of accomplishment and unity in American society. However, some domestic issues were problematic. For example, the massive transformation of youth culture and concerns over juvenile misbehavior and delinquency were pervasive. The comprehensive high school received much of the blame, with its critics arguing that the traditional academic disciplines failed to engage youth properly and keep them in school (Rury, 2002). Some educators called for dismantling the
traditional academic curriculum in favor of a new “life adjustment curriculum” for American students.

The life adjustment curricular movement “advocated vocational education…and claimed to meet the needs of youth by teaching students about their own personal and social problems” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 327). The movement focused on creating responsible citizens prepared with the technical skills and abilities that would help them to function in their jobs after high school. Such a curriculum was viewed as more relevant, and more likely to combat the high school dropout rate and ameliorate juvenile crime. Objectives of the life adjustment curriculum focused primarily on developing life skills – everything from recreational leisure skills to maintaining mental and physical health. Preparation for work as the primary goal for the comprehensive high school (Urban & Wagoner, 2009) implied that good citizens needed to cultivate technical, practical knowledge instead of traditional academic knowledge in order to become contributing and efficient members of society.

Labaree (2007) argues that this era of educational history was dominated mostly by a social efficiency mindset. This approach to education meant that “our ability to prepare the young to carry out useful economic roles with competence” (p. 91) should take precedence. From this point of view, education was seen as a public good to benefit the taxpayer and the employer by creating economically productive citizens to fill their roles in the workforce and thereby improve the national economy.

The life skills adjustment curriculum that dominated much of the 1940s and most of the 1950s aimed to create citizens who were complacent with the social order, and to help young people adjust to the status quo. Conformity to the norms of society, not
resistance to them, characterized education in this era (Tyack, 1983). Focusing on domestic ills after such a triumphant victory in World War II could create unnecessary tension in society. Rather than confront such divisive issues as racial inequality, good citizens would ignore such issues through self-control. Graebner (1990) describes a society focused on social unity and stability, yet it was clear that conforming to the status quo helped reinforce existing social divisions. Nonetheless, schools helped to reinforce the view that citizens needed to ignore social inequalities to ensure the stability of the country.

According to Tyack and Cuban (1995), political leaders focused on the acceleration of the Cold War in the 1950s and emphasized the necessity of citizens’ domestic unity against the growing international threat of communism abroad. America needed to appear strong at home. Strength through unity became a matter of national security, thereby strengthening conservatism and authoritarianism both inside and outside of schools.

The U.S. was by no means unified when it came to issues of race, but a small “tolerance education” movement focused on the idea that citizens had to learn to live with each other peacefully to ensure the stability of the country. Burkholder (2011) argues that tolerance education following the war took a step in the right direction with its emphasis on constructing race as a series of cultural differences and a scientific focus on the human race. However, teachers instead “crafted a discourse that depicted racial minorities as somehow inherently different from the white majority” (Burkholder, 2011). Thus, ensuring the status quo, rather than critically analyzing it, continued to dominate the spirit of conformity that characterized this era. And as McCarthyism
spread in the 1950s, rather than continuing to teach lessons explicitly on race and prejudice to challenge the status quo, teachers took a more “colorblind” approach (Gutek, 2000; Tyack, 1974). Eventually the colorblind approach became the norm in the American classroom, with teachers not bringing attention to racial conflict but rather focusing on cultural and historical contributions of distinct minorities as well as instruction in appropriate behavior toward people of “difference” (Burkholder, 2011). However, the colorblind approach toward tolerance education could not work in a country that was beginning to acknowledge the issue of racial segregation, largely because of the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. the Board of Education*. In the *Brown* case the court advocated for “the importance of education to our democratic society” as “the very foundation of good citizenship” (*Brown v. Board of Education*, as cited in Tyack, 1974, p. 279).

According to Butts (1978), civic education during this era emphasized that a good citizen should embrace the core principles of democracy and the values of the free enterprise system as a response to the threat of communism. Civic education also started to focus on the social aspects of citizenship, calling attention to the problems of democratic living and how citizens could best solve them as contributing members of society. However, Butts (1978) argued that the actual implementation of this type of curriculum in schools failed to address the “basic political questions of power, influence, and decision making” (p.71).

Preparing functional citizens for their future roles in the workforce while helping them to understand the basic responsibilities of good citizenship continued to serve as the bedrock for civic education (Butts, 1978). Such civic education ignored a critical
analysis of pressing, divisive issues and embraced social unity for the common good of
the dominant white society.

Expectations would change as the Cold War continued to escalate with the
proliferation of nuclear weapons, and in 1957, the launch of the Soviet space satellite
Sputnik created a new wave of panic and urgency in American society. It appeared that
the Communists had gained an advantage over America, and this was simply
unacceptable. Now, because of a growing international ideological threat that
culminated in the scientific achievement of America’s enemy, technological
advancement was viewed as the best way to ensure national security and superiority.

Most of the rhetoric around the launch of Sputnik blamed the schools for letting
the Soviets win the Cold War, and within a few years the life adjustment curriculum
vanished as a primary means of education in American society. That curriculum was
viewed as too soft and incapable of maintaining a competitive edge over the Soviets.
The traditional academic curriculum became yet again the focus of schooling (Rury,
2002). Clearly, this was more than just a race into space; it was a competition in political
and economic ideology that the American public could ill afford to lose (Mitchell, 2011;
Rudolph, 2002). Public attention to “the need for cultivating talent as a weapon in the
contest with communism” (Tyack, 1974, p. 276) became the top priority in education.

In 1958, the National Defense of Education Act became the first large-scale
federal involvement in education (Dow, 1991). The NDEA sought to redirect funding and
curricular efforts to the goal of academic excellence in math and science. (Anderson,
2007; Kaestle, 2007). The revitalization of science and math education in the curriculum
came at the expense of the other traditional academic subjects as “national security and
political reality required that science be singled out for special consideration” (Jaracz, as cited in Rudolph, 2002, p. 108). Civics and other social studies courses were deemphasized in the school curriculum because they were viewed as unnecessary to technological superiority. Civic and social studies education would never quite recover from the educational reforms of the 1950s and 1960s.

David Gamson (2007) argued that another significant consequence of the NDEA legislation was that it created a hierarchy of ability in cultivating citizens. According to Gamson, the NDEA sought out students of exceptional academic ability and marginalized students who showed less promise. The cultivation of future citizens in the schools now seemed to be based heavily on students’ academic abilities and how they could best serve their country. Ability tracking gained a firm place in the educational environment, and focusing curricular efforts on creating an intellectual elite of citizens was far more important than focusing on the needs of the many. Although some education reformers championed the benefits of mixed ability classrooms (Urban & Wagoner, 2009), the desire for cultivating the most scientifically knowledgeable students gained momentum. All students would receive an education steeped in math, science, and foreign languages, but creating citizens based on ability and skill through isolated grouping evolved as the norm for American society, and it would lead the rhetoric, policy, and practice of schooling from the 1960s to today.


Throughout most of the 1960s, the schools continued to support the scientific and technological race against the proliferation of communism at the expense of a broader conception of civic education (Byford & Russell; 2007 Gutek, 2000). For the social studies, the perceived success of “new math” and “new science” encouraged
social studies teachers to adopt a disciplinary approach to their subjects aimed at training future citizens to engage in the types of inquiry that social scientists do. Funding provided by the National Science Foundation and other private organizations created a “new social studies” stressing cognitive analysis, conceptual analysis, and inquiry learning with no direct connection to what all of this meant to be an effective citizen (Butts, 1980). Nonetheless, social studies teachers largely still used traditional methods of instruction, thus reinforcing social control and conformity in and outside the classroom (Evans, 2004).

The 1960s gradually brought about social change and challenge to the status quo, and the discourse surrounding social issues began to flourish during this period (Gutek, 2000). Labaree (2007) argues that education and democratic equality were realigned in the 1960s and early to mid-1970s. According to Labaree, education was “seen as a public good, designed to prepare people for political roles” (Labaree, 2007, p. 91). However, the shift on the perspective of education did not bring about significant change for formal civic education.

President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” focused on pockets of poverty existing mostly in urban America and Appalachia (Gutek, 2000) as much of the rest of the country prospered. As part of the War on Poverty, another important component of his domestic programs, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, was signed into law. A major purpose of the ESEA was aimed at addressing inequality in schools, and it attempted to reduce the inequities of educational resources for minorities in order to “restore the principle that public education ought to be equal everywhere, a critical step if the American credo of equal opportunity (would be) truly realized” (Rury,
The ESEA was an attempt to provide more opportunities of equal access and equal resources so that more citizens could become economically self-sufficient and assume their roles as productive, democratic members of society. Echoing Horace Mann, Johnson believed education could prevent poverty and improve the quality of life of all citizens, and thus it became a hallmark of his “Great Society” policy agenda (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

As a result of the tumultuous conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Vietnam, civil rights violence against civil rights activists, the Watergate scandal), the public grew more dissatisfied with the government and less enthusiastic about political participation. Distrust of political institutions contributed to cynicism about voting and civic values (Gutek, 2000). Civic education in the schools was moribund because social studies was still relegated to the margins of the school curriculum. The “new social studies” never really got off the ground, “humanistic education” took its place, and ironically, the civic activism of the 1960s did not translate into the classroom. Ravitch (2000) argues that “the hedonistic, individualistic, anarchic spirit of the sixties was good for neither the educational mission of the schools nor the intellect, health, and well-being of young people” (p. 407). Ravitch criticizes the 1960s for cultivating selfish, ill-informed young people in the absence of strong civic and social studies education.

A brief glimmer of hope for civic education manifested in the mid to late 1970s with a renewed interest in the type of education that would create a more informed, engaged, and active citizenry. In particular, efforts could be seen in schools that sought to create citizens who were more sensitive to and understanding of the needs of the marginalized. The civil rights movements of ethnic minorities, women, the disabled, and
gays amplified the importance of individual rights, as well as an understanding of the Constitution and of the appropriate civic values for creating a democratic community (Butts, 1980). The two major trends of civic education in this era focused on law-related education and moral development. Both trends encouraged citizens to embrace pluralism and a core civic morality devoted to developing a strong, democratic, political community (Butts, 1980). Yet these efforts would prove short-lived, as the standards and accountability movement ominously loomed in the near future.

**Standards and Accountability Movements (1980-present)**

The late 1970s and early 1980s comprised a period of economic struggle and instability for the country. America was developing and transitioning from an industrial economy to an informational and service economy (Gutek, 2000). Conservative rhetoric denounced the liberal curriculum of the 1970s, arguing that it bore the responsibility for the weakening American economy. Academic excellence had allegedly given way to too much freedom in schools during the later 1960s and 1970s (Button & Provenzo, 1989). Neoconservative politics and ideology came to dominate much of the educational landscape throughout the 1980s, and would continue to do so throughout the rest of the century.

The denigrating rhetoric of public education and neoconservative spirit culminated in 1983’s *A Nation at Risk*, a report by the National Commission of Excellence in Education commissioned by President Ronald Reagan. The report claimed a national crisis existed within the country, as the U.S. seemed to be declining in international competition as part of the global economy (Kaestle, 1983). ANAR (1983) argued that public schools were to blame for the economic shortfalls, claiming:
The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people…if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war (p. 1)

The inflammatory rhetoric of the report would galvanize public concern over the purposes of public school. ANAR signified the beginning of subsequent reports and accountability movements, seeking to improve the quality of education with specific foci on math, science, and reading. The purpose of education seemed to be reverting to an era of beliefs in social efficiency and eventually social mobility. Labaree (2007) argues that this landmark document focused on the inadequate production of skilled workers, and on raising the productivity of the workforce in order to give the U.S. an international competitive edge. History repeated itself as social studies and civic education were relegated to the margins as the idea of creating a citizenry trained to be productive in the workforce came to the fore again. Schools responded to the ANAR recommendations by limiting elective courses and creating a core curriculum focused on math, science, and English.

The 1990s would soon give rise to the development of national standards (e.g. Goals 2000) and tests to assess students’ academic progress in the public schools (Gutek, 2000). Eventually, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 would reify the belief in a system of educational accountability for economic prosperity. The aim of NCLB was to improve test scores in reading and math and focus on basic academic skills; the legislation made no mention of civic or social studies education. Attention to civic education had begun to decline from the 1980s ANAR report to the early 2000s, and NCLB only further marginalized its role in the curriculum of public schools. Ravitch (2010) argued that the legislation only “produced mountains of data, not educated
citizens” (p. 29). Academic excellence and success were denoted by achievement on standardized tests in reading and math, were inherently ant-intellectual, and devalued true knowledge, according to Ravitch (2010).

Thus, over time, throughout the mid to late 20th century, more Americans became educated, and competition for desirable roles in society increased. However, the heated and individualistic climate of the standards and accountability movements lent itself to social mobilization. As a result, creating citizens who were socially mobile and socially efficient became the primary purposes of education.

It can be argued that education is no longer viewed as a public good for the common good of the republic; rather, it is a private good serving the future needs of the citizen’s socioeconomic status. A continued commitment to standardized testing throughout the first decade of the 21st century has only further cultivated the competitive rather than the cooperative disposition of the ideal citizen. For the past several decades, creating enterprising citizens able to compete in the global marketplace for the benefit of the country has served as the primary purpose of American schools (Tyack, 2001).

**Civic Education in Florida**

In July 2010, the state legislature of Florida passed the Justice Sandra Day O’Connor Civic Education Act, which required the implementation of a course in civic education in all of Florida’s public middle schools. Along with this new curricular requirement, a high stakes test would also be implemented in order to ensure school accountability. The End-Of-Course Assessment (EOCA), created by the Florida Department of Education Test Development Center in conjunction with a major publisher of curriculum and assessment materials, figures into the overall grade assigned to an individual school each year and is also worth thirty percent of the
It seems self-evident that social studies education has an important place in the school curriculum, yet it has remained marginalized over the last few decades. Today, the aforementioned No Child Left Behind Act has diminished the role of social studies by ignoring it, thus guaranteeing that social studies would not be an educational funding priority (National Council for the Social Studies, 2008), among other things. This situation is typical of social studies courses not linked to a high stakes test (Soder, 2004).

Because the Florida EOCA is still relatively new, there has not been a great deal of research on its impact on the state. Proponents of civics testing in Florida assert that it is the best available way to measure – and hopefully improve – students’ civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. With Florida requiring civics in all public middle schools, it is now considered a critical component of the curriculum. Because of the test, more time and resources for civic education have become available; civics is no longer regarded as a low priority (CCMS, 2014). In other words, civics is now tested, so it is now taught.

Certainly, when used appropriately, testing can serve as a valuable tool for measuring the efficacy of civic education. Providing a frame of reference for the teacher by identifying gaps and areas of weakness and establishing baselines for students illustrate some of the benefits of testing (Roediger, Putnam & Smith, 2011). In all
likelihood, teachers would agree on the necessity of testing to inform them about student performance and to be used as an effective diagnostic tool. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in civics has been a valuable resource for measuring the “civic health” of the nation for various age groups of students, and many educators view it as diagnostic in nature and by no means as a high-stakes test.

Opponents of the EOCA criticize the test for measuring only civics content knowledge, and to some degree, civics skills. They assert that the test in its current form cannot possibly measure meaningful civic learning. According to the CCMS, high-stakes, standardized testing environments like Florida’s do not promote a broad version of civic learning that encompasses the six proven practices as inputs and the three main categories of outcomes: knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

**Whither Civic Education and Testing?**

The deterioration of civic education over the years (CCMS, 2011) is troubling. For Florida teachers, the “new normal” is that they have now joined the ranks of teachers of other tested subjects with rigid standards and benchmarks that must be covered to prepare for a high-stakes test. However, in Florida not all standards are treated equally (Florida Department of Education, 2012). Out of the 40 benchmarks in the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, a few are not tested because they are experiential in nature – e.g., service-learning projects, mock trials, and mock elections. With 35 benchmarks to get through by the administration of the test in May, teachers may find themselves “teaching to the test” and being forced to neglect the experiential standards that promote a more well-rounded civic education. Predictably, although to some degree civic content knowledge can be measured, civic skills and dispositions cannot (Education Commission of the States, 2013; Godsay, Henderson, Levine, &
Littenberg-Tobias, 2012; Saye, 2013). Levine (2012) also states that merely requiring one civics course or one high-stakes test is unlikely to improve civic learning and engagement.

High quality civics instruction lends itself to Dewey’s philosophy (1897) of “continuing reconstruction of experience” by becoming a permanent fixture and evolving experience throughout the course of a student’s public education (p. 37). Yet schools seem to have become ineffective instruments for measuring and promoting “civic health,” mainly because the typical public school experience fails to engage students in meaningful civic instruction and participation. If schools are to truly become laboratories of civic experiences and growth for students, civic education progress must stem from the “development of new attitudes towards and new interests in experience” (Dewey, 1897, p. 37). Providing students with a fully immersive civics experience, as opposed to temporary enrollment in a civics course, is the best way to cultivate new experiences for students while helping to create capable, effective citizens inside and outside the classroom.

I argue here that that the task of trying to create a truly immersive and powerful civics experience for K-12 classrooms is challenging but manageable. Research on civic education has gone in many directions, but there seem to be some agreed-upon absolutes regarding high quality civic education. First, the National Council for the Social Studies is the largest and most prominent association in the country devoted solely to social studies education. The mission statement of the NCSS is “to provide leadership, service, and support for all social studies educators” (2015). NCSS seeks to provide frameworks of study to help teachers and researchers to conduct their ongoing
work with social studies education. As part of a position statement released and approved by the NCSS board in 2013 on revitalizing civic learning in schools, the NCSS makes strong recommendations for civic education. Adopted from *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools* (2011), the NCSS recommendations identify and promote characteristics of effective civic learning implementation.

The CCMS’s (2011) *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of School* (2011) is perhaps the “gold standard” of recommendations for essential practices to provide students with the most holistic civic learning experience possible. Classroom instruction, discussion of current events and controversial issues, service-learning, school governance, simulations of democratic processes, and extracurricular activities all contribute to an overall high quality experience of civic education, according to the CCMS. This study will focus on the six CCMS’s “proven practices” as a conceptual framework. Although extracurricular offerings and participation, while essential components of a high quality civic education (Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003), are not overt measures of civic pedagogy, they will be discussed only briefly in this work.

It is important to note that the participants in this study were slightly familiar with the CCMS *Guardian of Democracy* Report because they had all attended a civics training conducted by the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship that referenced the proven practices. In the interviews, we did not specifically discuss the proven practices, nor do I critique the teachers based on their use of these practices. Coincidentally, however, the teachers mentioned using pedagogical practices that were similar to the CCMS “proven practices.” Therefore, I refer to CCMS “proven practices”, when appropriate, in a non-
judgmental way, as a framework for understanding the “big picture” of the participants’ narratives about effective civics teaching and learning.

**Proven Practice One: Classroom Instruction**

The first guideline for civic instruction advocated by the NCSS (2015) calls for direct instruction in government, history, economics, law, and democracy in ways that provoke analysis and critical thinking skills”. CCMS (2011) has also revised its position on classroom social studies to include instruction in geography to stimulate meaningful civic education. Providing students with a solid foundation of content knowledge is crucial for effective civic education. The focus should not be on the simple acquisition of civic facts, but on the development of deeper civic knowledge, which helps students develop their civic skills for democratic participation (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). More focus on the function and purposes of civic knowledge is far more effective than rote memorization, which can cause students to lose interest and even hinder their civic participation as adults (CCMS, 2011). The civic spirit of the child can only be awakened and nourished if students are provided with knowledge that enhances their thinking. Maria Montessori (1912) spoke about the artificial conditions (both physical and cognitive) that can limit children in their personal journey. Students ought to be civically educated in an organic, engaging manner that allows them to develop their skills of civic engagement for deeper learning (Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2015).

Knowledge is important to civic instruction, but knowledge without connection or purpose is pointless. Niemi & Smith (2011) assert that most civic classes today focus on delivering generic civic knowledge, rather than developing students’ abilities of analysis. For most of the history of civic education, students have been indoctrinated in the values of our country and forced to regurgitate discrete facts as proof of good
citizenship. In terms of civic pedagogy, lecture and memorization have traditionally won the day. Students must have opportunities to develop their knowledge in a variety of ways that challenge their skills of inquiry and critical thinking (Syvertsen, Flanagan, & Stout, 2007; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). In other words, critical thinking and inquiry are essential, but students need substantive content to think about as they develop civic skills.

Journell, Beeson, and Ayers (2015) further argue for civic knowledge-based skills by restructuring civic education as a “discipline in which students use specific tools and ways of thinking that mimic those used by professionals within that discipline… specifically, knowledge that utilizes tools and methodologies of political scientists” (p. 28). Journell et al. demonstrated how students can learn to critically think and examine civic scenarios through an observation of a civics classroom during the 2012 presidential election. Students were tasked with becoming “critical consumers of political information” (p. 49). For example, students were asked to observe the range of media coverage on the election and evaluate statements for bias, reliability, and purpose. Such an activity could also be considered a part of media literacy education, since it requires students to think critically about various forms of communication (Scheibe, 2004). Media literacy education can be powerful in multiple educational contexts, but its goal of “creating an informed and critical public” (Mihaldis, 2001, p. 4) has a strong connection to civic education with its potential to positively influence civic engagement (Kahne, Lee, & Feezell, 2011).

**Proven Practice Two: Discussion of Current Events and Controversial Issues**

Classroom discussion is at the heart of any strong social studies curriculum and pedagogy (MacAvoy & Hess, 2013; Nystrand et al, 1998; Parker & Hess, 2001).
Discussion seems indispensable to a high quality civic education. As Mansbridge (1991) claims, “Democracy involves public discussion of common problems, not just silent counting of individual hands” (p. 122). The effective citizens of tomorrow ought to experience and understand the value of discussion. The CCMS (2011) calls for high quality, inclusive, and constructive discussions of current events and controversial issues in the civics classroom. There is widespread agreement on the value of what to discuss (current events, controversial issues) and how to conduct such discussions in the classroom (methods). However, there is far more ambiguity concerning the exact definition of discussion. Some define discussion based on the number of participants and the ethos of the discussion (Nystrand et al, 1998), but fail to include the conditions and purpose of the discussion (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999). Although not all definitions are comprehensive, at the root of all discussion is the understanding that it is a dialogue among people exchanging information over a particular topic as a means of constructing knowledge for a positive outcome of understanding (Hess, 2004).

Parker (1996) discusses the inherent value of democratic discourse within our schools. Classroom discussion has the power to be transformative, because it can lead to the development of citizens who are more engaged with their society and more likely to play a role as an active participant, not a passive observer (Hess, 2009). It is vital to show students how to engage in democratic discourse and the importance of discussing controversial issues in the classroom. Schooling on discussion during the formative years of our students’ lives has the potential to make a difference in their adult lives as citizens (Parker, 1996).
A study by Conover, Searing, and Crew (2002) suggests that only 30% of Americans engage in any kind of public political discussion. Discussion skills should begin in schools in order for students to learn how citizens can not only make their voices heard but also hear the voices of those who are marginalized and typically unheard. In a private setting people are more likely to discuss political topics (if at all) with people like them, and the consideration of people from different backgrounds may be neglected. A good civics class makes discussion possible, when the discussion of issues is conducted in a rational, organized, civil environment that can potentially help students in their future adult lives to acknowledge and better handle complex issues (Avery, 2002; Hess, 2004). Reaching our students as early as possible is the key to nurturing the skills of democratic discourse.

Maxine Greene (1971) discussed the shortcomings of a strictly prescribed curriculum and the importance of allowing students to participate in curriculum development, which encourages teachers to “stimulate an awareness of the questionable” (p. 138). Discussions on topics of relevance to students and society can help spark such stimulation, and students likely will be far more eager to participate. Relevant topics can pique the interests of students, and in turn encourage students to participate more actively in discussion (Hess, 2008). Greene (1971) asserts that students will only be in a position to learn when they are committed to act upon their world. Accordingly, facilitating meaningful discussions with students can generate this commitment. Of course, students participating in such discussions are further developing important democratic skills (CCMS, 2011).
Classrooms should engage students in discussion on a routine basis, covering current events that may include controversial issues (Hahn, 2001). The NCSS (2015) guidelines also call for teachers to engage students in “civil dialogue about controversial issues” because such dialogue “provides opportunities to foster character and civic virtue” (para. 14). Understanding what defines a controversial issue and how to conduct such discussions are critical to their implementation. Hess (2009) defines controversial political issues as “questions of public policy that spark significant disagreement” (p. 37). They also take into account the importance of context, insofar as issues that are controversial in some places are not in others. Also, timing plays a crucial role in defining a controversial issue, as the political and societal landscape is always in flux (Hess, 2009). For example, Misco & Lee (2014) conducted a study on the discussion of controversial issues related to understanding identity in Guam. Had such a lesson been undertaken on the U.S. mainland, this may not have been considered controversial. However, since the citizens of Guam have a storied past with the U.S. military and have a unique relationship with the American federal government, understanding Guamanian identity raises controversial issues that can be brought to the surface in classroom discussion.

Once the teacher selects an issue, a specific instructional practice can be implemented to engage students in the discussion of the issue. However, before diving into the techniques of in-depth discussion, teachers must always remember to “keep the deliberative space of their classroom fair and open by resisting the urge to mock or dismiss competing views about open political questions” (McAvoy & Hess, 2013, p. 44). Respecting student thinking and dialogue is critical to cultivating an open environment
of discussion. In order for the experience to be transformative, all students must be allowed to have their opinions voiced in a rational manner without the teacher shutting down the discussion as a result of his/her own disagreement (Hahn, 2001; Hess, 2008). The teacher should act as more of a facilitator than a participant, making sure discussion is respectful and open. If discussions are led in such a manner, teachers can help students to “develop the skills and dispositions of deliberation so that young people are able to practice reason-giving, listening, and considering how their views impact others” (McAvoy & Hess, 2013, p. 44).

Hess (2009) and Parker (2008) make the case for implementing a variety of methods for the discussion of all issues, controversial or otherwise. Research overwhelmingly advocates the use of protocols in the classroom. Town hall meetings, Socratic seminars, deliberations, and other discussion models allow students to develop their understanding of a topic, engage with their classmates in a respectful manner, and become more open to exploring their thinking on a particular topic. For example, in a study by Hess (2009), the teacher asked students to participate in a town hall meeting format via large group discussion on affirmative action, where every student was required to assume a particular perspective, regardless of personal opinion. Students were provided with rubrics for the discussion, as well as examples of what kind of town hall meetings were considered effective. Prior to the meeting, students researched their assigned perspective and found evidence related to their position on the issue. The teacher facilitated the town hall meeting, but the students led the discussion, and because of the structure the teacher put into place, the discussion was informed, civil,
and critical. Practices such as these provide students with an opportunity not to simply argue, but to better understand multiple perspectives on a particular issue (Hess, 2009).

**Proven Practice Three: Service-learning Opportunities**

NCSS (2015) encourages schools to provide students with rich “opportunities to connect formal classroom instruction with the principles and process of democratic life through practical community problem solving” for the most wholesome of civic experiences. It can be argued that the concept of service-learning grew out of Dewey’s (1897) reflections on the importance of experiential learning in the classroom. Saltmarsh (2011) asserts that the more students participate in meaningful service-learning opportunities, the more likely they are to participate in their communities as adults. Service-learning has the potential of positively influencing civic outcomes in students’ lives (Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005; Wade, 2008; Wirthlin Group, 1995).

Mann, Dymond, Bonati, and Neeper (2013) contend that “successful service-learning opportunities connect students to their communities as engaged citizens who advance their own learning of relevant content knowledge with skills and value development in extended learning activities outside of the classroom” (p. 58). The National Youth Leadership Council (2008) advocates for high quality service-learning experiences, and recommends eight essential components: length and intensity of service, student participation and voice, personal and community relevance, reflection, collaboration, constant engagement and assessment, and respect. Wade & Yarbrough (2007) argue that the wealth of research on service-learning calls for a focus on three distinct factors: a focus on local government or civic issues, reflection on social and political issues, and an appropriate length of time and intensity. Service-learning experiences should be localized, as students can actively engage with the community
while in close proximity to the classroom. Students will be more invested in localized service-learning when they have a direct connection with the community in which they live (Yates & Yoonis, 1998). Large scale service-learning opportunities disconnected from the students’ community may be ineffective as compared to those in the student’s community.

Wade & Yarbrough (2007) and Morgan & Streb (2001) also emphasize the importance of reflection on social and political issues. The most impactful service-learning programs help students to “integrate community service with systemic reflection on their experience (and) are more likely to help students develop an understanding of political context and governing institutions” (p. 373). To maximize the civic benefits of service-learning, students must be constantly guided by the teacher to reflect and think about the issues the students are focusing on in the community. Contemplating the why and how of a community issue as well as reflecting on the process can help students develop their foundational civic skills and dispositions.

A final guideline for service-learning experiences is providing an appropriate amount of time and depth. Service-learning should be an ongoing experience for students that is more than just an objective to meet, but a fixture of academic life (Niemi, Hepburn, and Chapman, 2000). Wade & Yarbrough’s (2007) study on the CiviConnections program required students to participate in a yearlong program researching and participating in specific social issues. At the end of the program, students reported more positive attitudes and beliefs about civic engagement. Wade & Yarbrough also call for continued service-learning opportunities for the entire duration of their schooling in order for it to have its most powerful impact (Melchior, 1998)
McKoy, Stern, and Bierbaum (2010) have created a model for service-learning that meets the aforementioned guidelines while creating a powerful service-learning opportunity for students. Their model, the “Social Enterprise for Learning” (SEfL) emphasizes student voice in identifying a public issue and acting on it. SEfL provides explicit guidelines to help civics teachers conduct service-learning projects, breaking it into five key steps: start-up, making sense of community resources, developing the enterprise, making the activity known to the public, and continual reflection. Each of the cases presented by McKoy et al. (2010) focused on local issues, continued for at least the length of a school year, and required continual reflection. Service-learning can be an intensive and lengthy undertaking for students, teachers, and schools to take on but it has the potential for powerful results.

**Proven Practice Four: Simulations**

Simulations and games have a particularly important place in civic curriculum, as they can have a direct impact on future civic political life (Lenhart, Kahne, Middaugh, Macgill, Evans, & Vitak, 2010). Schools and teachers should work together to provide their students with simulations of various democratic processes and procedures. Wright-Maley (2015a) defines simulations as “pedagogically mediated activities used to reflect the dynamism of real life events, processes, or phenomena, in which students participate as active agents whose actions are consequential to the outcome of the activity” (p. 70). This kind of activity encompasses scenarios in which students can simulate real world roles in a variety of settings, allowing them to experience and think as people actually might do in those scenarios. CCMS (2011) states that “games and other simulations contribute to civic learning by allowing young people to act in fictional environments in ways that would be impossible for them in the real world” (p. 34). Deitz
& Boekelman (2012) argue that such activities as mock presidential elections and mock trials can help reverse the trend of political apathy and contribute to positive changes in students’ “levels of political knowledge, their interest in public life, and their attitudes about government in general” (p. 743). According to Deitz & Boekelman, after a Mock Presidential Election (MPE) that they studied, students better understood political theories and how they connected to the Electoral College, which led to “increased factual and procedural knowledge about a specific topic” (2012, p. 747). Traditional simulations such as the MPE are considered to be one of the most widespread type of simulations to potentially impact students’ civic activism in their communities (Bain, 2004). Simulations are a significant part of civic instruction when “students must apply what they have learned in a low-risk but real-life situation, which allows teachers to assess whether students have internalized information so that they can actually use it in their role as citizens” (Miller & Singleton, 1997).

Teachers should select simulations that encourage active participation from all students in the class (Arnold, 1998; Frasca, 2003; Pautz, 2011). Mock trials, mock elections, and mock Congressional hearings are just some of the more traditional simulations teachers can implement in their classroom. Teachers should make their simulations as active as possible for students, encouraging them to guide and participate in a simulation with an end goal of what they want to accomplish in mind (Wright-Maley, 2015b; Landis, 2012). In addition to creating an active, fully participatory simulation for students, they recommend using an audience for the culminating activity of any simulation. Including an audience can encourage students to work harder to excel at their role in the simulation (Miller & Singleton, 1997).
Simulations for civic learning can also be implemented in a non-traditional manner, such as those occurring in a digital environment. The development of more unconventional, technology-driven approaches to simulations has been increasing in the social studies classroom (Aldrich, 2009; Blevins, LeCompte, & Wells, 2016). One of the most encouraging things about simulations is their versatility and use. Levine, Berson, and Poole (2010) offer a prime example of an innovative simulation that places the learner in an unfamiliar but useful context. In the simulation Legislative Aide, students assume the role of a legislative aide to a fictitious local Congresswoman. The aim of the simulation is to guide “students in investigating real community problems and proposing real community action plans to address the problems” (p. 70). The benefit of employing a simulation like Legislative Aide with students is its immersive nature.

In addition to understanding the complexities of an election or a Congressional process through a hands-on, participatory activity, simulations have the potential “to develop skills to authentically explore issues in ways that are likely more enriching than conventional pedagogic approaches” (Levine et al., 2010, p. 79). Bers & Chau (2009) attempted to enhance college students’ skills of civic engagement through their participation in a 3D world known as Zora, which virtually engaged students in three components of civic life: civic activities and volunteer work, electoral activity, and civic voice. The researchers found that students who had participated in the experience “reported increased participation in civic activities to express their political and social view over the academic year” (Bers, 2009, p. 19). Although this study was conducted with college freshmen, this kind of simulation recognizes the changing role of technology in schooling and civic education. Such technological innovations can help
teachers to “connect to the personal interests and talents of the students who study them [subjects]” and to the use of technology for the benefit of civic health (Noddings, 1984, p. 54).

**Proven Practice Five: Student Governance**

Civic dispositions and skills can also be developed in schools through participation in student governance, which can include, for example, the election of student officers, presentations of school-related issues in a forum, or student council fundraisers (Andolina, 2003; Berman, 2004). Through student governance, students can participate in civic debate, problem solving, teamwork, innovation, and ownership of a type of governing body (CCMS, 2011). More importantly, student government can empower students and give them an outlet to have their voices heard. Student governments challenge the conventional notion of students as “objects to be acted upon’, but instead are trusted to be *subjects* of rights and responsibilities within the school community in some form or other” (Dobozy, 2007, p. 116). School wide democratic deliberations can have positive effects on civic life when they have a defined purpose (Barber, 2003; McIntosh, Berman & Youniss, 2010; Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989) and when students engage in an active dialogue with each other, and with teachers and administrators.

Sinclair (2004) asserts that school governance structures, when they are meaningful and engaging, can also help students with understanding the principles and process of democracy, as well as improving their ability to make informed civic decisions (Sinclair, 2004). Dobozy (2007) also argues that student governance can help students better understand civic concepts such as the rule of law and collaborative decision making. Creating highly participatory student governments, special interest
councils, and surveys canvassing student opinion on school matters are just a few examples of student government in action (Thomas & McFarland, 2010). Again, these are activities that, according to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) have the potential to impact students’ future political participation as adults.

Regardless of the student government activity, schools at all levels should have some kind of student government in place for students to participate and voice their opinions. The CCMS (2011) advises that student government activities must be structured, that students must make a substantial time commitment to activities that activities must engage student interest, and that students’ decisions have real effects. For students to gain the most from the experience, the student government programs ought to be structurally inclusive with a legitimate role in school decision-making (ASCA, 2015; ASGA, 2015).

**Proven Practice Six: Extracurricular Activities**

Providing students with varied and plentiful extracurricular experiences, from sports to drama clubs, may have a positive impact on a student’s civic learning as well, Connection to experiences outside of the traditional school setting may be a significant aspect of civic education through providing students with opportunities to apply their civic skills outside of the classroom. The connection between extracurricular activities and the development of civic skills and dispositions stems from a 1965 study conducted by David Ziblatt, who sought to demonstrate the importance of youth participation in voluntary organizations in high school. However, his in-depth study of one high school showed no direct connection. Nonetheless, the study did suggest that extracurricular activities helped students build social trust, which he defined as “a set of highly generalized beliefs about human nature” (p. 29) and as an indicator of good citizenship
dispositions that may influence adult civic participation. Additionally, the study also provided insight into the lack of extracurricular participation among working class students.

A few studies indicate a positive relationship between students’ after-school experiences and future civic involvement (Niemi and Junn 1998; Putnam 2000; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, and Schulz, 2001). These long-term studies illuminated the benefits of participation in extracurricular activities at an important juncture of a student’s civic life, especially when they emphasize democratic participatory experiences in which students have a voice. More recent research has demonstrated the importance of extracurricular activities. Kahne and Sporte (2008), for example, highlight the benefits of extracurricular learning for civic learning. Kahne and Sporte (2008) identified extracurricular activities as one of the many predictors of civic participation, but found them less significant when compared to practices such as service-learning and discussion of current events. Like Ziblatt’s 1965 study, Kahne and Sporte also point out the unequal distribution of civic learning opportunities through extracurricular activities for students of low socioeconomic status. Kirlin (2008) found similar results regarding socioeconomic disparities. Unfortunately, when state and local governments are in a budgetary crisis, after-school activities are often the first to be eliminated. More thorough research in this area has the potential to strengthen advocacy for extracurricular activities.

**Personal Reflection, Personal Bias**

My firsthand experiences and anecdotal evidence support many of the proven practices. As I found that my students worked in a sphere of engagement that gave me hope for their capacity to become active, engaged, and informed citizens, I can attest to
the value of four of the six proven practices. During my time as a teacher, I did not lead any service-learning programs or projects, nor did I lead a student governance program. I regularly addressed the four proven practices related to developing civic knowledge, facilitating discussions, and conducting simulations. I also provided an opportunity for extracurricular participation as the sponsor of the *Odyssey of the Mind* club.

As a civics instructor, I focused to a great extent on content related to American history, government, and law. My focus on content was a means to an end: providing a foundation for civic knowledge in order to help students understand civics concepts while also challenging them to develop their skills of analysis and critical thinking. I found that this knowledge and these skills laid the groundwork for discussion. Providing students with structured opportunities for discussion of current events and controversial issues not only challenged my students, but also helped to create a more cohesive, collaborative, and respectful classroom environment. Without such an environment, the classroom simulations I conducted (e.g., mock trial, mock elections, classroom congress) would not have been as effective. I wholeheartedly support the “proven practices” from the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and hope that schools across the country will implement such practices for high quality civic education.
CHAPTER 3
METHODS

Introduction

This chapter details the design and implementation of my methods for conducting this study. My purpose is to capture the lived experiences of civic educators as they manage their instruction in an environment of high stakes testing and accountability. I selected my research questions based on my own curiosity as a former civics teacher. As a researcher in a state that has only recently required a civics course and an EOCA, I hope to contribute to the research on civic education.

My research questions have been developed to provide the best possible insight into understanding the lived experiences of three civic educators as they teach civics in a climate of high stakes testing. The idea behind this type of research is not to generalize to the larger population, but to provide deeper insight into the narratives of a few participants with the aim of uncovering more questions and a better understanding of the deep complexities of teaching civics. My questions are open-ended in an attempt to better understand the ontological sense-making experiences of civic educators and their views on teaching civics in a single school district in the state of Florida. How social studies educators make sense of teaching civics with a focus on their beliefs and practices about planning and instructional choices with a state-mandated assessment hanging in the balance at the end of the school year is the driving force behind this research.

The following research questions guided my inquiry:

How do civic instructors make sense of teaching civics under the pressures of high stakes standardized testing?
How does a high stakes test impact civic educators’ instructional choices in their classrooms?
Because of the nature of this inquiry, I decided that a qualitative, constructivist approach would be the most appropriate theoretical foundation for my research. The section below provides a brief discussion and explanation for my choice of this kind of study. Next, I offer descriptions of the research settings, recruitment methods, and a rich description of the research participants to provide a comprehensive understanding of my research choices and the context of the study. I continue the chapter with a discussion of my methods and rationales for data collection and analysis. I also explain the theoretical nature of my data as well as my analytical processes in attempting to draw meaning from my participants’ classroom experiences. I conclude discussion of my research methods with a brief discussion of the trustworthiness, subjectivity, and limitations of my research.

I also speak to the nature of my positionality and how it affected my choices and my own interpretations of experience. Positionality is an integral component of any research approach, and I firmly believe that “interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher” (Denzin, 1986). Although my research focuses on the narratives of my participants, I also recognize the role my presence plays in the construction of their narratives. My research choices, selection of data, and interpretation of research all contribute to the narratives of the lived experiences of my participants (Bazely, 2013).

**Research Perspectives**

**Qualitative Research**

Ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological questions can serve as the four key assumptions for framing research (Creswell, 2007). Determining
the appropriate type of research method should not be decided until the researcher has finalized his or her questions; the type of question determines the type of research. I decided that qualitative research would be the best and most appropriate type of research to answer my questions. Denzin & Lincoln (2011) explain that qualitative research “involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world…This essentially means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (p. 3). I framed my questions so that I could better understand the meaning and sense making of the civics teachers with whom I worked, the contexts in which civic education took place for them, and the overall process of their instructional decision-making. Accordingly, such intellectual goals can and do typically guide qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013).

**Constructivism**

Walker & Lambert (1995) define constructivism as “a theory of learning, and it is also a theory of knowing. It is an epistemological concept that draws from a variety of fields, including philosophy, psychology, and science” (p. 1). Constructivism seeks to understand how people make sense of their world around them, and reflect on the process. Their reflection considers everything from culturally embedded mores to other social factors, and the environment plays a significant role in the process of how people learn and eventually how people come to know something, reconciling their experiences with external stimuli. Constructivism does not acknowledge an objective reality, but rather positions itself around shared realities constructed by individuals and is determined by how they reflect on their experiences. Exploring the varied construction of experiences is a central assumption of constructivism.
There is no agreed upon absolute reality, according to constructivist thought. Vygotsky (1986) states, “The world is a thing in our consciousness ... that is absolutely impossible for one person, but which becomes a reality for two. The world is a direct expression of the historical nature of human consciousness” (p. 256). All branches of constructivism are centered on this belief.

Cakir (2008) explains further the deeper meanings of constructivism, arguing that the paradigm is “more of a philosophy, not a strategy” for how one views the world (p.197). Examining how someone sees reality through a particular lens and experience is one facet of constructivism. People create their own realities from their previous experiences and include these experiences in their learning process. It is within this context that the nature of knowledge is explored, as is the creation of knowledge by the individual. The world has an impact on how knowledge is constructed, but the individual has control over the knowledge as it is created in his or her own mind. Human interaction also helps develop and impact knowledge through “negotiated meanings” which are “thought of as more cooperative than authoritative or manipulative in nature” (Cakir, 2008, p.197). Knowledge is not transmitted and simply delivered to the individual; rather it is a shared co-creation of meaning between individuals. The construction of knowledge is social in nature, but the individual makes the final decision in the learning process on what is considered a true or authentic reality. Finally, as the individual may come to see reality as a creation of knowledge through social interactions, human activity in the creation of reality is accompanied with bias and filters of reality (Johnson, 2015).
Constructivists in the humanities are often concerned “for the ways in which patterns of meaning with streams of consciousness move in and out of the shared commonsense world…Experiences are eventually realized within the currents of dialogue in the social sphere” (Greene, 1996, p.135). Fostering “currents of dialogue in a social sphere” is one of the core purposes of civic education because it relates to cultivating active and engaged citizens. Creating citizens who are able and willing to think and act outside of their own homes and take action within society is paramount to civic education, and such conversations can help cultivate this kind of citizen. This approach to the construction of social knowledge is inherently democratic, since a true democracy invites citizen participation, enlightened thought, and social exchange. People who have experiences that allow them to hone their civic skills of active listening and discussion have the power to transform society. The constructivist need to “negotiate knowledge within a social community ultimately requires democratic social practices…a search for workable truths, personal humbleness in the power of evidence, toleration for different perspectives and interpretations, and an acceptance of the tentativeness of what is held to be true at any particular time” (Fleury, 1998, p. 172; Bronowski, 1965). Thus, the democratic goals of civic education are intertwined and aligned with constructivist thought, and the argument for the mutualistic relationship of the two paradigms is encouraging. Understanding and examining how civic educators develop such patterns of meaning in their daily lives is a crucial part of better understanding and explaining their lived experiences in specific teaching contexts.

**Research Setting**

The research for this study occurred in one Florida school district, For the sake of anonymity, I will refer to it as Faulkner County. The county population totals
approximately 250,000. The city is predominantly Caucasian at 65% of the population; 23% of the population is African-American; 10% is Hispanic-American (mostly Mexican-Americans and Cuban-Americans; and the remainder of the population comprises East Asians and South Asians, as well as small populations other ethnic identities/racial groups and identities. The county is significantly less affluent than the coastal counties of the state (United States Census Bureau, 2016).

Selection of Participants

I used a purposeful sampling approach for my research. Purposeful sampling allows researchers to choose research participants, based on their judgment, to fulfill their needs for the specific purposes of the study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Thus, in order to best explore how civics teachers make sense of their teaching under the pressures of a high stakes standardized test, I recruited three teachers with the following requirements:

- Each participant will be a full-time public school teacher.
- Each participant will be currently teaching at the middle school level.
- Each participant will be teaching 7th grade civics.

The rationale behind my selecting public school middle school teachers is simply a matter of context. In my best attempt to capture the narrative of civic educators teaching under the pressures of a high stakes test, this is the most appropriate context. Civics is required and tested only at the middle school level in Florida's public schools.

To best maximize the variation of participants in my study, I purposefully sought to include participants who differed in years of civics teaching experience as well as other teaching experiences. By selecting participants with a range of experience as civic educators, I hoped to craft a more comprehensive narrative in my data analysis. I
attempted to recruit six teachers for my study, but only three agreed to participate. The three teachers worked at two different schools: one school with more fairly high SES students and somewhat limited racial/ethnic diversity, and the other school with a large percentage of lower income students on free or reduced lunch, more racial/ethnic diversity, and a magnet program for gifted students. It was not my original intent to have two participants from the same school, but even though they both taught at this school, they had vastly different students and issues. For the sake of anonymity, I will refer to the first school as Graham Middle School and the second as Hurston Middle School.

**Description of Participants**

Again, for the purpose of anonymity pseudonyms are used in this study. Kelly was the novice of my three teacher participants, having begun her first year of teaching in the fall of 2016. Kelly is a 22-year old White female born and raised in Florida. Kelly spent most of her education home-schooled by her mother. Once Kelly completed her home schooling, she went on to attend a large public university in the Southeast. As an undergraduate, she majored in sociology and became interested in teaching. Her interest led her to complete an M.Ed. in education, and when we first met she was a student in one of the social studies methods courses I taught in the master’s program. Kelly excelled in my class and considered herself to be an “academic overachiever.” Kelly enjoyed the social studies program, but felt she was always at a disadvantage because of her specialization in sociology. Most of her classmates had backgrounds in history and political science. Kelly hoped she could find a job as a sociology teacher, but also recognized the low probability of finding such a teaching position.

Prior to completing her graduate program, Kelly was excited to be offered a position at the school in which she had interned during the program. In her first year of
teaching at Graham Middle School, she was responsible for five classes of civics and one class of U.S. history. Kelly shared with me her views on social justice, and felt strongly about matters of race because of her sociology background and her personal relationship with her partner. Issues related to race and racism were an important part of Kelly’s thinking, and she believed strongly in their place in the classroom as a point of discussion and understanding. Politically, Kelly described herself as a moderate liberal.

Olivia, my second participant, is a middle-aged White woman with over 15 years of classroom experience, most of them at Hurston Middle School. Olivia was born in Georgia and grew up with her parents in a commune setting in the formative years of her life. Olivia believed that the commune helped create her as a person and develop her views on society. At the age of 8, Olivia and her family left their commune and moved so that her father could enrolled in the law school of a large public university in the Southeast. Olivia moved away from the town in which the university was located because of her father’s career, but she returned several years later for her own enrollment at the same university where she had studied history as an undergraduate. Olivia developed a passion for social studies and decided to pursue a career in teaching, enrolling in the same graduate program that Kelly had completed.

Olivia had no intention of staying in Faulkner County, originally having plans to leave the state and teach in Oregon. She was drawn to the lifestyle and cultural differences of the Pacific Northwest. The job outlook for teaching looked grim in Faulkner County, but at the last minute Olivia was offered a teaching position there. She did not believe she would be staying in Faulkner County for a long time, but it soon became home for her and her family.
Olivia described herself as a progressive liberal with strong views on racial injustice and the embracing of cultural pluralism in American society. She believed her early experiences in the commune, her parents, and her upbringing as a Hindu all had a profound impact on her worldview. Olivia had a nuanced understanding of racial dynamics in the United States, as she experienced different cultures, people, and races/ethnicities in the early stages of her life. Olivia talked about her White privilege, and about her desire to advocate for issues of social justice both in and outside of the classroom.

Sandra, a sixty-year-old White woman, was my third participant. Sandra is a veteran teacher, having over 35 years of teaching experience. She grew up in Maryland and had some difficulties in her early childhood with her family. Sandra believed strongly in the influence of a few of her teachers, as they served as role models and sources of inspiration. Sandra knew at an early age she wanted to become a teacher. Eventually, Sandra enrolled in a small teachers’ college in the South. Sandra’s stories of her early teaching career were colorful and spoke to a distant time in American teaching when she believed that the teaching profession was far more respected and autonomous than it is now. Sandra moved south because of her husband’s job, and soon she found a teaching job in Faulkner County, where she has remained for many years. She also believed in the importance of being an active citizen in her community and in the larger Florida teaching community. She has assumed several positions of state and local leadership in social studies education.

Sandra also explained the importance her religion had in her everyday life as an active member of a local Catholic church. Many of her views on citizenship were
steeped in the doctrine of the Catholic faith, especially regarding charity for people in need and the respectful treatment of others. Sandra also explained how this affected her political principles, and said she identified as politically moderate. She also expressed hesitation to openly sharing her political beliefs because of an unfortunate experience in the past, and said she tried to remain as politically neutral as possible in her teaching.

Data Collection

Interviews

Interviewing is a ubiquitous form of data collection in many approaches to qualitative research inquiry (Holstein, 2002). Interviewing allows the researcher to capture the individual’s point of view in a localized context, as well as examine the demands of everyday life by highlighting the specifics of distinct cases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). In narrative analysis, interviews serve as the primary research method for collecting data (Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2008). Mishler (1986) also explains that interviews construct meaning between the researcher and the participant, and such construction produces an understanding of narrative between the two. Interviews can range from formal, structured styles to informal, casual conversations with participants. Both can reveal insights into the research participants (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

Since I worked with civic educators from the paradigm of constructivism, the overall goal of the interviews was to allow the participants to speak freely about their experiences and how they made meaning of their daily experiences. From their interpretations of their meaning making experiences, I collected and analyzed data that provided me with further insight into the lived experiences of civic educators working under the pressures of a high stakes test.
Interview Process

I decided to conduct four semi-structured interviews with each of my research participants. Initially, I had planned for only three interviews, but as my interviews got underway I realized I had more questions and needed more time. Designing and using a semi-structured interview protocol allowed me to develop some open-ended core questions to guide the interview but not at the expense of the organic nature of the phenomena (Creswell, 2007). I conducted a semi-formal interview during the middle of the fall semester, one at the end of the fall semester, one at the beginning of the spring semester, and one during the middle of the spring semester. Over the course of the interviews I also familiarized myself with the context of the local curriculum by studying commonly used classroom resources, examining the state standards, and immersing myself in any EOCA documents released by the state as well as the district pacing guide.

Although the formal interviews and archival data collection directly informed much of my data analysis, I also maintained a research journal. The journal allowed me to process my thoughts and reflect on my meetings with each teacher, in addition to helping me focus on how to improve my future research. Additionally, I maintained a working relationship with my participants and had several informal conversations with each participant via e-mail, text, and phone calls. Throughout the course of the study, I engaged in casual conversations and experiences with the participants, and I believed this helped me develop a more trusting and open relationship with each teacher, which gave me the most authentic and meaningful data as possible.

Prior to my first formal interview, I had been in contact with each participant via e-mail and phone. However, meeting in person creates a different dynamic, and I sought
to create as comfortable a rapport as I possibly could with each participant. For my first interview, I sought to establish or reestablish a relationship with my participants. A routine mistake by many researchers during the interviewing process is trying to fully immerse the participant in the content of the research, without trying to develop a relationship and provide context for their participants (Roulston, deMarrais, & Lewis, 2003). I attempted to avoid this issue by asking the participants questions about their background and initial thoughts and feelings about civic education. I used a fix set of questions from interview protocols I developed to help me uncover their stories. Because it was my aim to collect narratives for my study, I always encouraged participants to share any and all stories during our time together. In October 2016, I asked the following questions in the first interview:

- Tell me about your background. Where did you grow up? Anything you’d like to share about yourself.
- Tell me about your civic learning experiences during your P-12 schooling.
- Tell me about your background in education? Why did you become an educator? Why civics?
- What do you think is the purpose of civic education?
- What type of learning experiences do you think are best practice for civics classrooms?
- How do you think these experiences reinforce your interpretation of the purpose of civic education?
- What do you consider would be poor civic education?
- What are your thoughts and feelings about the EOCA?
- How do you feel about the civics standards and benchmarks?
- How do you feel about the current climate of civic education in the US?
- How do you feel about the current climate of civic education in Florida?

From the first interview, I learned a great deal about the backgrounds of each of my participants and how they came to be civic educators. I could not help but find commonalities between them and myself, such as my shared affinity for history. I also
gauged their feelings about the EOCA and civic education in general from the first interview.

During our second interview, I focused my questions on civic practices in their classroom. Specifically, I spoke to each candidate about the types of knowledge that were emphasized in their class and, more specifically, the role of discussion in their classrooms. The second interview occurred during December 2016, just after Thanksgiving break. I asked each participant the following questions:

- What types of civic knowledge are most emphasized in your class and why? How is this determined?
- What civics content do you cover?
- Why and how do you cover the material?
- What do you think the EOCA emphasizes in terms of civic knowledge?
- What other types of civic knowledge would you spend more time on or change in any way in your class?
- What do you feel are the best classroom practices for helping your students learn civic knowledge for the EOC? Why? How often do you engage in these practices?
- What classroom practices would you like to do more of if you had the time?
- Tell me about discussion in your classroom.
- Do you ever have discussions on current events or controversial issues? Why or why not? What does this look like?
- Do you think discussion is helpful for your students’ performance on the EOCA? Why or why not?

After I met with my participants for the second interview, I quickly realized I would need more time with them to obtain the rich descriptions of narrative I sought. The second interview yielded discussions on practice, the EOCA, and issues of time and coverage of content. I had developed more questions, and decided to change the number of interviews to four. No participants took issue with the change; all of the teachers seemed to welcome the adjustment.
The third interview occurred in January 2017, and primarily focused on the civic practices of games and simulations, service-learning, the EOCA, planning, and resources. Each participant was asked the following questions:

- What are your thoughts on service-learning? Do you intend to design or implement any kind of service-learning in the classroom? Why/why not? Do you feel it is helpful for the EOCA? Is there any kind of school wide service-learning?
- What are your thoughts on games and simulations? Do you incorporate any games or simulations into your classroom? Why/why not? Do you feel it is helpful for the EOCA?
- Tell me about other any other practices you employ in your classroom that you feel are especially engaging.
- What do you think are the most effective classroom practices for preparing your students to pass the EOCA? Why?
- What do you think are the least effective practices for the EOCA?
- What type of training and support have you had for the EOCA?
- What are your thoughts on the ability level of the tests?
- Tell me about your planning process. What guides your planning? What resources do you use? Why?
- Do you ever feel you are teaching to the test?
- Please look at the following reporting categories for the test. How do you feel about their organization? Is there anything you would change?

My last formal interviews occurred in February and March of 2017. I asked questions about student government and extracurricular activities at the school, as well as more conversation on the EOCA. At this point I had conducted three interviews and had collected several lesson plans, and I wanted my participants to articulate their views and practices with regard to the EOCA as fully as possible. The following questions were asked to each participant:

- Tell me about the student government in your school.
- Tell me about the type of extracurricular activities at the school. In what capacities are you involved?
- How will you cover the untested benchmarks on the EOCA?
- Of the tested benchmarks, which do you find to be the biggest struggle for your students on the EOCA? (Modified for novice teacher)
- How do you determine this and why do you think this is the case?
- How do you address these challenges?
Which benchmarks do you spend the most amount of time and effort on in your classroom?
What is your opinion of the civics benchmarks?
How do you feel the EOCA affects your teaching of civics?
Tell me about any notable lessons you’ve done that you think will help students perform on the EOCA.
Tell me about any notable lessons you think may not have been successful for student performance on the EOCA.
If the EOCA were removed from the course, how would that impact your instruction?
What are the advantages and disadvantages of the EOCA?
What are your final thoughts on the EOCA? How do you feel about teaching civics? What do you want other teachers to know?

At this point, I had begun analyzing data and had some preliminary thoughts on my findings from the research. As a form of member checking, I either spoke on the phone or had a meeting with each of my participants after the fourth and final interview in order to share my thoughts. I presented my initial findings and spoke to each participant about my understanding of their own lived experiences. No participant expressed any disagreement or contention with how I had come to understand the data.

Transcription

Once I completed my interviews, I decided to develop transcriptions of my interviews. Because of time and quantity of data, I utilized a transcription service for my interviews. Following the suggestion of Bazely (2013), once the transcriptions were sent back to me I listened to the audio again and edited the texts and verified the work of the service. This allowed me to develop a more intimate understanding of my research, while verifying the credibility of the transcriptions.

Additionally, because the nature of my research was focused on the content of the interviews, I did not transcribe based on the linguistic nuances of each participant. However, I ensured the transcripts best represented the conversational exchange
between the participants and me. As Bazely (2013) contends, “The goal in transcribing is to be as true to the conversation as possible, yet pragmatic in dealing with the data” (p. 73). Thus I edited extraneous language without compromising the authenticity of the dialogue.

**Lesson Plans**

I elected to use archival data collection in my research to deepen my understanding. Archival data collection has long been considered an integral component of qualitative research that can allow the researcher to gain more holistic comprehensions of data (Bradsher, 1988; Creswell, 2007). The bulk of my research concentrated on my interviews and conversations with the teachers, but this additional data helped me gain a better understanding of classroom demands and instructional choices. Employing such a method also provided me with plenty of rich data that also gave me insight into how each participant made sense of teaching the civics standards and how they provided students with civics experiences. I mostly relied on reviewing the daily lesson plans written by each my participants over the course of the two semesters. Lesson plans are the type of archival data collection that can provide the narrative researcher with descriptions of actions and insight into their sense making experiences (Creswell, 2007). The lesson plans also helped guide some of my questioning in the subsequent interviews with my participants.

To best meet the needs of my participants, I tried not to add more to their already busy schedules. I asked them not to change anything as a result of their participation in the research study. I wanted to understand the best possible constructions of their reality as civic educators. I imposed no planning requirements; I only asked each participant to provide me with any lesson plans they had developed prior to each new
scheduled interview. Each teacher provided me with different quantities of lesson plans, which varied in content and detail. It was not the aim of the study to compare lesson plans, but to use them to contextualize the interviews.

Kelly provided me with electronic lesson plans, mostly based on the lesson plans developed by the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship (FJCC). The Florida Joint Center for Citizenship is a partnership between the Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government at the University of Central Florida and the Bob Graham Center for Public Service at the University of Florida. FJCC provides civics professional development and resources to teachers across the state. She made minor comments or adjustments to each FJCC lesson based on her needs. Olivia electronically sent me short agendas in her lesson plans. Olivia’s lesson plans were less detailed, but typically described the major components of each lesson. Olivia typed her lessons on a daily basis for her record keeping and pacing. Finally, Sandra’s lesson plans were handwritten in a personal planner. In order to obtain Sandra’s lesson plans for analysis, I visited her classroom prior to our conversations and took photographs of her lesson plans with my mobile device. Sandra’s lesson plans were also less detailed, but still provided a general outline of her daily agenda. It should also be noted that none of the teachers taught at schools where formal lesson plans were required for their daily instruction.

**Data Analysis**

Bazely (2013) contends that “our understanding of the nature of reality and truth and whether we discover, interpret, or construct realities and truths influence our choices of topic, methods, and conclusions” (p. 1) in the research we conduct. The interpretation of data in qualitative research is a complex process replete with challenges. The biggest challenge for the researcher is to transform seemingly
disconnected information into a meaningful analysis. Selecting how to best interpret
data varies based on the nature of the research, as well as the theoretical framing of the
researcher’s approach. Data analysis is essentially a more sophisticated version of our
personal analytic methods of everyday minutia, and it is the researcher’s task to
articulate his or her findings in an organized and comprehensible manner (Bazely, 2013;
Schatzman, 1991; Stake 2010). I employed a thematic narrative analysis to best
capture and understand the experiences of the civic educators in my study.

**Narrative Analysis**

The experiences people choose to share with others help to craft a narrative.
These narratives are created and informed by life experiences that “affects how he or
she experiences, remembers, and interprets historical events” (Maynes, Pierce, &
Laslett, 2008, p.3). Researchers doing narrative inquiry collect information regarding
their participants’ lives and make sense of the narratives of their experiences, while
gleaning knowledge from their interactions with the participants’ stories (Clandinin 2006;
Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Loo, Cooper, & Manochin, 2015). This process offers “a way
of understanding and inquiring into experience through collaboration between
researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social
interaction with milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004, p. 20).

Narrative analysis offers the researcher a methodology for interpreting the storied
Relying on narrative as a fulcrum for discovery “allows researchers to present
experience holistically in all its complexity and richness” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p.
10). Furthermore, it is the aim of narrative inquirers to capture and present the “whole
story” of experience, a core tenet of its existence. Whereas other forms of research may
present a myopic view of an experience, narrative research seeks to ground itself in the search for verisimilitude (Clandinin, 2013; Webster & Mertova, 2007). The desire to provide the “rest of the story” is a major feature in the origin and rise of narrative analysis in qualitative research.

Narrative analysis has the potential to be conducted in four major ways. One method focuses on word structure, specifically the overall nature of the telling of the story. This method focuses on the “how” of the production of the story. Another method, dialogic/performance, analyzes who is involved as the story has come to be produced. This approach requires a much more active and involved role for the researcher as she or he becomes an active voice in the story of the research. Third, the most contemporary approach of narrative analysis is visual, where the researcher uses images alongside text to make meaning of stories (Riessman, 2008). Narrative research is in constant flux, and welcomes changing ways of doing narrative analysis.

Finally, although narrative analysis can be conducted by the aforementioned ways, for the purpose of my study I used thematic analysis to unpack my data. Thematic data analysis focuses more on the content of the story, insofar as the researcher looks for core themes throughout the stories and attempts to capture the overall “what” of the story (Riessman, 2008). Thematic narrative analysis helped me explore and understand how a few individuals made sense of their roles as civic educators and how they implemented civic education. These detailed accounts revealed common narrative themes and provided a richer understanding of the experiences of the participants.
I based my thematic narrative analysis on Riessman (2008) with “the primary attention on “what” is said, rather than “how,” “to whom,” or “for what purposes” (p. 54). Riessman offers “concrete practices or ways of working with the narrative data” (p. 53) in her framework for employing narrative analysis. Utilizing Riessman’s (2008) core assumptions on narrative analysis, I maintained a focus on content, preserved narrative sequence, attended to detail, and, when applicable, historicized from the narrative accounts. My aim was to identify thematic narrative categories across individuals while preserving the narrative nature of my data. Rather than fracture the data into small, discrete parts I aimed to preserve the whole of each significant narrative. Although the focus of my data was on the narratives of each participant, I also remained observant of individual statements that I felt spoke to the entire narrative. For purposes of organization and preservation of data context, I created an organizational graphic that allowed me to chart significant narratives and their connected themes. I found this method to be extraordinarily useful in systematically organizing and referencing my data.

In order to work cautiously and systematically with my data, I first had to decide for myself what would define a narrative. Rather than have a strict structural limitation, I decided I would focus on any type of recall, story, recollection, or extended statement of a particular event. Salmon (2008) says that the inherent contingency of narratives and the qualification of narrative as a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected must be present. Because not all conversation or written communication is narrative, I searched my data for speech that included such meaningful patterns. Not all language included the strict criterion of a complete
structural narrative, but it included elements that I chose to analyze when I deemed it necessary to understanding the research as a whole. Riessman (1993) states that narrative can be any kind of discourse “organized around consequential events” (p. 3). I analyzed any and all comments, questions, and statements if I believed them to be a necessary part of understanding the constructions of meaning from each participant.

Narrative analysis is conducted by researchers in a variety of ways, but based on my questions and the needs of my research I approached my data analysis in a manner similar to Riessman’s (2008) description of Ewick and Silbey (2003). I defined narrative as any “bounded segment of interview text about an incident” and chose to represent the data in “brief interview excerpts with cleaned up speech” (Riessman, 2008, p. 75). First, I employed an open descriptive coding process to focus on relevant narratives to my research questions and eliminated unessential information (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2013; Wolcott, 1994). Once I identified distinct narratives in my data I coded each narrative using In Vivo coding. King (2008) defines this type of coding as “the practice of assigning a label to a section of data, such as an interview transcript, using a short word or phrase taken from the data” (p.473). I believed this process to be the most appropriate in preserving the voices of my participants (Saldaña, 2013). Once I coded my data, I developed thematic categories based on the narratives and their relevance to the meaning making experiences of the participants. As I developed my categories, three narrative themes – definitions of civic education, conflict, and negotiations of time – emerged from my data across all three participants. Although the degree of each theme varied based on the participant, this type of analysis allowed me to interpret the constructions of meaning from each participant’s narratives.
Subjectivity Statement

The role of the researcher varies based on the type of research, but the mere presence and positionality of the researcher are always a factor (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Qualitative researchers who recognize their position in the research process can help ensure the study’s integrity. Certainly, I bring my own perceptions, biases, and understandings of knowledge to the research and to the participants. I also realize that this research is not a linear progression of constructed truth. My perspective as a constructivist researcher informs my belief that knowledge is created by the experiences we have. My post-positivist perspective emphasizes that knowledge is constructed differently by each person. The lack of an objective truth creates constructed realities, and it is from these constructed realities we can derive useful insights. My perspective as a constructivist researcher and educator is also informed by the idea that people learn when they have experiences of meaning and reflect on those experiences. True learning occurs in active experiences designed to challenge the thinking of the learner; learners are not passive receptacles of random facts and trivial information.

Just as my researcher and educator perspectives inform my positionality, I also recognize my individual background does the same. Being a 30-year old white male of middle class background brings its own form of privilege to my experiences as a researcher and more generally as a citizen. My own personal views on citizenship are also a significant part of my civic education research, in that I define myself as a critical democratic educator with a social justice orientation. My political leanings as a progressive liberal have unquestionably influenced my interpretations of citizenship and civic education. Admittedly, my ambition is to advance the civic mission of schools to encourage the growth of justice-oriented citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2008).
I also recognize that I am deeply invested in the civics curriculum in Florida because of my connection to the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship (FJCC) and one of its lead specialists, Dr. Elizabeth Washington. As a civic education researcher, I appreciate the value of civic education and wish to see it flourish throughout the state and the rest of the country. I also approached my research as a former middle school civics teacher of three years, and believe my experience helped me interpret the narratives of my participants. I openly admit to my distaste for high-stakes, standardized testing. However, this bias stimulated my research interest because I am aware of the reality of what civic educators in Florida experience. I hope that my research informs their work and illuminates some of the ways in which my participants address problems and issues in their civics teaching.

Additionally, my past experiences with research also put me in a unique position. Although in this study I am the researcher, I was the “researched” one several years ago as a novice civic educator. As a research participant, I was asked to share my own sense making experiences of teaching civics, but the context was different because I did not teach with an EOCA looming ahead. Undoubtedly, my experiences as a research participant and my experiences as a teacher invigorated my inquiry into civic education.

It is also important to note I approached my participants from the perspective of a civics teacher educator. I brought my own understandings of training and research for practicing educators that influenced my research design and purpose. I also could not help but bond with my participants over shared experiences. From this I believe I developed unique relationships with each participant. For example, I spoke with Kelly as
a former student of mine in the master’s program for which I was a graduate teaching assistant. With Olivia, I shared a passion for social justice and found political compatibility that led to stimulating discussions. With Sandra, I found that we shared the experience of working with gifted/advanced students in civics. I recognize how the experiences we have inform our own constructions of knowing, and it is from these several roles that I have interpreted my research. I acknowledge that my own actions, beliefs, and attitudes affected how I chose to contextualize my research, but I tried my best to be as authentic as possible in my representations of my participants.

**Trustworthiness**

Issues of validity are ubiquitous in research, and considerations of validity were part of undertaking this qualitative study. Although Maxwell (1996) contends that absolute certainty is an impossibility in any kind of research, it is important for all researchers to resolve issues of concern in their research. Peräkylä (2016) defines validity in qualitative research as “the interpretations of observations, ‘whether or not the researcher is calling what is measured by the right name’” (p. 415). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2013), at the heart of validity in qualitative research are the following two questions: “Are these findings sufficiently authentic...that I may trust myself in acting on their implications?” and “Would I feel sufficiently secure about these findings to construct a social policy or legislation based on them?” (p. 246). These questions guided me throughout my inquiry.

Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) provide a synthesis of the research literature on issues of validity. In their review of understanding validity in qualitative research, Whittemore et al. (2001) developed a framework for research criteria, and it is from this framework that I address issues of validity in my study. Integrity, authenticity,
credibility, and criticality comprise the primary criteria for validity. With regard to integrity, I conducted member checks of my initial analyses and understandings of our conversations throughout the study. I also concluded with an additional meeting with the sole purpose of member checking the preliminary findings of my data. For credibility, my accounts of the narratives are represented in a believable manner through detail and thoroughness in my analysis. With regard to critical appraisal, maintaining a research journal provided me with an audit trail of my research and my wonderings. Finally, issues of authenticity were addressed in the sheer size of my data collection and the time I spent with each participant. The lengthy interviews and lesson plans yielded significant data, providing me with rich descriptions of their experiences. Additionally, my In Vivo coding efforts focused on maintaining the distinct voice of each participant.

**Limitations**

The single greatest limitation in my research is in its small sample size. It is not the aim of this study to draw broad and deep generalizations that can be applied to the entirety of civic education. However, it does bring forth rich narratives of three individuals in order to glean insight from their experiences. Accordingly, it is common and appropriate in qualitative, constructivist research of this type to work with such a small sample size (Creswell, 2007). The sample size allowed me to work deeply and intimately with the data, an important feature of narrative research (Riessman, 1993). I believe that each of my participants provided me with relevant and descriptive data that enabled me to best explore their personal narratives as forms of both communication and knowing (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004). Such rich descriptions are valuable and insightful for the researcher because the details can reveal more significant, broader issues at work (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).
Additionally, I also realize that the participants were only interviewed and reviewed by me for six months. Although six months was a significant amount of time (over half the school year), my data collection did not include planning prior to the school year, the beginning of the school year, or the end of the school year after the EOCA was administered. Unfortunately, these are the limitations of the timeline for dissertation research. I acknowledge that these are valuable times to capture events “in the moment,” but I believe each teacher’s reflection served me well in my interpretation of their data.

I am confident about the integrity of my research. All of my decisions were based on my best judgment. I routinely asked myself, “Is this what is best for educators?” and “Am I doing this right?” Needless to say, the methodology that undergirds my research has been a painstaking, carefully constructed process.

**Concluding Remarks**

With the recent resurgence of interest in civic education, there has never been a more opportune time to conduct meaningful research to benefit the social studies field. However, such pioneering comes with its difficulties. Most of the research on civic education is based on best practices, curriculum and program design, and student civic outcomes. Attention to the meaning making experiences of civic educators is virtually non-existent, as is understanding the perceptions that educators have of civics classroom practices. Moreover, the context for civic education in Florida is an entirely unexplored area of inquiry to which I hope to make a small but meaningful contribution and spark new inquiry in civic education research.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Introductory Remarks

Many questions came to mind as I conducted my inquiry into the classroom experiences of each of the three civic educators: How do civic educators reconcile the demands of the EOCA (End-Of-Course Assessment) with the needs of their students? How do civic educators choose what to teach and how to teach in their classrooms, in light of this test? How do these civic educators decide what content to implement and how to best provide instruction for the students? What are the beliefs of these teachers concerning the purposes of civic education, and what role does the EOCA play in helping to reinforce or conflict with their beliefs? How are civic educators being impacted by the EOCA, and what are their perceptions on student impact? What views do the civic educators have about the 7th grade civics standards, and how do these views inform their actions? And finally, what are the reflections of these civic educators about teaching civics and how they construct meaning from their varied and complex teaching contexts?

This chapter aims to answer these questions and provide insight into how the teachers made meaning from their various experiences of teaching civics over the course of two semesters. To reach a more holistic understanding of their sense making experiences, I present the narratives and statements of each of the educators thematically for interpretation. Thematic analysis better allows the researcher to focus on the content of the narrative (Riessman, 2008). Although each participant provided narratives unique to their specific contexts, significant thematic elements connected all three of these teachers. From their experiences, each teacher sought to share with me
depictions of their reality to construct a more complete story of themselves (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004).

My findings are presented in three sections based on the three major thematic elements that emerged from my analysis. First, I share my findings on how each participant defined civic education. Several sub-narratives comprise the nature of this thematic narrative, and I have categorized each under a main category. Defining the purpose of civics, best practices, poor practices, and background connections to each teacher provide narratives informing their definition of civic education. Second, I share my findings based on the thematic element of conflict. Each participant revealed stories of conflict, such as conflict with the school district, school, curriculum content, the EOCA, and the coverage of the material. Third, my findings on the negotiation of time, and stories of instructional choice related to content and instruction based on time, are discussed. As I analyzed the content of each narrative, I looked for broader narratives connecting these participants and their lived experiences. Each participant shared several narratives over the course of our time together, but only the narratives with thematic connections evolved as units of analysis in my study. When appropriate, I also comment on the lesson plans each participant shared with me over the course of six months. These lesson plans helped me gain further insight into their classroom planning and practices. As a personal choice, I also head each narrative subheading with an In Vivo code to provide the best possible representation of the thematic content. In Vivo coding attempts to respect and preserve the voice of the narrator to the greatest extent possible. Chapter 5 concludes with a summary and discussion of the thematic findings.
Theme: Defining Civic Education

In this section, I examine how each teacher defined civic education. The sub-narratives provided by each participant are discussed and organized based on the participant. For example, I explore Kelly’s stories defining civic education based on her understanding of what a good citizen is or what she believes the best practices in civic education ought to be. The sub-narratives gleaned from this broader narrative stem mostly from the first interview, unless otherwise noted. During the first interview, teachers were asked about their personal backgrounds and their essential views on teaching civics. I aimed to understand how each person’s background informed her views on teaching, citizenship, and classroom practices. Methodologically, I believed that asking questions about a person’s background could provide me with a more holistic understanding of her various perceptions. Understanding who these people are and what motivates them to teach civics helped provide me with keen insights into their pedagogy. Additionally, this approach allowed me to help cultivate a partnership of trust and openeness with each teacher. I wanted my teachers to feel at ease, and I believe I successfully established a friendly, albeit professional, rapport with each person. Finally, the primary criterion for selecting these narratives is based on thematic content. I purposefully selected statements, reflections, and stories comprising the sub-narratives of each participant. It should also be noted that certain stories may contain thematic overlap, but I chose to categorize my findings based on the most appropriate narrative and sub-narrative thematic content. As I spoke with my participants, the broad narrative of defining civic education revealed itself in my data. From this, I then selected appropriate sub-narratives, which comprised the larger narrative of defining civic education while providing insight into a specific component of their beliefs and ideas.
Kelly

Kelly's background and its influence on defining civic education – “I was homeschooled so…”

As Kelly and I talked about her upbringing, it became evident to me that her background informed her views on defining civic education. Kelly talked about how she grew up homeschooled, and how “that had a profound effect on how I saw the world.” She had a strong relationship with her mother, and felt she did “the best she could do with raising and teaching all of us kids.” Kelly reflected on her mother’s views on educating her own children. Kelly believed her mother chose to homeschool her children in order to make sure they were “being taught the right lessons in life.” Kelly shared with me her reflections on her homeschooling experiences:

So being homeschooled is different, but it’s something I’m proud of. Looking back, it’s no doubt my Mom played a role in how I see the world. She always tried to make sure we understood the difference between right and wrong, good vs evil. We weren’t crazy Christian or anything but she definitely believed in helping us understand to stand up for the good things in the world. It’s a complicated place out there but being a good person really isn’t that complicated, and there were definitely some lessons with strong moral takeaways.

Kelly went on to explain how these experiences helped define her views on civic education. She talked about the “importance of showing your students right and wrong” and connecting it to their civic actions:

If we don’t show our kids what’s good or bad, we’re doing them a disservice. We need students to have experiences where they can understand what’s good for society. And I’ll always be thankful for those little learning experiences. Without these opportunities students can’t be the good citizens they ought to be. So in many of my lessons I try to get them to understand exactly what it means to be a good citizen. It’s all about being a good person and doing what’s right.

As we discussed more about Kelly’s upbringing, it seemed to me that sometimes it had made her feel uncomfortable in the past. Kelly liked to talk about it with people...
close to her, but she mentioned she always would “get looks” from people when she first mentioned her homeschooling background. However, Kelly talked at length about how she no longer shies away from discussing it and wants people to know “it’s entirely normal.” Kelly made a point of explaining how she thought her education helped “shape my views on what it really means to be a good citizen in today’s society.” Kelly also felt she had an advantage over public school students, saying that her friends in public school “didn’t seem to be getting any education in civics or just getting at what makes you a good person.” Kelly’s views on being a “good citizen” are clearly informed by her experiences as a homeschooled student.

**Kelly’s definition of civic education – “creating active and engaged citizens who can discuss the issues”**

Kelly explained that the purpose of civic education is to teach her students “how to be good citizens” and elaborated as follows:

…In other classes, they learn about stuff but they don’t learn how to talk about stuff and I think that’s my job as a civics teacher. Just the other day a student came in from (another) class and they felt everything they were doing was just useless. The connection just wasn’t there because the teacher didn’t give the students the chance to really talk about the stuff. Students should be able to talk and see what the connections are with each other. Giving the students the chance to talk will help down the line when they are trying to discuss other issues of civic importance.

Kelly connected her classroom practice to defining good citizenship as students being able to take part in discussion as a major component of her classroom practice. She strongly believed that robust classroom discussion would prepare her students for their future lives as citizens. When I asked what this might look like for the students, Kelly shared this belief:

I suppose I’d like my students to know enough to have conversations of substance, (because) there's just too much unnecessary drama going on these days. Let's say a student read something about a group of people
who were being unjustly persecuted in our country while they were reading the newspaper. I would hope they would talk about it and decide to take action, at least write a letter to their congressman. I would hope they would stand up for justice.

**Kelly’s definition of “best practices” in civic education – “Active learning, anything that keeps them engaged”**

During the first interview, I also explicitly asked Kelly what she believed the best practices for teaching civics were. At the heart of her explanation about instructional practice, Kelly believed strongly in the active learning component of any particular experience. Kelly advocated for practices that “engage students in learning in a fun and meaningful way.” When I asked her to elaborate, Kelly mentioned the importance of students doing research and how it can be done best with project-based learning:

Yeah, so project-based learning. Well, the purpose of civics is how to be a good citizen and learning how to figure things out yourself and that’s what project-based learning is all about, doing it on your own, nobody is going to be following them around when they’re older telling them this is what to think about the election. Just kind of research on their own and working together on something meaningful and relevant.

Again, Kelly alluded to her students’ futures as citizens. She explained one practice that she believed was successful in her classroom:

Early on in the year I had my students do a project in class on looking at their family’s history as citizens. My students learned so much, and they didn’t stop asking questions. They all did really well with it. They were just so into it and I’d like to do more of that.

Kelly used her students’ performance and interest in the material as an indicator of her successful practice, as well as an example of active learning. Kelly’s conclusion also serves as an evaluative measure of what she believed she was currently doing in her classes, and what she wanted to do in the future in her pedagogy. This early narrative provided me with a glimpse into some of the struggles I would soon learn more about.
It is also worth noting during our interviews that Kelly referenced her use of the lesson plans provided by the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship (FJCC). Kelly mentioned to me how she thought many of those lessons were “full of active learning” and that she used some of those lessons from time to time. In fact, most of the lesson plans she chose to send me were lesson plans from the FJCC, with notes and modifications about how she decided to use those lessons specifically for her students.

**Kelly’s definition of poor practices in civic education – “Indoctrination is the problem”**

When I prompted Kelly about what poor civic education might look like, she provided some initial thoughts regarding bias in the classroom. She said she believed that “everyone is biased,” but that indoctrination is the problem. Kelly expressed the importance of trying to avoid indoctrinating her students with her own political beliefs. However, she also explained in a short story about how neglecting to examine specific content is indicative of an even worse form of indoctrination:

Biased information is very hard not to do, and I’m very biased a lot of times by just what I choose to highlight, but I think intentional bias is worse. Like, I have known some teachers in this school who wouldn’t even talk about the election after it happened. I heard other students were so bummed because the teacher didn’t want to talk about Trump winning. It’s a real shame. They were just so sad about the results, but that’s very biased. They should have talked about it. You still have to talk to them about it, so that would be poor practice I think. I made it a point to sit and talk to my students about the election after it happened. It was just too big not to talk about it with them. I knew it was all on their minds anyway.

After explaining her views on bias, Kelly turned her attention to her thoughts on the delivery of instruction. As Kelly and I talked, it was clear to me she had strong views on what poor practice looks like:

Really just asking the students to sit there and answer questions right out of the textbook is horrible teaching. It’s not enough for students. Students are not engaged this way. Oh, and obviously just lecturing at them isn’t
going to do anything worthwhile. I remember having a few instructors who did this, and I hated their classes.

Kelly understood the limitations of direct instruction and textbook learning, and categorized it as poor practice when done excessively.

**Olivia**

**Olivia’s background and its influence on defining civic education – “I realize not everyone was raised like me”**

During our first interview together, Olivia seemed aware of how her personal background influenced her views on teaching and learning for civic education. She “never intended to be a civics teacher, nor did I really have any experiences to prepare me to teach civics.” She explained:

So, I was born in (a major Southern city) in a commune-type organization. Very different, but it influenced how my parents raised me. So, my parents are Hindu, and I was raised during the ’60s and ’70s, a pretty different time and place to be brought into this world. But we moved around a lot, on account of my Dad going to law school and then practicing in (the South). Being in the South, the commune, and just meeting all types of people made it very easy for me to develop a more advanced understanding of the complexities of society.

Olivia talked further about her own aspirations prior to teaching, noting that she “wanted to make the world a better place.” In explaining her rationale for going into teaching, Olivia talked more about her experiences in the commune and how they informed her perspective:

I always wanted to make the world a better place, and there’s no doubt the commune played a part in that. There was also a focus on what was good for everyone, not just a single person. But I really liked working as a sub(stitute) in the school district here, because being born and raised in the city I lived in, I had experiences most people don’t have. For example, in the commune (I was able to get to know) a lot of African-Americans.
When she talked about her life outside the commune, which began when she was in middle school, she developed a passion for combating racism and social injustice:

When I was in middle school, I saw some awful stuff. I really had no idea. People can just be so ignorant and so awful. And I recognized and saw racism firsthand, and so that has always been an issue I have been passionate about. And so, for me, getting to talk about it in the classroom, and through social studies work at school, it’s been a really meaningful experience for me, and it’s one of the main reasons now why I love it.

When I went on to ask her about how this personal experience may have influenced her motivation for teaching civics, Olivia emphasized the importance of addressing social justice issues in her classroom:

Issues of social justices are nearest and dearest to my heart, and again I know my upbringing was partially responsible for this. The reason why we learn history so we don’t repeat the same mistakes, all those things. Getting to talk about these issues, and especially at this age is important to me. I feel like you can have an impact and talk about real things that are relevant. And you can do a lot of critical thinking with these kids, and so that’s why I love it. We can focus on these issues in social studies, that’s why I would never think about teaching another subject.

It is evident Olivia felt her past experiences directly impacted her teaching, and from those experiences she developed her own views on teaching civics from a social justice perspective. She seemed to have a strong self-awareness of both who she is as a person and who she is as a civics teacher. Her personal connections to her past have helped her construct meaning for herself as a teacher, and these meanings are indicated in her discussions of racial injustice in her classroom. Her deep commitment to understanding her own past and how it has informed her own beliefs overlap with her desire for her students to understand the past of the country and how we “can learn from the mistakes of those before us.”
Olivia: Defining the purpose of civic education – “We want involved citizens”

Olivia defined civic education based on a careful consideration of its purpose in her classroom – in other words, she derived the definition from her overall teaching philosophy. Olivia passionately expressed to me in our first interview how important she believed it was to “prepare our students how to be active citizens.” Olivia believed that her students must learn the “importance of getting off the couch” and being involved in society and civic life. When Olivia first expressed her views on teaching for active citizenship, she provided a rationale for her beliefs:

We teach to prepare. So that to me is why we want involved citizens. And so we teach them so they understand how out government runs, ways that they are doing things. First of all, our government is a government, it is supposed to be run by the people and for the people. I try to remind my students of that throughout their lessons and just in general. It’s an important idea for them to take away.

Olivia’s passion for civic education was evident in our conversation and in her references to quintessential American civic principles. She provided a brief narrative on how she tried to connect the content to her students:

So, for them to really see that connection and their role in it, and their role of the decisions that are made we have to have these lessons of focus. For example, the other day we just talked about voting. I asked my students, “who goes and shows up in the polls in numbers? Old white people. Do you think exactly like they do? I say it like that. And it’s that I’m middle-aged, I don’t think like that exactly. I tried to get them to understand that if the people are voting, these are how the laws are being made. You have to be involved so you can be a part of that process.

Olivia strongly believed that by making connections personal, she could convince her students of the importance of being an active citizen.
Olivia: Best Practices in Civic Education – “Being active helps them learn best”

As Olivia and I talked about the best practices for civic education, she mentioned “project-based learning” as the best kind of practice because it promotes learning in an active way:

It really is the best kind of learning because it helps students become actively involved in and with the material and the students can also come together to figure out how to solve problems together. Students are up and about doing something, working together. Not passive at all. Whenever we’ve done projects in the past, I can immediately see a difference in my students. They really get a lot out of it. It can really show them how to fix some problems in the class, but more importantly prepare them to see and fix problems in their future.

Olivia discussed the importance of active learning and felt this should be an important commitment “for all teachers,” but emphasized how it can specifically help her population of students learn:

A lot of teachers make the mistake of thinking the lower level kids can’t handle the more active stuff in the classroom, and that’s a real shame. In my opinion, they’re the students who would benefit the most from active learning experiences. I think teachers are just too scared to try things out sometime or just even relinquish some of the power. And I get that, but it’s tough. We gotta do what’s best for our students. The other day I had a conversation with a teacher and they couldn’t believe what I was doing in my class. They said, “never in my class” and I just thought what a shame. You could do so much more. Your students need you to do so much more.

Olivia: Poor Practices in Civic Education – “They need to see the connections”

Olivia also had a clear sense of what fails to work in civic education for her students. When I first asked her about poor practice, Olivia pointed directly to the textbook with a look of utter disgust. Olivia explained:

I think opening up your textbook and reading your textbook is a boring and useless strategy, especially if your students can’t read well. I’ve tried to never do this. I remember as a teacher when I started out it was tough because that was how I was taught in school. I never liked it then, but I thought that was the only way. I’m just glad I don’t do that, and I think my students definitely are thankful. Besides, textbooks are written so poorly
and fail to help students see the bigger picture, I think. The students aren’t going to make the connections to a textbook, they have to make the connections with real stuff, with me, and each other.

Not only did I gain a sense of her dissatisfaction with textbooks in our conversations; I also saw this in her lesson plans. Her lessons routinely comprised activities occasionally interspersed with direct instruction. While perusing her lessons, I could not find a single lesson built solely around direct instruction. Olivia believed passive learning experiences limit the connections her students could make. As the discussion progressed, Olivia strongly expressed her views on an unacceptable practice – lack of discussion about relevant issues:

If we don’t talk about important issues to your students and the world, you aren’t going to impassion your students and you’re not going to make legit connections. If you aren’t talking about real issues or you’re ignoring the issues that students face, that defeats the purpose of understanding civics and history. Isn’t that the point, asking our students to have a better understanding of all this?

The following exchange between Olivia and one of her students demonstrated how Olivia felt about providing students with meaningful learning opportunities:

Sometimes I forget I need to be explicit with my students in explaining to them the logic behind what we’re doing in class. A student was complaining to me in class the other day about what we were learning, I think we were discussing the money in campaigns. At first, the student was resistant but once we all talked about how money influences people they sort of had a “eureka” moment---like wow, I should care about this, this is big. So again, I think it’s important that they see these connections between citizens and the things that we have in our government that give us the power to make change when we see issues and problems.

Thus, Olivia tied her views on civic activism back to the importance of making connections to the real world for her students. Olivia’s commitment to creating civically active students who are vigilant about issues in our society and implementing change when it becomes necessary was clear. The connections the students could make to the
real world were critical for Olivia, and in our second interview she even mentioned the importance of implementing “culturally relevant pedagogy” (Ladson-Billings, 1995) as part of helping her students learn about civics. She explained to me how much she “truly values the needs of her students” and tried her best to build the learning environment that would best benefit them.

**Sandra**

**Sandra’s background and its influence on defining civic education – “She was the best government teacher I ever had”**

Sandra seemed to be a firm believer in the transformative power of teaching, and she elaborated on this belief with stories of her own teachers who influenced her, especially her high school government/civics teacher, Sister Margaret. Sandra explained to me how this teacher influenced her own philosophy on content knowledge in civics:

> I went to Catholic school my whole life. But when I got to high school, that’s when I really had a great experience with Sister Margaret. We used to call her “the long tall woman in the black dress.” She was probably the best government teacher I ever had. She was also another teacher that inspired me a lot. She knew government inside and out. I mean, she was just fabulous. She showed me just how important it was to know what you were talking about, so you can really dive deep with your students and do the stuff that really matters. And I learned a lot of government from her. I guess I learned a lot of my basic government principles from her class in the 10th grade. I really learned a lot of fundamentals. She really showed us how important it was to know and understand the government. And that’s really half the battle. We have to educate our students about their citizenship and its role in government.

Not only did Sister Margaret influence her views on knowing civics content, but also had an impact on her pedagogy. From this teacher, Sandra developed a strong belief in active learning experiences for her students, and she made the connection of the teacher’s influence to her own practices:
It really was just a fabulous class. She didn’t do a lot of lecturing, she did a lot of fun, hands on, cool activities, we did a lot of debates. For a nun, she sure was different. You don’t see that kind of stuff. But that’s really the type of stuff you should see in civics. How else are we going to get people to really talk to another and make differences in the world? She really was just so great. There’s no doubt in my mind I wouldn’t be the teacher I am today if it wasn’t for her. And it really helps with helping my students experience civics.

Sandra shared with me the difficulties of her early family life, and it became clear to me she searched for a role model as a child and adolescent. Although her various role models informed her views on teaching civics, Sandra expressed to me just how significant those few teachers were to her.

They really did so much for me. Sure, I definitely teach the way I do because of them, and you could also say one really helped me understand what it meant to be a good citizen. But more than that, they both taught me how to be a good person. They were just great people, and I learned so much about life from them. And now I try to do the same with my students. I really am lucky like that.

As we finished talking about her experiences as a child she made certain to remind me to “be thankful for those who helped you along the way.” Sandra was clearly grateful to her teachers, and hoped to inspire her own students.

**Sandra – Defining the Purpose – “It’s all about being a good, active person”**

Upon sitting down with Sandra for the first time to discuss her views on civic education, I perceived that she defined herself by her positive outlook on life. Sandra tried to always put a positive spin on any issue, and she believed people were inherently good. She expressed to me throughout our conversations that she believed people “just needed someone to look up to,” and that it was up to her as a teacher to serve as a role model for her students. Sandra believed that helping each student become a moral citizen and a “good person” was an explicit part of defining the purpose.
of civic education. She explained how she defined someone as a “good person” with a connection to her perceptions on citizenship:

These kids need to see someone not just be smart, but have a moral compass. So much is lost today. We need more character education today. But with the way things are that becomes more challenging, so I feel the best way for me to help my kids learn from this is to model that behavior. And that’s to do what’s right. A good person always does what right. Because at the heart of teaching civics, and life really, it’s all about teaching how to be a good person. I’ll never forget her, the best teacher I ever had. Her name was Mrs. Bella. She taught me a lot about life. She taught me a lot more than I think I could have ever learned from somebody. But she was an excellent role model to myself and all the other students. Every day she would inspire us. Amazing woman. But you really can’t be a good citizen without being a good person. At least that’s what I think, anyway.

It is evident that Sandra believed citizenship and morality are inextricably woven, and she that she felt compelled to serve as a role model for her students. Again, this sub-narrative reveals how her teachers affected her views on life and how these views translated into practice in her classroom.

After she talked about “being a good person,” Sandra went further in defining her views on the purpose of civic education:

So I want them to be good people. I want them to be actually be active in society. But it’s so much more and I hope my students realize that. They have a responsibility as a citizen of this country to be an active participant. And that’s what I really think civics is. Getting these kids to be an active participant as a citizen of this country. And that means being able to speak up, as the First Amendment says, say what you think. Be willing to speak your mind, be willing to petition if you want to. Be willing to say things are not right. The voting situation in this country is nuts. I recently spoke with a teacher who didn’t vote in the election! I told them they were nuts. And this was a teacher. I mean come on! You gotta be an active voter…sometimes people don’t even sign up! Because if I don’t vote I can’t complain. And I tell my kids all the time about what happens in these elections and they are shocked.

Sandra explicitly connected active citizenship to voting, and strongly felt that those who do not vote are not active citizens.
Sandra: Best Practices in Civic Education – “Hands-on and up and moving”

Over the course of all the interviews, Sandra mentioned to me several times her views on the importance of “active, hands-on learning” in her classroom. Sandra believed this was the best type of learning for her students, as it “keeps them the most engaged with the material, and they get a lot more out of it.” Sandra believed that this was the type of pedagogy that students “carried with them outside of the school and for the rest of their lives.” Sandra provided the following definition of “active, hands on learning” to me in our first interview:

I like them to do lots of hands-on activities, these are things that are more than just reading or watching (me deliver the) content. They're actually working with the material. It’s engaging. Students are busy and connected with whatever we’re learning about that day. It’s even better when I can get ‘em up out of their seat and they're working together.

Sandra illustrated the connection between her pedagogy and her idea of civic learning with this example:

I like to work that way with the kids because they love it, but also because I think it helps them respect the opinions of one another. And I think that’s important, because if you don’t respect someone’s else opinion, that is a problem. And I think as a good citizen, you may not like somebody’s opinion but I think it’s important you respect it and are actually opening to listening to a different perspective. And today, in today’s society, people don’t do that at all, but they have to learn to do that, because they’re gonna be solving our problems. They’re going to be taking care of me. And I see the growth in my students. I really do. I have one student who used to be a real bully towards other students during the election. But as I got to work with him more in my class he started to change. Way less aggressive. He still had strong feelings, but the way he interacted with the other students improved. And I can tell you that just makes me proud. But students, generally, really haven’t gotten it at all, and if we can as teachers, educators, can try to give them more of that or explain more of that, that you have to learn to be more civil with the people that are around you, that will help them, I believe. I really believe it will.

Her satisfaction with her student’s improvement in his interaction with his peers helped affirm Sandra’s views on educating for civil discourse. This narrative shows how
Sandra tied her pedagogy to her views on civic education, and how she justified her views on civic education through seeing an improvement in her student’s civic disposition. This also helps reveal a key insight into how Sandra made sense of her classroom experiences through a heavy emphasis on her students’ civics beliefs and behaviors. Because Sandra believed her students learned best this way, “seeing her students move about the class and work on something where they seem civically engaged” encouraged her in her thinking on best civics classroom practices. Sandra routinely reminded me throughout all our conversations of the importance of providing her students with this kind of instruction above all others. It is also worth noting as I explored Sandra’s lesson plans that she had a large variety of activities planned throughout all her lessons. Practically every single lesson (aside from a test day or a school club day) required the students to participate in some kind of civics-related, hands-on activity (e.g., inquiry, discussion, simulations) that ranged in size, scope, and detail.

Sandra – Poor Practice in Civic Education – “If you worksheet them to death…”

Sandra had a passionate set of beliefs about poor practice in the classroom. Every time she spoke at length about poor practices, her body language and tone of voice clearly indicated what she considered to be unacceptable teaching practices. Sandra provided me with specific examples of poor classroom practices that she had observed:

Using the book and worksheets doesn’t really do much of anything. If you’re not interacting with them, they’re not getting anything. And to me, I’ve seen that in classrooms many different times. It happens in this school. I’ve seen it first hand, I know. Oh, and I don’t think long lectures do much. Students just shut off after 10 minutes anyway. But ya know there are some teachers where lecture is too much for them, it’s worksheets only. You can’t just give them a worksheet and say, “Oh, tomorrow we’re
going to have a test.” You have to at least explain the worksheet. And I’ve seen teachers who have not even interacted with the kids with what was on the worksheet. I’ve seen it right here in this school. And I mean recently. I won’t say who, but I was in another teacher’s classroom just a few weeks ago and I saw that go down, and I thought, “How is this happening?”

Sandra’s philosophy of ineffective practices in civics is no different than her philosophy of generally ineffective teaching practices. Her views on poor practice were not only evident in how she worked with her students, but also in how she collaborated with her student teachers every year.

**Theme: Conflict**

The narrative theme of conflict arose throughout all interviews with the teachers and is the focus of this section. Each participant had experiences of conflict specific to their own teaching context, but each also articulated broader conflicts throughout their narratives. Several sub-narratives arose throughout my data, including conflicts with the district, the school, the content, the EOCA, the CCMS “proven practices”, and coverage of the material. Discussing these issues yielded varying degrees of conflict for the teachers. Some participants, like Kelly, shared multiple forms of conflict with teaching civics and the EOCA, whereas Sandra had fewer narratives of conflict. Olivia fell somewhere in the middle of the three teachers. For these differences, it is especially important to keep in mind the teaching contexts of each of these participants. Let us turn now to these sense-making narratives that provide insight into their civics teaching and the conflicts that challenged them.
Kelly

Kelly – Conflict with the District: “Thank God somebody showed me the right way”

Being a first-year teacher comes with its own unique set of challenges. As we spoke, Kelly thanked me for “just listening and being a sounding board” as she reflected on her experiences in her first semester as a teacher. Kelly told me she felt prepared, “lucky to be in a good situation” at her school, but generally overwhelmed. Kelly experienced a wide range of conflict immediately within her own school district. As she reflected on her initial experiences in the school year, she revealed to me her first issue with the district, the official civics course pacing guide:

So, when I first started planning out my lessons, I had a really tough time. Sure, the usual stuff is to be expected. Man was I tired! But really the worst of it was that I really wasn’t sure how I was to plan for teaching all this material. I mean, I knew what to teach but I wasn’t sure how much time to spend and all that. So, I originally used the district’s pacing guide but quickly learned what a piece of crap that was. But I was told we were to stick to that pacing guide. My admin said, “Hey, this is what we want you to use. This will help.” But it didn’t, it really just stressed me out. I remember covering the foundations of democracy and just needing more time but I couldn’t. And I knew my students needed it too but I thought I had to really stick to that guide. Plus, it just seemed all out of whack to me. They had some stuff all over the place and it just didn’t make sense. But I stuck with it anyway. It was just a real struggle for me and I already started to worry within the first 9 weeks about how much I was going to actually get done, and there’s a lot of content to cover.

Kelly clearly did not agree with the pacing guide as set forth by the district but had to struggle with it regardless. She seemed to feel a sense of responsibility to adhere to the district guidelines “for the sake of my job.” Her struggle with meeting the district’s pacing requirements only exacerbated the typical first year teaching issues. Kelly used her students as an indicator of content pacing efficacy, and soon realized the ineffective nature of the pacing guide. As Kelly became more comfortable in her own
school setting, she decided to make the appropriate changes to meet the needs of her students:

Meeting with Ms. Smith (another 7th grade civics teacher) really helped me better understand what to do. She had created her own resources and pacing guide and shared it with me. It was completely different than what the district wanted us to do in their pacing guide. But it didn’t matter. She had been teaching civics for a couple of years now and she always had high scores on her test, so I thought she must know what she’s talking about. So now I go by that guide she developed. It was super helpful to me, and I think it is way more reasonable for pacing. Don’t get me wrong, it’s still fast but it makes more sense and it devotes more time to some of the harder stuff. Usually the stuff my kids struggle with.

Thus, Kelly justified the adjustments to her teaching based not only on the needs of her students to understand complex material, but also based on the approval of a more seasoned teacher. Upon learning about how the other teachers chose not to follow the pacing guide, she expressed great surprise to me in our third interview, stating, “They’re all such rule followers at my school. I couldn’t believe it. So, I knew if all these other teachers weren’t doing it then the pacing guide must be faulty.” Kelly felt validated regarding her conflict with the pacing of the course. She also felt the changes helped her and her students cover more of the content that would likely be on the EOCA.

Kelly’s disenchantment with the school district escalated when she learned more about how the district pacing guide had been developed and altered. Kelly’s focus on the pacing of the content coupled with the looming date of the EOCA became an essential part of her planning. Kelly felt her students needed an acceptable amount of time to cover material so her students could pass the test, and she strongly believed that the district pacing guide did not support this issue. Kelly’s interactions with other teachers at her school revealed that the disagreement over the mandated pacing guide
was not unique to her, but possibly spoke to a larger problem with how the district handled the coverage of civics content, as well as how civics teachers were treated.

Kelly also expressed conflict with the AIMS test, the district’s periodic assessment used to monitor the pacing of the civics benchmarks within the district, asserting that the AIMS test had nothing to do with the EOCA and thus was fairly useless. Eventually Kelly learned something about the pacing guide that she found disturbing:

Believe it or not, the district actually asked teachers first to come together and make this pacing guide. Or at least that’s what I heard. One of the teachers works here at our school. So I asked her about it, and she told me it was different than what they had created. So she doesn’t even use it! How ridiculous. So that really made me think that something was seriously wrong. Next time, the district ought to listen to the teachers and create something more useful like the guide I use now. Really that guide has just been a lifesaver.

Kelly also raised concern over another conflict with the district relating to how she began the school year. During our fourth interview, Kelly expressed her concern with how the district prepared her and other novice teachers for teaching civics and handling the EOCA:

So really, I had no formal training or professional development at all. And when I mean none, I mean none. I really was thrown into it. Other than the online civics course I took with you, I really didn’t have anything. Which was fine, I can handle myself with the content when it comes right down to it. I’m just always trying to stay ahead of my students and learn as much as possible so I understand things. But at first I really was thrown into it, and I just don’t think that’s fair. If you’re going to have all these expectations for your teachers you gotta do more. Thankfully, my teachers at school really helped me out. I don’t know what I would have done without them. A few of them helped me get right on track, and explained to me some of the basics of the EOC. It was a lot to take in, but I was happy to have their help. I only wish I was I had known things like the pacing guide sooner. But really I had no official support, no official training. They need to change that, they need to make sure new teachers get what they’re supposed to do. At the very least explain to us what we need to do. Have an after-school meeting, I don’t know. It just wasn’t handled right.
Especially when you have something as intense as the EOC. I think they just kinda assumed I knew everything because I interned with them but you never really learn all this extra stuff in your internship.

Kelly’s belief in the importance of training specifically for teaching civics and for the EOCA are clear. In fact, her response spoke directly to my first research question. Kelly illustrated how a district oversight, combined with the pressure of the EOCA (which she described as “intense”), contributed to her management of teaching civics. She also found out that other civics teachers shared her concerns. She felt that the district’s lack of civics-specific training contributed to a “more stressful” first year experience for her.

**Kelly – Conflict within the School – “It’s really kinda crazy”**

Kelly experienced an unexpected form of conflict in her own school that manifested itself in the relationship among the teachers. During our third interview, Kelly shared her early struggles at the school with trying to obtain some professional advice:

Originally, I went to go see Jacobson (another 7th grade civics teacher). It was awkward for me, because once at the beginning of the year I went to her classroom and asked her about sharing some of her stuff, and she wasn’t very forthcoming. She pretty much just gave me general advice. She didn’t really wanna share anything with me. Jacobson was very close-fisted with her stuff.

Kelly tried to understand why Ms. Jacobson refused to share her detailed lesson plans and eventually attributed it to the competitiveness among the civics teachers at Graham Middle School. As a consequence, the teachers were reluctant to collaborate with each other. Kelly explained:

The teachers at my school typically do pretty well on the EOC with their students. They mostly have pretty high passing rates. But there’s this competition to be the best at the school. It’s funny because most teachers wanna know what everyone else is doing, but people more or less keep to themselves. Everyone wants to have the best scores, I guess.
Kelly also contrasted her situation with the language arts teachers at her school:

It’s counterproductive to everything. And that’s what I’m like, ‘cause the language arts and reading department is so opposite. They work together. But they don’t have the test we have. And of course there are some leechers and there are some overachievers…but it’s ultimately about the kids getting the best education, so if one person is rocking that lesson planning and already has it down, okay, let’s just help others out.

Kelly’s narrative is telling because it demonstrates a drive for exceptional EOCA performance as the primary objective for the teachers within her school.

**Kelly – Conflict with the Standards – “There are definitely changes that could be made”**

Kelly expressed many disagreements with the civics standards and benchmarks in their current form. As she explained:

I always spend a lot of time on foundations (of American government). The Enlightenment thinkers, the beginning of the country, all that stuff. And that stuff takes a lot of time. The students struggle with it too. It’s something they’ve never had before and it can just be confusing. And it’s really more history than civics. It would make more sense to me to have civics after the students take American history.

Along with her strong convictions concerning the appropriate grade level for the civics course, she believed that the sequence and structure of the standards should be revised:

We already have so much to cover in this class. But really it would make it easier for them to jump right into civics if they already were familiar with the history. And the students know this. One student asked me why we were “learning all this history stuff in a civics class.” They had a good point, and yeah, it’s important to know your history but why can’t they learn this sooner? I think it just makes more sense. It would be better for the students. It would be easier for me, to be honest.

In addition to conflict with the structure of the standards, Kelly also disagreed with their heavy focus on content knowledge at the expense of experiential learning:

If I could change these standards, I would make them more action based. Like I think students get more from actually doing civic things. We need to
actually have conversations about important things, like writing letters to Congresspeople, having plays, simulations, and really anything that requires them to do rather than just know. I just feel that the students have more fun, and they learn more if they actually experience these things. I know because I’ve done a few of these (action-based) things with my honors class, and I feel like I’m making more of a difference. We had some time after an AIMS test, and I had my students look up and write to their congressman. That was fun. I think they got a lot out of that experience. We need to do more things like that.

As Kelly stated, “I don’t see why the standards can’t have them do more things. But of course, that wouldn’t be possible with the pacing and the structure for the EOCA.”

Although she acknowledged the realities of the test, she also demonstrated a belief in the efficacy of some of the CCMS six proven practices, such as simulations and discussions, and wished she could spend more time on these instructional activities.

Kelly also disagreed with some of the content of the civics benchmarks within the standards. When I first asked her to look through the benchmarks, she mentioned that she had “never really looked at them all together, and this is my first time seeing everything together.” Although Kelly had not taught all of the benchmarks yet, since it was early in the school year, she found them overwhelming:

Really, it’s all too much. We have too much to cover. Some of these benchmarks are so detailed and they expect us to teach all of this. Like, the (Supreme Court) cases. Why are they expected to know so many court cases? I get it, it’s important. But we could just understand their importance, rather than having to memorize all of these. And there’s really a lot there. Also, economics benchmarks are in the 7th grade standards (but not on the EOCA). Why would I teach economics? It’s way too early for them. I’m barely getting by with civics and you want to introduce economics? Oh, and learning about other forms of government. Is that really necessary? That one is just off the top of my head. I struggle teaching that so much with my students, let me tell you. I’ve gone through it so many times with my students and I think it’s just hard for them because they don’t really grasp what type of government we have in our country. That was a tough lesson I did with them. I think that it’s kind of ridiculous because we have a democracy, the end. I think it would be okay to be like, there’s other governments but you can learn about those later.
Again, I feel like that’s a U.S. History thing or a World History thing. In this country, we have this type of government, this is for U.S. citizens.

Clearly, Kelly grappled with the content of certain benchmarks mainly because of the ability level of her students – especially their reading levels – and the appropriateness of the content for their age. It is worth noting that Kelly did not feel the content lacked merit; rather, she believed the content did not benefit her students and was not in their best interest.

When I asked Kelly about benchmarks she thought were “unnecessary or ought to be changed,” she immediately mentioned “the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation” and referenced the entire section of standards on the “origin and purposes of government”:

Yeah, any in that section on origins. I don’t know. Yeah, pretty much. The Articles could go. All those other standards should be removed too. Not only is it too much, but I just don’t think the students are going to get the most out of those standards. They’re like Jeopardy trivia for some of them…Because nobody’s ever gonna be like, “Oh my God! Articles of Confederation, Magna Carta, this is life or death! It’s just not necessary to a civics class. I don’t think my students get much out of it to be honest. It’s not fair that they have to learn this because it doesn’t matter to them in 7th grade.

Kelly provided examples of what she deemed worthwhile material for 7th grade:

You need to know what happens when you are on a jury and why there’s a jury and what the justice system is. But knowing your rights, knowing your amendments, knowing all the things that really matter in what to do as a citizen are important. Yeah, that’s the important stuff. Knowing the political parties can help you make an informed decision on who to vote for. They don’t need to focus on useless knowledge, especially in a civics class. I just don’t see how learning the Articles (of Confederation) will help them be a good citizen, which is the point of civics.

Kelly justified her views on “useless standards” with her understanding of the purpose of the civics course. She ardently believed that her students should learn
content that she believed was “relevant – and for her, this meant civic education that would benefit her students as adult citizens active in civic culture.

**Kelly – Conflict within the School – “Where is the student council?”**

Kelly also briefly shared her thoughts on an aspect of civic education that she felt could help her students grow as citizens: student government. I asked her what it looked like at her school during our fourth interview:

> We don’t have one. And I think it’s weird and just a shame. I’ve actually had a few students ask me recently about why we don’t have one. And I don’t know. We just don’t. The students didn’t think it was fair because they have friends at other schools who are in student council and they love it. I don’t know. I guess someone should look into that. The students could really benefit from that. Sometimes the school really drops the ball. If they cared half as much about other stuff rather than all this testing…

As previously mentioned, student governance is one of the six proven practices. Although it is not within the scope of my study because it is not a classroom practice, I felt it was important to talk about the topic briefly to gain a better sense of the civic culture of the school. She speculated that student government was “not happening at her school” because of the administration’s focus on the EOCA.

**Kelly – Conflict with the EOCA – “It’s a stupid test”**

Throughout our interviews, Kelly made no attempt to hide her feelings about the EOCA. Whenever she spoke about it, she did so with a variety of emotions. Many of the narratives from the interview data related back to the EOCA in some manner. There is no question the EOCA dominated much of her thinking, time, and planning as she taught civics in her first year in the classroom and prepared to test her students for the first time. However, she knew quite a bit about the test from her time as an intern at Graham Middle School. Initially, she had this to say about the EOCA:
So of course, I have no actual experience being a teacher with the end of course exam, but last year I was an intern, almost to when they started doing the end of course exam and then I was actually long-term subbing while that was going on and until the end of the year. So I was talking a lot to all the civics teachers because I knew I was gonna be teaching civics next year. And they told me, all across the board, that they think it’s a horrible test and not indicative of the students’ actual learning. I just had so many conversations with all of them and nobody seemed to like the test. So I already knew what to expect going in about the test, and just by everything everyone has told me so far I’m not a fan. I’ve seen sample questions, and I know what’s on the test and I think it’s just unfair.

Her early reference to stories of talking with civics teachers about the EOCA during her internship and while substitute teaching planted the seed of her conflicted thinking about the test. By the time she started teaching at Graham full time, she quickly developed her own impressions, which became an important part of understanding how she made sense of teaching civics, and potentially how the test influenced her role as a teacher.

As an intern, Kelly got a glimpse of the connection between reading ability and EOCA success. As she explained:

…There were some students who struggled last year when I was an intern in the civics class. I got a really good feel for who was “Wow, a really good student.” And then I looked at a couple of the teachers’ results and I was like, “She didn’t pass? Oh right, she can’t really read well but she can answer questions out loud really well.” So that’s all it is, a reading test.

As a full-time teacher, the more she learned about the test and worked with practice items, the more she believed the test to be unfair to her students. She explained:

It’s unfair because it’s primarily a reading test. It’s just really who has the best reading comprehension and who can narrow down the choices, who has the best test taking skills. When I first started teaching I spoke to some teachers about the EOC and they told me not to worry. They said it’s really a reading test and not a reflection on me. Students struggle with the vocabulary and wording of the test, not so much the knowledge. They said you’ll have a lot of classes that just fail it, you’ll have some classes that just all pass it, and that doesn’t mean one class knows more than the
other. But I still got the feeling they were all really afraid of it and wanted to calm me down.

I also asked Kelly how she would feel if the test were being given tomorrow, and she said she believed her “advanced class would do fine but my others, no. And I’ll feel that way when it is actually time to take the test.” Kelly strongly reiterated that her lack of optimism was a result of her lack of confidence in her student’s reading abilities rather than their civic knowledge. This is a telling statement, given the fact that instruction in civic knowledge is one of the CCMS six proven practices. Kelly clearly believed that her students’ civic knowledge would not be authentically measured. She said she felt badly for her students “because I know some of them just can’t read and that’s just not fair.”

The reading difficulties of her students also placed pressure on her as a teacher. Kelly said that she spent most of her time “getting my students to understand all the abstract vocabulary” and felt it was “too much” for her students. She used an item bank of EOCA practice questions from the FJCC, but she still expressed frustrations with the reading level of the test:

I do my best to teach them as much vocabulary as I possibly can, but it’s still tough. I teach them all the civics vocabulary they need to know, but it’s not enough because the rest of the language and vocabulary is too complex for them and they really have no idea and they struggle with it. Like, a student asked me when we were going over the practice questions, “What is indicative? What does that mean?” The wording of the questions is tough, and it’s not fair because I believe my students actually know some of this stuff and they get hung up on the wording.

As Kelly and I spoke, she vented a great deal about the reading issues and about her feelings that she had no control over the situation. When I asked her to talk more about the reading challenges of her current students, she replied:

I have a lot of students with reading challenges. I have 10 kids with IEPs in one of my classes, so it’s really hard. And I know that some of them, if you just ask them a question directly they will be able to answer you. I
have one kid, he can’t write anything down, so I’ll go over it multiple times with him and he still struggles. Eventually I’ll be like, “Just tell me the answer,” and he’ll tell me. But he can’t get it into his mind to write. It’s just his learning style, so then I’ll say to him, “What you just said, write that down.” But it's tough because that’s not how it is on the test. You can't do that on the test.”

She concluded her reflection on this individual student by stating, “In reality, he’s never gonna have to take a 60-question civics test. He’ll be able to communicate his thoughts fine. So it doesn’t matter because the test isn’t helping him with civics.” Again, Kelly made it clear that she saw little connection between the EOCA and authentic teaching for civic learning. Although Kelly prioritized the importance of students’ civic learning over their performance on the EOCA, she felt – justifiably – a lack of control when it came to making her instructional decisions. And when Kelly compared the performance of her advanced students to her on-level students, she believed the reading issues were the cause of the disparity.

Olivia

Olivia – Conflict with the School District – “I don’t know what they were thinking”

When I spoke with Olivia about her thoughts concerning the civics requirements set forth by the district, she responded with an emphatic, “Where do I begin?” From the onset of our conversation, it was clear Olivia had some strong opinions about the district’s initiatives for civic education. Olivia did not mince words; in fact, she expressed “being happy” that she could use me as a sounding board. It is also worth noting throughout all our formal interviews, Olivia referred to some type of district issue. During our first interview, Olivia mentioned the district pacing guide for civics. She told me, “I never follow that thing.” When I asked her why, she described to me how it “made zero sense and doesn’t give my students and me enough time to go over the benchmarks.”
Olivia felt the pacing was unfair to her students and failed to make sense to her in terms of the “order of the material.”

As I pressed Olivia further on her issues with the pacing guide, she mentioned she didn’t “like having the pressure” on her to stay on pace with the rest of the district. She felt it failed to consider the needs of her students, and she stated that there were certain topics that required more review and more time. Olivia said she did not like being “dictated by the district” and explicitly chose not to follow the pacing guide. However, she did feel it was important to cover the benchmarks. When I asked her if there was something specific that required more time, Olivia shared with me a story about a classroom practice she routinely incorporated:

The justice system can be difficult for my kids to understand. That being said, I think the mock trial helps and it brings to them a better understanding. We do mock trials and here the kids really thrive. The kids always enjoy it, and last year the kids really had such a great time. We have a case that we do based on a real case. Everyone gets involved and is doing something and it’s just a great learning experience for them. But the pacing guide doesn’t account for the mock trial time so I just ignore it. It takes a lot of time and that district pacing guide doesn’t account for it. So I really don’t look at it at all. It’s really never been my style to stick to a pacing guide or some other kind of pressure, I just kinda do what I want.

Olivia’s mention of past mock trial experiences is significant in understanding the large amount of time it takes from her schedule, but in doing so she was implementing CCMS’s proven practice of simulations. Despite the time limitations for the mock trial in the district pacing guide, and the fact that this benchmark would not even be tested, Olivia decided to teach how she saw fit based on the needs and engagement of her students.

Like Kelly, Olivia also expressed conflict with the AIMS test, the district’s periodic assessment used to monitor the pacing of the civics benchmarks within the district. Like
the district-mandated pacing guide, Olivia chose to ignore the demands of the AIMS test, again citing issues with the pacing of the material, stating, and “If I were to care more about the AIMS test, I would be tied to a pacing guide. And I just refuse to do that. I wanna do things my way. I don’t wanna get stuck.” Olivia’s views about the AIMS test also related to the timing of content:

The stuff they test on the AIMS just isn’t always where we are. It’s not realistic for my students and me to be where they want us to be with the test. Honestly some of it doesn’t make sense for where it’s placed, but I don’t really pay much attention to it because it doesn’t matter to me. I just pace myself for my students and I pretty much never do the AIMS on time…I have better things to do.”

She also expressed concern about the “validity and expectations” for the AIMS test and about how she felt it was not a fair measure of her students’ knowledge because the material she taught conflicted with how it was tested. Olivia recalled the following event related to her students taking a recent AIMS test:

The questions are complicated like the EOC, but the wording is different on the AIMS and it confuses the kids. Like for example, the last one I was really frustrated with it, because there were three or four questions that asked about delegated powers, when they weren’t listed that way in the benchmarks. I didn’t teach them that. I taught them according to the benchmarks. So, they got annoyed because we had recently done their legislative branch test, which is what we were covering in class, so they got annoyed. And I got annoyed. It was an upsetting situation for everyone.

As we finished talking about the district’s lack of coherence with the AIMS test, Olivia was visibly annoyed. She concluded, “They really should just scrap the whole thing, because in reality it doesn’t matter. It’s all about those EOCA scores anyway.”

**Olivia – Conflict with the school – “So now that’s less time for me”**

Olivia spoke candidly to me about her school environment and said that she felt mostly supported throughout her teaching of civics. She mentioned in our third interview
that “administrators aren’t hanging over my head checking in on where I am. I think they trust what I am doing in my classes. I have a lot of autonomy, I’m lucky in that way.” Olivia interpreted their trust as a sign of support of her teaching methods.

However, Olivia did share one experience where she felt slighted by her administration with regard to the timing of the EOCA test. As mentioned earlier, the EOCA has a testing window for all schools. It is at the discretion of the school, not the state or the district, to determine a date and time within the state-mandated window when the test will be administered. Olivia expressed her disappointment in the administration’s handling of the EOCA test date in the upcoming spring semester. Olivia said, “Right now, I’m feeling stressed. I mean, wow, we’re taking this test [the EOCA] actually two weeks earlier. A whole two weeks, that’s a lot of time. I still have so much to cover. I really need more time.” When I asked her to tell me about the sudden change in the testing schedule, she recalled the following brief story:

I had a meeting with admin and they caught me off guard. They told me I was going to be taking the EOC sooner this year. Sandra (another civics teacher) usually takes it before me, on account of her kids being honors. They’re just more on pace and ready to take it sooner, and she doesn’t have a problem with taking it sooner. But they told me I had to go earlier this year. I was hoping they’d be more understanding but they weren’t. Since Sandra is going on a trip that time of year, I have to take it now. Which isn’t right, because we’ve never done it this way and I think I would prefer not to take it earlier…I’m a bit panicked at how much stuff I still need to cover with them. We have a lot to do, I don’t know how we’re gonna get to it in time for the test…I’m going to just give (my students) a big picture idea of a lot of content that we haven’t gotten into and hope for the best.”

Olivia’s frustration with her school did not cease with the EOCA; she also took issue with the handling of student governance. When I directly asked Olivia in our third interview about student government at her school, she retorted, “What student government?” She told me that her school did not have a student government or
student council. When I asked her why, she said she had “no idea” and expressed her disappointment, stating, “We really ought to have one here. Usually the school is better about these things. It’s weird, now that I think about it. It’s a real shame.” When I asked her why she thought there should be a student government, she said that it could “connect to my class” and expressed her own meaningful personal experiences with student government:

I do remember the student government experiences being very meaningful to me. You got to make decisions, you’re part of the decision process at the school, which felt empowering, and made you more enlightened and wanna do things. It kinda gave you an idea of how and why we have people in power. It’s all those things, I think. And I really enjoyed that experience.

Olivia’s personal experience with student government when she was in school meant a great deal to her because it impacted her future civic involvement:

There’s no question that student government got me interested in politics. I enjoyed taking several Poli Sci classes at UF and even thought about being a Poli Sci major. I stuck to history but I’ve worked on different campaigns and things like that. My Dad ran for…years ago, he ran for…what was he running for? State legislature here in Florida. And then Bill Johnson, I worked on his campaign. I was also real active with Obama’s campaign.

Olivia’s personal experiences with student government increased her interest in public affairs, so she understood the value of the experience. This anecdote is also telling of her teaching philosophy; she clearly valued experiential learning in civics. Her narratives about her experiences are significant in that they link classroom practice to civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

**Olivia – Conflict with the Standards – “Too much and why?”**

Olivia also had issues related to the content of the civics standards. Specifically, Olivia expressed concern over their breadth. During our fourth interview, she vehemently declared that “there are too many benchmarks. I think they need to cut
some of them and concentrate on giving the students more active experiences.” When I asked her why, she stated that “kids can learn more from experiential learning rather than just memorizing text.” She also explained to me her thoughts on covering less material over the course of the year. Olivia believed that she could “dive deeper” into the content with her students, and that in doing so her students would get more out of the class. When I asked her for an example of how she would “dive deeper,” Olivia referenced her time as a geography teacher without the pressures of a high stakes assessment:

It’s anxiety to cover them [the benchmarks]. There’s just so much to cover. It limits what I can do in the classroom, like the activities that I think the kids would benefit more from and learn when I was teaching geography, which I loved. I didn’t have the same pressure then and I could go deeper with what we were learning. And so, I mean, the kids loved my class. I don’t think they like it still, but I mean, we did some great stuff in geography. We used to do learning centers all the time, which the students loved. They could spend so much time getting engaged with the material. My students would really get into it. We were also able to have cultural experiences, international fairs, all kinds of stuff. There was just a lot more flexibility without having to worry about covering an insane amount of standards. But it’s sad and different now, so I do miss that aspect of geography especially.

Olivia concluded that she covered “much more material” in civics, but said that her students’ learning suffered from a lack of lesson depth.

She expressed another conflict with the content: “There’s just some stuff I would get rid of. I don’t think it’s appropriate for a 7th grader.” When I asked her to explain further about her definition of “appropriate,” she said she felt “some of the material is just too difficult for a 7th grader to understand.” Although she did believe the material was important, she stated that in its current form it was just not suitable for her students. Again, she expressed her annoyance with some of the benchmarks, wondering why the curriculum developers would pack “so many difficult concepts” into one set of standards.
With regard to her students, she stated, “It doesn’t make sense to try to teach them some of these things, it’s just going to go over their heads. She explained, “I think it’s more important for the students to take away the big concepts. Some of this is too much right now. It would be like an algebra teacher skipping ahead to calculus.”

When I asked her for an example of content that she believed was inappropriate, she reflected:

Well, just off the top of my head, I can tell you learning about the parliamentary government system and other forms of government as unnecessary. I don’t just see it as essential for right now. We need to have our students understand our government first and foremost. Get to the other stuff later. Whenever we talk about it in my class, my students tell me it’s so difficult for them to understand. So many types, so complicated. And they don’t see a connection to themselves so it makes it really hard.

Olivia also expressed her dissatisfaction with the economics standards. She said that she had “tried to teach them before” but disagreed that it should be taught in 7th grade. Again, she recalled her students’ reactions to learning about the material:

Typically, I don’t really cover it. One of the reasons is that I just don’t see the point in it. The first year that I tried covering it a little, I think all of my students’ eyes sorta glazed over and I thought, “What’s the point?”

Olivia expressed relief that even though there were economics benchmarks for 7th grade, they were not included on the EOCA.

Olivia declared that she would get rid of the benchmarks on the “origins and purposes of government,” arguing that they belonged in a history course. She explained:

The English policies, Magna Carta, the philosophers. Natural rights and all that stuff. I’d probably skip it if it weren’t tested. Yeah, it’s important and I try to make it real, but it’s harder. We talk about it all but I think it could easily go into history class. I mean it’s there and it’s relevant, but it’s more history than civics. I don’t know. I would like the content to be more focused on how to be involved in government today and how to teach her students to becoming active citizens.
Olivia shared an interaction she had with a fellow teacher:

When I say it’s more history, it really is. And it makes sense. I actually recently had a teacher come to me and say “thank you” because her students had already learned so much of the information for her class. The origins of government stuff. She told me she felt it was almost redundant for her to teach it. I thought, that’s great for you and your class, but what about the stuff I should really be focusing on in my class?

**Olivia – Conflict with the EOCA – “I’m not a fan of it”**

At our first meeting, Olivia made it abundantly clear that she did not care for the EOCA. She had strong convictions about what the test is and what it ought to be. She complained that “the test really doesn’t measure much of anything, and so it shouldn’t count for anything.” When I asked what the potential merits of the test might be, she could not come up with anything positive. Instead, she listed a variety of specific problems she had with the test. One issue regarded its purpose within the civics course:

I’m not a fan of the test. I’m also not a fan because…my biggest problem with it is I feel like the reason why we have this class is that our students like a lot of civic knowledge. When our legislators came together and decided to create this test, I thought they had a certain goal in mind. We also expected our naturalized citizens to be able to have all this content knowledge about our government. So we have that naturalization test that they have to take. But I think most of our citizens couldn’t pass the test that we’re expecting of the naturalized citizens. So, I think that’s part of the intended purpose of this class, we want them to have that content knowledge.

Olivia’s understanding of the intended purpose of the EOCA is at odds with the reality of the assessment. Olivia provided me with the following evaluation of the EOCA:

But we’re testing them in a different way. If you gave my students the naturalization test, and you asked them these facts about their government, they would be able to answer that. They would pass that test. In fact, I give it to them every year as a pretest and a post test, and they can do it. But if you’re giving them a test which is very complex, that’s not fair. These aren’t the same type of questions. I bet you that adults couldn’t answer these questions…They are designed to be difficult.

She also expressed concern about the test’s impact on her students:
Every year I see the struggle. I see what the test does to my kids. It’s unfair to them, and I think we could just get through so much more without it. I have kids tell me all the time how tough the test is for them, and it just breaks my heart because I know that they know the material. I work with students during lunch sometimes, and I have had students talk to me about how they struggle with it. I just wish it wasn’t so hard.

In particular, she addressed the reading level of the test:

I am frustrated by it because so much of the test is reading. If you are a strong reader, you have a significant advantage, but most of my students are levels 1 and 2 and are at a disadvantage.

She said she would probably feel less frustrated if her students were not struggling readers who had to deal with the “tough vocabulary” on the test:

The vocabulary in civics is tough, no question. So to start off with it’s a challenge, especially because they have no civics background knowledge. But the vocabulary alone is hard, then they add in all this other difficult language that aren’t civics terms but vocabulary words that are supposed to be understood by 7th graders. I’ve seen the test and I do the practice questions so I know how challenging the questions can be worded. For example, when I walked around and saw the test questions they were using things like double negatives and it was just confusing language. I had multiple students raise their hands and try to ask me about particular questions. I knew they knew the content, but they struggled because they can’t read.

She considered the test to be invalid because it was primarily a “reading test, not a civics test.” She asserted:

And I think so much of the test is really testing their reading content knowledge, so if you have these primary sources and you’re a strong reader, you can get the answer without really having the best content knowledge, so I’m not a fan of that. I’ve had teachers with strong readers tell me their students scored well on the AIMS, even when they hadn’t covered the content yet. So there ya go.

Thus, Olivia’s previous interactions helped her construct her own meaning about the efficacy of the test, which she totally lacked confidence in as an authentic civic knowledge evaluation, and then her brief exchanges with her colleagues reinforced her
beliefs about the EOCA as a reading assessment. When I asked Olivia if she thought it was a fair assessment of civic knowledge, she answered with a flat “no.” She recalled teaching an EOCA practice review question with her students:

Whenever we are working on our practice questions, sometimes we will talk through and discuss the questions. When they’re just reading and answering the test by themselves, they struggle. But as we walk through it together and talk about the questions, the students show me that they get it. The really do know the information, but sometimes they just struggle with the vocabulary or articulating what they know. But I can tell.

In our third interview, she mentioned her interaction with one particular struggling reader and about how much more the student knew compared to her performance on the test. Outside of class sometimes, she would speak to the student and ask her “to just tell me. Explain in your own words. And sometimes they really do know it, And that’s what frustrates me more than all. I can see why they struggle with the more complex questions. It’s not their level.”

Olivia shared another example of one of her students:

This one student in particular, he actually moved out of my class, but it was a behavior issue, probably because of his struggles with school. He was avoiding things. But when he and I worked one on one in my smaller class, it was great. My class originally had 16 kids and then jumped to 26 with all low-reading kids, but when it was 16 we worked one-on-one, and he could orally tell me what he knew. There were just plenty of things that we could talk about and that we were covering in class that could orally express. Couldn’t spell. I was constantly asking kids to spell. Couldn’t read. But he definitely knew what was going on and getting the information. That just shows you how unfair the test is and how difficult it is for our low readers and how it really just targets them, it doesn’t actually help them in any way.

Her experience with her student helped her make sense of the reading realities of the EOCA. Olivia’s interpretation of the test’s reading level is also significant, in that it informs her attitude toward the validity of the EOCA. She strongly believed her students were at a clear disadvantage because of the complex vocabulary on the test. Olivia
believed that her students were being set up for failure; it was “designed to hurt them, not help them.” She was emphatic that the EOCA should be changed so that students like hers could demonstrate that they truly have civic knowledge rather than testing them for reading comprehension.

Olivia’s reflections on the EOCA during our final interview focused on its detail. Olivia believed the test to be “ridiculously detail oriented” and that it failed “to focus on bigger concepts.” Olivia conceded that there would be a few “easy recall questions” on the test, but mostly the questions seemed detailed and challenging for her students.

Specifically, Olivia mentioned the benchmark on landmark Supreme Court cases. She spoke of the difficulty her students had in “memorizing all those cases, so if they screw up the names they’re not going to remember the outcomes.” During our fourth interview, she recalled an experience with the previous year’s EOCA:

So, I don’t get to see the questions directly, we’re not supposed to look. Our job is to just pass out the tests, but we will never see the test or those questions again. Which is difficult because we could go through those questions if we really wanted. But I definitely noticed a lot of them as I was skimming and scanning and walking around that there was a lot of detailed stuff and some had to do with Black history and stuff that we definitely didn’t cover in detail because it wasn’t in the benchmarks. Some primary sources were just so tough and detailed too. And they didn’t do that well with it. They were definitely confused. The ridiculous detail bothers me because it sometimes just doesn’t mean anything. So I won’t let it control everything I do. We just do our best with it.

She also mentioned that her students typically shared with her how they think they performed, but she noticed a lot of ambivalence among her students, saying, “They’ve come out before and they were like it was so hard, it was easy, it was difficult to read. I wasn’t sure what to make of it.”

Olivia’s reconciliation of the EOCA with authentic assessment of civic knowledge is most indicative of her attitude and beliefs about the test. In practice, Olivia tried “to
cover as much as possible” to help her students prepare. She fervently wished she could change the standards so she could “concentrate on more meaningful activities” for her students.

Sandra

Sandra – Conflict with the District – “It’s the worst”

Throughout my conversations with Sandra, it was evident to me that her most significant conflicts were with the school district. She had little to no problems with some of the other issues plaguing other teachers, but when it came to matters of the district Sandra would get fired up. Sandra has worked for the district for several decades, and claims to have “seen and heard it all.” However, when we started to discuss civics and its issues, she spoke to two key issues: the AIMS test and the district pacing guide.

According to Sandra, the district pacing guide is her “number one problem.” Her issues ranged from how the test was created to the timing of its content. During our first interview, I asked Sandra about her feelings about the EOCA, and she quickly responded, “I don’t have a problem with the EOCA, but I do have a problem with the terrible pacing guide.” When I asked her about why she did not care for the pacing guide, she reasoned:

I don’t like being held to a pacing guide, and it’s been an adjustment for me. All these years, I’ve never had to teach to a pacing guide, and all these years I’ve been doing a good job. It’s just not my style. I actually do miss that aspect of the job. I wish it were still like that, when I had more autonomy with my decisions.

Sandra’s experience had powerful meaning for her because of her many years as a veteran teacher of social studies. Losing autonomy was a “real challenge” for her. When I asked her how much she thought the pacing guide informed her practice, she responded, “An unbelievable amount. I now have to be concerned about where I am for
the district and not for my students. It’s really stupid. Now I never get to everything I want to cover…it’s not conducive to my students.” When I asked her to tell me what she meant, she responded:

Listen, I have gifted students. These kids are the cream of the crop. This pacing guide doesn’t work for them. And that’s the key problem that I have where my kids can move faster if they get a concept and I wanna move on, but I can’t now. It cripples me, and it cripples my instruction. Because that stupid pacing guide is telling me here’s where I have to be at a certain period of time. And I just don’t like that. Because I know where I need to be and what I need to be covering with my students. I have been teaching civics now for five years, I know what I’m doing. And those years I wasn’t on a pacing guide, they were great. I paced based on what my students needed, not some useless guide. I tell the principal all the time we need to get away from that thing, but it’s really the district. They’re the ones who created this mess.

Sandra also took issue with the inconsistency of the pacing guide in that it failed to appropriately connect the AIMS test and the EOCA. During our third interview, she showed me a copy of the pacing guide, wanting me to look for obvious problems from an outsider’s perspective. Prior to our next meeting, I skimmed through the materials she provided me. As a former civics teacher and novice civics researcher, I noted there were indeed some serious issues with the AIMS test. During our third interview, Sandra and I talked about these issues, and she commented:

I would redo the pacing guide. I would do it in a more consistent manner. I mean, you looked at it. It just doesn’t fit. It’s a mess. They put voting in with the judicial branch. Voting goes with elections! You see what I’m saying? I don’t know where these people are coming up with this stuff. It’s not logical. Why do the people downtown sit there and say, “Oh, let’s just put this here.” Or let’s just put this over here instead. They don’t look at anything logically.

As a long-time teacher in the school district, Sandra was comfortable with making her voice heard when necessary. She explained that she only did this with her students in mind when she felt that something would negatively impact them. As she recalled:
For example, last year I complained and complained and complained to the people downtown that they were having us teach the Constitution, but then they didn’t teach how to amend the Constitution. They had us teach about the Constitution articles in the first 9 weeks. However, they messed up because they didn’t have us teaching the benchmark on amending the Constitution till the 3rd 9 weeks. Can you believe that? It’s ridiculous. Hello, there’s an article that specifically addresses this! It just didn’t make sense. And that’s just the first thing off the top of my head, there’s so much more. But they didn’t listen to me and didn’t change a lick of it. I couldn’t believe it. Here I was doing their job for them and they couldn’t even take my advice.

Sandra elaborated on a variety of other civics content-specific inconsistencies she found in the pacing guide. Aside from illogical sequencing of content, she also shared her views on irrelevant material:

I’ll never forget how outraged I was last year. It was awful. We have these 7th geography benchmarks we also have to teach even though they’re not on the EOCA. And yes, I love teaching these geography benchmarks because the kids don’t get geography anywhere else. However, we’re tied to such a strict pacing because of the guide. Would you believe they had us teaching geography in the beginning of the year? We spent a whole two weeks on that stuff, and it ended up not being on the AIMS test or the EOCA. We wasted so much time, and we had so much left to cover in the guide. I marched right on down to the front office and let him (the principal) have it. I told him, “This is a waste, please don’t ever do this to me again. I’ve just wasted two whole weeks I could have been preparing my students for the EOCA and AIMS. You need to tell them downtown they’re messing up.” He understood I was upset, but still, it didn’t change anything. They need to get it right.

Sandra had a firm grasp on what to teach, based on logic, appropriate conceptual learning in civics, and the needs of her students. However, her frustration with the district leadership and their failure to acknowledge her thoughts on the pacing guide only affirmed her views of incompetence in the district. She felt “more controlled, more limited” by the district pacing guide. It was evident that the pacing guide was a sensitive, consuming, and prominent aspect of her civics teaching.
Although the pacing guide created “many headaches”, Sandra was even more incensed by the district AIMS test. Sandra mentioned the AIMS test in all of our interviews together, and always expressed how much she despised “that despicable thing.” Sandra explained during our first interview that, ostensibly, the purpose of the test is to help prepare students for the EOCA and serve as a diagnostic for student learning. However, Sandra argued that the test measured nothing important because it did not match the EOCA: “It is useless, but we have to waste time on taking it nonetheless. I honestly don’t know why we have to take it. Enough is enough. Too much testing…We get in trouble if we don’t take the dumb test. But the class suffers because of it.” According to Sandra, the AIMS test is “deeply flawed” and failed to serve a purpose for her students preparing to take the EOCA:

The reality is the district supervisor decided we needed to create a quarterly test for the students. But he didn’t create it himself. Rather, he brought in a bunch of teachers and administrators to work on the AIMS test. I don’t know what they were doing, because it just doesn’t make sense. But it was probably a case of too many cooks. So they spent time working on putting something together and this is what they came up with. I honestly wish I was there, because I definitely would have made sure that darn test made more sense. And for what? Just more of a waste of class time when I could be actually teaching my students something useful. We don’t need to have these AIMS tests, that’s the point of the EOC. It truly is a frustrating situation, because those AIMS tests don’t mean a hill of beans. They’re nothing like the EOC.

Clearly, the entire conception and implementation of the AIMS test conflicted with her views on what the purpose of the class ought to be. Although she had strong opinions about the EOCA, she at least saw some merit in it. To her, the AIMS test was superfluous.

When I asked Sandra about the incoherence between the AIMS test, the EOCA, and the district administrators, she speculated, “It’s all about district leadership. And the
reality is it’s just not there. People aren’t doing their jobs, and the kids suffer as a result. They really need to take this more seriously. It baffles me.” She shared this narrative about her students’ experiences with the AIMS test:

Although I know it’s off, even my students pick up on it. Would you believe that? They know what’s going on. I can tell you, the last AIMS test was a nightmare. I had students coming to me all day upset because they thought they didn’t do well. I had to try and calm them down, and explain to them it doesn’t really count. But they were just obstinate! They wanted to know why it was different and why they should have to take it when it was just riddled with disaster. One student flat out told me some of the questions were on things we hadn’t covered yet. I looked at the questions. Not only did they not make a lick of sense but they also were all over the place. Man, did that make me angry!

Clearly, Sandra’s students’ perceptions of the test were an important component of her meaning making about the validity of the test. Furthermore, Sandra used her own observations and knowledge of the civics benchmarks to inform her opinions about the validity of the test.

Sandra - Conflict with the school – “It’s not very encouraging”

A major conflict Sandra had with the school centered on the issue of student government. This narrative proved to be useful in light of my thinking about the “six proven practices” for effective civic education. Sandra had a deeply personal experience in her school related to student government. She provided a long narrative about its recent history at her school and her connections to it:

Several years ago, I ran the student government. And I really enjoyed doing it, because it was a way to get the students involved and able to give back to both the school and community. It really was a good experience. The students need to have it, it’s good for them. I think everyone should be involved in some way if they can. Anyway, I was told I would have administrative and school support for all that. And I had that student government club, and there were things we tried to do directly for and in the school, and of course, we tried to raise money, which we did sometimes, and we gave the $200 we raised to the veterans’ Fisher House when it was being built. And we also gave a $100 donation to the
Ronald McDonald House. It was very popular – we had move it to the cafeteria, because I couldn’t fit all the kids in this classroom.

It was obvious that she felt student government was an important experience for her students because it connected them to active citizenship and community service. As sponsor, she believed she had full support. However, that all changed. She said:

And then, the administration decided to disband it. And it was partly because we were running the school store and we were doing fundraisers, it was partly that the administration wanted to take over the fundraising and the other things that they were doing. They didn’t want me or the kids to have that much power. They didn’t think it was necessary for the kids. I completely disagreed with them. And so they completely took away some of the things that we were doing and pretty much said, “I don’t think we need a student government.” I told them they were making a huge mistake, and should really reconsider what they were doing. But they didn’t think it was necessary for the kids. They didn’t want to share the power. I don’t know. But I bet you if it was tested they’d be all about it. That’s the only thing you can ever truly count on. If it’s tested, you’re going to get support and resources. But, of course you can’t test this type of stuff.

She found it stunning that the administration would totally disband the student government organization: “The situation just zapped me…Hasn’t student government been a fixture in schools for decades?” She also found it mind-boggling that the administration somehow connected student government with the EOCA, as if somehow student participation in governance took time away from instruction and test practice.

Sandra described a recent attempt at reinstating student government:

I just couldn’t. That experience wore me out. So disheartening. Not just for me, but the kids. After I got sabotaged, I said, “Okay, fine.” And everybody said after that, “Where did the student government go? Why isn’t it around anymore?” It was brought up again this year, because we have a community school that we needed a student government. How can we be deemed a community school without a student government? But anyway, a new administrator came to me and said, “I understand that you ran student government before?” I said “Yep, and never again.” She was clearly taken aback, because I rarely say no to anything. I really do enjoy being involved with the school. And she looked at me and said, “Why?” I said, “Ask the administration.” That’s all I said to her. And she never asked
me about it again, and we still don’t have a student government. We desperately need one, but once bitten twice shy. Let someone else get burned by them. I don’t want to have to be the one to let my students down again.

As Sandra shared all these experiences, she wore her emotions on her sleeve, expressing the wish that things could have been different for her and her students, who were now stifled in their efforts to create a more active and engaged school culture.

Reflecting on these experiences was emotionally taxing for her, but she mentioned “how good it felt to talk to an outsider. It’s just one of those things that has always bothered me. It’s never been resolved and I’m not sure it will.” Her lack of interest in starting up a new student government was not the only effect of her unfortunate experience, but she also became uninterested in sponsoring other extracurricular activities. Sandra told me she would “always be there for my students and the school” but refused “to get involved in any other after-school activities.” The viability of extracurricular activities, another of the six proven practices, cannot be accomplished without teacher involvement, and who better to understand its importance than civics instructors? I found her experiences very disheartening.

Another conflict with the school arose from different circumstances. Sandra disagreed with the administration over the handling of the scheduling for the EOCA. In fact, the conflict occurred as a result of how the administration treated another teacher in her school: Olivia. Sandra’s narrative about this issue began when I asked her about EOCA preparations for the end of the year. Sandra wanted to be certain I understood the context for her outrage at the administration over their scheduling choices, so she first explained to me how things had always been done in the past:

Well, like take last year for example, when it came to scheduling the EOC, I told admin that I would be more than happy to go first. Because, you see
we don’t take them all at the same time. Our school has us take them all at separate times. We all take turns with the test for scheduling. But yeah, so last year and other years I have always gone first. I want to help Olivia. I understand that she’s in a different situation than me and needs more time. So, I went first last year. Not a problem for my class. Worked out for me and my kids, I thought we were ready. Because my kids are so gifted, they’re pretty ready to go anyway by that time of year. But I also knew Olivia needed more time to prepare so I let her go after me. Her kids struggle more, it takes them a lot longer to understand some of these concepts. They really need the time. And Olivia is always telling me that there never seems to be enough time, so I figured, well if I can be of help, why not? It’s always worked before, and it’s never been a problem since. It’s how we’ve always done things.

However, the conflict for Sandra materialized in a new change in the scheduling for the upcoming EOCA:

Well, this year I think it’s on the 24th, I have to look. But, Olivia is before me this year. And that’s not right. And it’s only because our students in the advanced program are going on a band field trip, so she really got screwed by the administration. My kids really don’t need that extra time. It’s not right what they did to her. And, it’s not like she knew at the beginning of the year, either. They just sprung that on her. She really just got screwed. Plain and simple. And they won’t budge. They won’t listen. It’s not right what they’re doing to her. And I know she’s got to be feeling stressed, that’s a lot for her to digest. And the thing is they won’t rearrange it to help her out. I just don’t understand what they’re doing. Don’t they realize her students need more time?

Sandra concluded:

I know she’s not gonna be ready. And that’s not her fault. She’s an excellent teacher. But realistically, she is working with students with different abilities than mine and she needs as much time as possible. You’d think they’d accommodate her more since this test matters to them so much. And I mean I always take it early, I take it way before her. Like I said earlier, I took it last year like May 8th or something and she didn’t go till the last few days before the deadline. But she needs that time. Her students need that time. But the administration flat out told her no this year. They didn’t provide any reason either. It’s just not right. We’re professionals and we need to be having these conversations.

It is highly likely that the students’ performance on the EOCA was directly impacted by this change in scheduling, especially on such short notice. Although the change affected
Olivia, Sandra was also affected by her own understanding of the context of the situation.

**Sandra – Conflict with the EOCA – “I can see the struggles with it”**

Sandra did not have a major issue with the existence of the EOCA itself, although she admitted she would probably feel differently if she had students like Olivia’s. She mentioned during our first interview, “I understand why they have it there. It’s to gauge how much civic knowledge our students leave with.” Sandra conceded that having an EOCA changed her instructional practices and the way she covered the material, and that the EOCA had its flaws and room for improvement, but she also felt it was important for diagnostic purposes, explaining, “Ideally the test would be more of a check-up. It wouldn’t weigh so much or have so much importance. But that’s just the reality.” So, although Sandra valued monitoring student progress, she disagreed with its consequences – particularly with the fact that the EOCA is worth 30 percent of a student’s grade in the civics course. As Sandra explained:

I don’t like the fact they’re tying it to their credits. That really bothers me. And I’m looking at that, not just because of my students, but more so for other students. Listen, we are dealing with some difficult concepts here that the students have never experienced before. We need to help them, not hurt them, as best as we can. So have the test, but don’t make it count for so much. The fact that they’ve tied it to your actual credits is just too much. But I think of Olivia’s students and I know it’s unfair to them. They already have so much on their plate, why should we burden them with so much more? It truly bothers me that they decided to do that to our students. That was a real oversight on their part.

Sandra had a conversation with an official at the state level who was directly involved with the design of the test. She recalled:

So yes, the whole passage and the weight of the test has always bothered me. It’s just always there. And honestly, like I said, it’s not something I really have to worry about but I know others do. They’re not all in my situation. I’ve even asked, and God I love him, I’ve asked George that too
– George Kandy, who was directly involved with putting this thing together. I had a real upfront conversation with him about my concerns. He listened, but I don’t think he really got it. I tried to tell him this really wasn’t about me, it was the bigger picture. It’s what should be best for everybody. I mean I’m near retirement, how much more am I really going to be bothered by it? But it just didn’t sit right and he didn’t listen. And that really upset me. We normally have such productive conversations but we were going nowhere fast with that one. He really couldn’t provide me with the answer I was looking for. I’m not sure he even knows why we’re doing these things. Deep down, I think he agreed with me but what difference does that really make? That’s not going to change a thing.

One final type of conflict related to the EOCA involved the nature of the test.

When I asked Sandra to describe the test to me, she said that she felt it was “a test of knowledge from the civics course” and it “challenged the students.” Although Sandra felt it was a fair measurement for her students, she argued, “I could see why other people have such stronger feelings about the test. They don’t have my students.” She observed that the EOCA is supposed to be “written at a 7th grade reading level, but that is up for debate.” She recognized her students were advanced for 7th graders, so “they really may not actually be an accurate measure” for the overall student success on the EOCA.

Sandra also explained the following about the design and content of the EOCA:

So, naturally, it is not just a civics test. It is in fact a reading test. It is supposed to be written for 7th graders. But I understand the struggles with it. Just because my students do well, doesn’t mean I don’t get why the others take issue. It definitely helps to have strong reading skills. Oh, and there is a lot of complex vocabulary. So, the test certainly favors strong readers and not weaker ones. It’s not fair to them, and really that is a major problem with the test. They need to make some kind of changes or provide different opportunities for those kids. Yes, it’s a civics test but again, for those struggling readers it is so much more than that. So if you teach those students then you really have two battles you have to fight with the EOCA.

Sandra indeed recognized that it comes as no surprise that standardized testing favors students with stronger reading comprehension. Thus, she also recognized the
inherent inequity for struggling readers on the EOCA. She described an encounter with another civics teacher:

I was speaking with Kelly G. the other day and she was telling me about her concerns for the EOC, seeing as it will be here before she knows it. But she can’t help but be worried, and she kept telling me how low her kids are this year and how they really just struggle with the practice questions. I tell her to just try her best and teach the benchmarks, but I know she has different students than mine. I get the concern. The questions can be wordy, and really challenge the students. The vocabulary can trip them up too. She gets upset, though, because she knows her students know this stuff, but the literacy is tough. That’s really one problem I don’t have to deal with. But I get that, if a student can’t read well, they are going to struggle with the test. And that’s where it’s really not fair for them. Some of these kids try so hard, and not to do well probably has an effect on them.

Sandra valued her conversations with other teachers and respected their interpretations and efforts to make sense of the test. However, for Sandra, the sense making, experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the students taking the test were what Sandra valued most. More than anything else, her conflicts occurred when she perceived that the EOCA affected students’ learning, success, and ambition.

**Theme: Negotiations of Time**

This section focuses on the narrative theme of time. There is no question that time plays a significant role in any classroom; however, these three teachers are in unique situations as they teach civics under the time constraints of a standardized test. As I spoke with Kelly, Olivia, and Sandra, it became clear to me just how important time is to their meaning making of civic education. Additionally, the lesson plans from each teacher provided me with a better understanding of how much content they are required to cover. I also examined district pacing guides, state resources, and the benchmarks and item specifications in order to help me better contextualize the time commitments of each teacher. Along with the issue of time as a recurring theme, with each teacher
 handling it differently, they also revealed two key sub-narratives: time devoted to specific content and time to devote to specific instructional practices. Equally important was the null curriculum: their choices of what not to teach in the interest of time.

**Kelly**

**Decisions about time for coverage of content – Kelly – “If I know something is not on the test, then I’m not teaching it.”**

Speaking with Kelly reminded me of the challenges many first-year teachers face as they try to navigate and survive. Kelly, a highly prepared and passionate former intern and substitute teacher at Graham Middle School, found that she had become a stressed-out, anxiety-ridden civics instructor, chiefly because of the EOCA. She felt that the test “dominates every choice I make” in her planning and teaching so that she would be able to cover the 35 tested benchmarks.

In our first interview, Kelly also shared her views on how having an “active, engaging, and experiential learning” conflicted with her actual practice. Kelly was completely aware of the disconnect and explained to me how much it bothered her and how what she was doing is “contrary to what I believe good civic education ought to be”:

> I believe these students need to have experiences that will help them be better citizens, but I can’t do that because of this EOC. It’s just too time consuming, and I know it’s not good teaching. But what else am I supposed to do, I’m between a rock and a hard place. So instead, we do a lot of note taking and boring direct instruction. It’s not good, but it’s the only way I can cover all the ground I need to cover so my students will be ready to take the test.

Her instructional choices were based on time, rather than what she considered to be best practices. When I asked Kelly to share with me a classroom experience that was typical of her instruction, she shared the following story:

> So, for example the other week we were learning about the Constitution. There’s obviously a lot to cover with all the articles. So, I put together
some notes based on the FJCC lesson plan and had my students copy those down. Then, I had them do a worksheet using their notes. It was really a lot of note taking. But they didn’t like it, and I’m sure they didn’t get a lot out of it. I could see them zoning out as we went over the notes. I’m ashamed to say this is what I do, but really it’s all I have time for. I’m sure there are way more creative and exciting ways to handle it, but it’s too much for me to try to take on. I don’t have the highest ability level students, so they need all the time they can get.

As I perused her lesson plans, I realized Kelly implemented quite a lot of direct instruction with her students, focusing mostly on note-taking with PowerPoint and worksheets. Although her lesson plans drew from the FJCC lessons, she found that routinely omitted the more active components of the lessons. Although Kelly had solid views on what an engaging civic classroom would look like in content and practice, her anxiety about the demands of time led Kelly to opt for a more passive classroom environment.

Five benchmarks are not on the EOCA because their experiential nature cannot be assessed by a multiple-choice test. Three of these benchmarks were in the six proven practices for effective civic education. One benchmark – a simulation – requires students to “simulate the trial process and the role of juries in the administration of justice.” During our third interview, I asked Kelly how she covered the benchmarks that focused on experiential learning opportunities. After Kelly reviewed each benchmark, she responded:

Okay. So I’m not going to cover them. There just isn’t enough time. So I won’t cover them because I don’t have to, they’re not on the test. It’s not that I don’t think they’re important, but I need as much time as possible to cover the stuff for the test. And it’s really just sad because I know my students could benefit so much from these benchmarks.

These remarks led to a short narrative from our fourth interview concerning her experience at her school as an intern:
But last year, when I was an intern, my mentor teacher did all of these benchmarks, except the service-learning. But yeah, she did all of these “practicing responsibilities” benchmarks. They were really some great lessons. (For example), she did a lot of awesome simulations. Her mock Congress was killer, and I could tell our students really enjoyed it. I was surprised she could manage with the EOCA, but then again she also had honors students. She probably could manage her time more. But yeah, it really did wonders for the students. I remember the mock trial, and after they took notes and watched some stuff they actually did the trial and it just came to life for everyone. They loved it, and it became real to the students. Like, when they’d try to remember they’d go, “Oh yeah, Ashley was the judge, and the judge is in charge of this or that.” It was just such an encouraging experience for those kids. I wish I could do it, but the time just isn’t there for me. I can’t spare a week. But it’s not on the test, even though it’s really the type of stuff that is most important for them to learn.

Kelly found herself in a dilemma: “How do I prepare them to be successful on the test, while also participating in engaging experiential learning?” While she believed that the more engaging practices would help her students to become better citizens, the top-down pressures of the EOCA in her first year of teaching led her to believe she really had no choice but to make her students better test-takers.

Kelly also shared with me her choice to avoid implementing a mock presidential election for her students— another type of simulation recommended in the six proven practices, and certainly a relevant one in fall 2016. When I asked her why, she asserted: “Time. Plain and simple. If I really wanted to go all out I would, but I can’t because it’s just too time consuming. The kids miss out, and I think they’d get a lot out of it, but they’re just too involved.”

One simulation she did occasionally allow was iCivics, an online learning civic education website, conceptualized by former Associate Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, that provides students with opportunities to play “brain games” or do virtual simulations of various civic processes – for example, playing the role of Supreme Court justices in making decisions based on the Bill of Rights. Combined with high quality content
instruction, games like iCivics can have positive outcomes for students. However, Kelly admitted that her students only played the games “on days where we have to kill some time and I can get a bit of a break, because otherwise it can take too much time, especially the longer, more involved games.”

Another practice that fell by the wayside because of time constraints was service-learning. “Conducting a service project for the benefit of the community” was one of the untested benchmarks that Kelly was adamant about omitting from her instructional choices. Although she deeply believed in “the powerful and meaningful nature” of service-learning opportunities, she also believed time would no doubt be taken away from the EOCA – another example of being between a rock and a hard place and forced to choose what was “best” for her students. She knew that some of her students did community service, but an actual in-class project was out of the question:

So the students sometimes participate in some kind of school beautification project. They have to help with trash and maintaining the grounds, which teaches them some good lessons. I remember some of my students doing it last year, and they learned more about community service because of it. From what I remember I think some of the students liked it. It was probably a good experience for them. But it’s just not the same as service-learning because it doesn’t require them to give back to the community and try to resolve a local issue. So, it’s not the same. But I’m sure that’s how some teachers and the school try to make a case for completing that benchmark. It’s nice, but I don’t see much in it other than keeping the school grounds looking nice. It doesn’t really teach civic activism.

Kelly seemed to understand the difference between service-learning and community service, and while she was glad the students were contributing to the school, she did not believe the school beautification project matched the service-learning benchmark as defined in the civics item specifications.
Another time issue for Kelly related to her ability to conduct classroom discussions. She bluntly told me “our discussions are brief, because we have so much to get to. But I would do more if I could. But I just don’t have the time. I have to get them so much material.” She believed in the importance of classroom discussion as part of civic learning, and admitted she wished she could do more but felt that it would not prepare students for the test. She said that when she did have discussions, they were “organic and spontaneous” but did not last long and did not include everyone in the classroom. When I asked Kelly if there was ever a time she did discussion, she recalled the following experience:

So, like I said I rarely do it, but one time we had a great discussion in my class when we were covering women’s suffrage. The students were so interested, and really tried to make connections to today. They were totally into it. But I cut it short. It killed me, because it really was a great teachable moment. But I just couldn’t help but think how much it would set me back and change my position (relative to) the other classes. So, it was great while it lasted but I definitely limited them. I’d change it if I could, but the reality is we just don’t have the time for full blown discussions, and I resent that. I realize it’s part of my role as a civic educator but I just can’t with that EOC looming over my head.

Kelly was reflective enough to regard discussion as a worthwhile activity, and it clearly frustrated her to curtail it. When I pushed Kelly further on what she would do with discussion if she could, she told me that she would love to have more discussions about “race and social justice.” Kelly’s background as a sociology major influenced her interest in these issues; she also believed her students “would love to have those conversations” because they were “incredibly interested.” I asked her if she would consider these issues to be controversial or uncomfortable, but she did not: “I am more than comfortable tackling issues of race and injustice. But again, it’s not tested and we are limited with our time. So we just don’t talk about it.” I also asked Kelly if discussion
of current events was part of her instruction, and, and she insisted that her students
“love love love current events, but again, I just don’t have time. Every now and then we
will have a real brief discussion on a whim, but I just can’t dedicate time on a regular
basis to it.” Without question, Kelly believed in the civic importance of including current
events in her teaching and hated not doing more with it because she saw how it
engaged the students’ curiosity and prior knowledge about what was going on in the
world. She told me about a recent issue in class:

We were talking about civil rights the other day, and Black Lives Matter
came up. Naturally, I was a little uneasy because it’s so controversial but
we were doing well that day and I could tell they were interested so we
had a little discussion. I didn’t plan anything, it just kinda happened. But it
was great. The students were respectful and really wanted to hear what
others had to say about it. But it went well, and honestly I wish I could do
more discussions like that. I would make it more structured, bring in more
videos and readings, and really organize it so we could go into detail. But
the EOC has really changed how I’d like to teach.

Thus, not only did the EOCA affect how Kelly covered current events in her classroom,
but she also acknowledged how it changed her instructional choices for both content
and practice.

During our third interview, I asked Kelly to share with me her views on
extracurricular activities at the school. Although activities outside of the classroom are
not the focus of my research, they do play a role civic learning, according to the CCMS
six proven practices. I was curious about how Kelly made sense of extracurricular
activities and about her involvement with them. She explained:

They’re great. And we definitely should provide our students as much as
possible because they can really help them in so many ways. Depending
on the activity, students can learn teamwork and things like that. These
are things we want our students to learn so they can be good citizens. I
know firsthand because I was involved in so many clubs when I was their
age. I had so much fun, but I learned a lot too. And of course it has to do
with the club sponsor, they can make a real difference. But I had this great
teacher who really made us involved with the school and we just had such a great time. We did all sorts of things for the school and even outside of the school, and sometimes the parents were involved too. It was cool because we were outside of the strictness of class and I could do these different things with my friends and I feel like I got a lot out of it.

Kelly also said that her current school had a decent number of extracurricular activities ranging in focus and time commitment. But when I asked Kelly if she was open to leading or creating extracurricular activities, she responded:

I wouldn’t be able to handle it right now. I just don’t have the time to do anything. I stay late, work on the weekends sometime, and I just can’t have another commitment. Sure, I’d like my students to be more involved in activities outside of school, but I just can’t be that person right now. Maybe in a few years when I’m more confident or better with my time. Or if the EOC ever goes away. But I just wouldn’t be comfortable sponsoring a club right now.

As a civics instructor, Kelly was aware of the potential for positive civic outcomes from extracurricular activities and would have liked to participate. However, as long as time plays such a critical role in her teaching, Kelly may never feel comfortable assuming more responsibilities, like extracurricular activities, that could benefit her students. As far as she was concerned, having enough time to plan, grade, and cover the material on the EOCA was her first priority.

Another proven practice from the CCMS calls for general instruction in civics, government, history, economics, law, geography, and other relevant topics. Although it is clear that civics teachers cover civics/government, law, and history, it is unclear whether students receive instruction on economics and geography in Florida if they do not overtly relate to civics. As previously mentioned, Florida does have 7th grade benchmarks on geography and economics, but they are not tested on the EOCA. When I asked Kelly about how she would address these topics in her civics course, she responded bluntly:
I’m not going to cover them. Sure, they’re important, but they’re not on the test and the bottom line is I am already pressed for time. And I see an opportunity here for me to try and review some of the more challenging stuff with my students if I leave out econ and geography. A lot of this stuff is tough, and we can use the extra time. For example, I have got to teach more about the types of powers the branches of government have. I don’t know what I did wrong but we had a test and the students just bombed that. I guess my lesson wasn’t so great, but I am going to make more notes and make it clearer for them. At least with the geography and econ they’ll get it somewhere down the line.

However, not all of the curricular and instructional decisions Kelly made were based on whether or not they were on the EOCA. She referred to additional content that was in the tested benchmarks but that she had decided to ignore. In particular, Kelly stated that she would not be teaching her students the benchmarks on contemporary global issues and foreign affairs, despite these being tested. She explained her rationale:

So, I’m not covering those standards. I know they’re tested, but from what I have heard there are not many questions on the test about them, so I am just going to free myself up for more time for other stuff. I spoke to two teachers a few weeks ago, and they mentioned to me “not to sweat it” because those benchmarks aren’t really tested. At first I was taken aback by their honesty, but it was refreshing to hear somebody else talk about how they felt it was too much to cover in so little time. I mean they’re definitely interesting and important topics, but I just don’t see the time as available. So they told me it was okay to skip those, so that’s what I’m going to do. I don’t feel that bad about it, because it’s just what I need to do. And the other teachers admitted they stay away from it, and told me to only do it if I felt comfortable with the time I needed for the test. But I can tell you right now I am going to stop before I get to those benchmarks. There is just more on the other content for the test, so that will be my focus with my students.

This anecdote indicates that even tested civics content may not be taught if teachers do not find it useful or relevant for the amount of time they would have to devote to it.
Kelly – Time for EOCA practice

Aside from changes in classroom instructional practice, I asked Kelly if the EOCA impacted her classroom in other ways. She explained to me that she tried to make questions for her assessments like those on the EOCA: “Multiple choice is the only kind of assessment I do for my students. It’s how they’re tested, so I figured this is what I need to do. It’s part of their test strategies.” Designing her questions to look like the EOCA took even more time, as did time to review for the test. As she stated:

Even after we’re done learning a topic, I try to go back to it as often as I can because I know they’re going to see it at the end of the year. They need as much exposure to it as they possibly can get. And I know it kinda bugs them, because when we keep going back I sometimes get the feeling I am losing them because it is so forced. Like, the other day a student said to me in class, “But we already learned this, I thought we were done.” So they probably think it’s redundant, but they can use the extra practice. Sure it takes extra time, but if I don’t take the extra time to cover it there’s a greater chance they’re going to mess up on the test.

One practice Kelly always included was a bit time-consuming, but she felt it was purposeful and worthwhile. She explained to me that she used practice EOCA questions developed by the state and the FJCC. Every day her students would answer a question as a “bell ringer” activity for test taking practice. Kelly elaborated:

So yeah, every day the students have to answer a daily civics question. This questions helps them get in the mindset of understanding the type of questions they’ll see on the test. I try to pick questions directly related to the material we’re learning about. So yeah, like today they had a question on the Declaration (of Independence). My students came in, read and answered the question, and we talked about it. They actually did pretty decent today, but then again that was a lower level question. Still though, it was encouraging. But yeah they come in and do it, it’s not the most exciting thing but they do it anyway. It’s a decent way to start the class plus it’s good review for the test. It takes a little class time every day to go over those questions but that’s manageable. I can spare 5-10 minutes because it’s directly related to the test.
It seemed that Kelly believed this practice was not the most engaging way to begin class, but she justified it because it was directly connected to the EOCA.

**Olivia**

**Olivia – Decisions about time for coverage of content – “I’ve got a lot to do and a short window to do it in”**

Olivia contrasted greatly with Kelly. Whereas Kelly exhibited many of the typical characteristics and frustrations of first year teachers, Olivia experience made her far more relaxed about the EOCA. To be fair, Olivia had taught for more than a decade and had seen “many spectacles in education.” She felt prepared to challenge anything else that came her way. However, Olivia was not exempt from general feelings of anxiety about her choices of which instructional practices to use and which content to cover. She made her own choices based on time, and explained that she felt the test “constrained and limited” her more than anything else. However, she said she refused to allow herself to “teach to the test” and explained she tried to “do the best that I can with what I have.”

Although Olivia generally felt more confident in her abilities to navigate the commitments of time the EOCA required, she acknowledged there had been some significant changes to her classroom environment and instructional practices. From our first interview together, Olivia talked fondly about her days teaching geography. Students were not required to take an EOCA for geography, and the pacing, content, and practice were left solely to the discretion of the teacher. Olivia lamented those “good old days,” but she was especially dismayed because she felt many of the ensuing changes negatively impacted her students. She compared her teaching then and now in our first interview together:
Like I mentioned, just a moment ago, I think project-based learning is the best type of learning we can offer our students. It requires them to be active and involved, and they must make their own decisions. They get the most out of it. When I was teaching geography, most of the class was on projects. And I mean meaningful projects, not something that’s just there to kill time. My students really used to go deep with learning about the culture and geography of the U.S., and they would create these really awesome presentations. You could just feel how much they learned. The students were way more engaged. Those lessons were great, and I feel like they got the most out of those lessons. But we can’t do that anymore, on account of the EOC. I’m already short for time, and those projects were always incredibly time consuming. But they were so worth it.

The way she taught geography was no longer feasible in her current classroom environment, so the changes she had to make came at the cost to her own teaching philosophy and beliefs.

Again, comparing her current classes to her previous classes without an EOCA, “Kids loved my geography classes. And I think they loved them because we took the time to dive deep into the material and really learn things. Now we can’t do that. We just don’t have the time for projects.” When I pushed Olivia further and asked her how it might have directly impacted her instructional choices, she explained, “There is more direct instruction, but I still try to keep things as active as I can for my students, because that’s how they learn best. But we have a lot to do and little time to do it.”

It was clear to me that 1) Olivia was committed to providing her students with substantive and active learning experiences; 2) she would not allow herself to be dominated by the EOCA; 3) she would continue to try to create lessons that required the students to be active and engaged with the material; and 4) her lesson plans would continue to be creative and include a variety of instructional activities. Her lesson plans included experiences such as civics games, mock trials, mock Congress, and several
“learning stations” for her students. Nonetheless, she missed the days of being able to “do more fun things” with her students. She elaborated:

It [the EOCA] affects how much time I feel like I have, which then affects the type of activities I could do and want to do. So it has a big effect. So basically I make sure I get the content and the big picture ideas across to my students, and then I make sure I get everything covered. I’m never on the pacing guide, I’m always behind because I try to still do some activities, but it’s not like what I used to do. But those activities take time so I just have to back off. It’s just unfortunate because I know those are the types of experiences that are going to be the most meaningful for my students, and they are going to get the most out of it. I know this on account of my geo classes. I want them to reflect on my class and think about how much they learn and how engaged they were with the material. I want my class to have meaning, and I think with more activities a class is generally better because it requires the students to be active. But I’ve had to change my style, and that’s something I’ve really had to reflect on. I wish that weren’t the case, but the reality is I have to make those changes if we are going to get to all of the material.

Thus, Olivia believed her teaching style had been affected but not completely transformed. She still committed herself to providing her students with high quality learning experiences.

When I asked Olivia to provide me with an explanation of a change she had to make in her practice, she told me:

I mean, there’s just so many activities I’d like to spend more time on. And I sometimes do. And that means I am forced to cut out other activities. Something always loses. One of my favorite things is the mock trial that we do. My students love it. Every year students tell me how it is their favorite thing to do, and they just get a lot from it. We still do one, but I would do more if I could. There was one time I did one for the Boston Massacre. My students were so into it, they really loved it. They could really put themselves in it historically. It was great too because they got both history and law from it. But it took away too much time. It was a great lesson. I just wish I had more time for more mock trials. The students love it and learn so much.

Olivia expressed strong regrets that she felt limited in her instructional creativity. Even though Olivia covered the experiential benchmark on mock trials, she felt that her
teaching was still challenged by her lack of time to go deeper into simulations and other experiential learning activities that she knew were beneficial to her students. She wanted to do more simulations – one of the six “proven practices” – but explained that she could not afford the time because her students, despite doing well with the mock trial, typically needed a great deal of remediation on the tested benchmarks: “We were already strapped for time.”

Because we had discussed simulations, I also decided to ask Olivia about how she handled the benchmark on mock elections. She explained that her school did participate in a mock election and told me:

So we did it [Presidential mock election] through all the social studies classes at the school. We had it set up so they actually could vote for third-party candidates also. And they could actually vote for some of the amendments on the Florida ballot, although they would have preferred to have included the marijuana one. The school left that out. I actually thought they should be able to vote for it. But yeah, that’s how we handled the mock election this time around and I’m glad we had something like that for the kids.

Olivia was generally pleased the students could participate in a mock election and asserted that it gave her the opportunity to have a few conversations with her students about other ballot initiatives, such those related to environmental issues. When I asked Olivia if there was anything she would consider changing other than the marijuana ballot initiative, she shared the following suggestion:

Well, I would have made it more realistic. Why not set it up like a true election? With the way things are right now we always vote on paper and in those little booths or sectioned off tables. I just think it would feel more real to the students. But I’m sure time is a major issue. It would be a real commitment to do it right. Admin would really need to get behind it and support us. But they know how much we need to do and I don’t think it would ever really happen. But I’d be all about it. Also, I wish I could have spent more time evaluating the candidates and the issues with my students. Really learning about these candidates and issues is part of a true mock election, so if I had the time we would have done way more. I
did cover it in my class with my students, but they just have so many questions and are interested in it. We started to spend so much time on it but I unfortunately had to pull back. I think we could build on it. That would be how I would change things for my students. We need to make it as real as possible for our students.

Like Kelly, Olivia was undoubtedly dismayed that she had to constantly attend to what she thought was best for her students to meet the needs of the EOCA, rather than what she thought was best for them as future citizens.

I also asked Olivia to share how she conducted classroom discussions (as mentioned above, another of the proven practices). Olivia said she felt more “limited” with her classroom discussions, but she still managed to encourage discussion when possible. Olivia reflected:

I think discussions are important. We need to have these conversations. It’s a great way to help my student learn how to have meaningful talk. Sometimes it can get carried on for a long time and we get distracted from what we are supposed to be doing. It’s still important, but we have so much to cover so I definitely have to reign in any discussions we have. I want to answer their questions and allow my students to speak with each other, but it would just go on all day and we will never finish the things that need to get done. I am on a pretty tight schedule, and we just have so little time for everything. Finding that balance can be hard and you hate to quell interest. So that is a concern.

She realized that classroom discussion is a meaningful civic experience for her students, especially insofar as it can generate student inquiry. Lack of discussion, in her view, can harm civic education and the learning environment. She shared a short story about how she had to make a decision about limiting discussion:

Take last week for example. My students really wanted to learn and talk about what was going on with the (Keystone) pipeline situation. I was surprised how familiar they already were, and I could tell they wanted to discuss it more, so I tried to tie it to what we were discussing that day about the government. But they were really into it, and wanted to talk more about it. And it was great, I was so happy to hear them having these thoughts but I just couldn’t help but feel like I had to cut them short. I didn’t want to, but I had to because I couldn’t afford to spend more time. We had
already spent too much time on it, and I have got to at least try and stay on pace.

Olivia said that she would also love to have “more discussions on current events and controversial issues” but that her hands were tied by time constraints. When I asked her if there was anything she would do differently if the EOCA didn’t exist, she immediately responded “more discussion of issues”:

If we had more time, I would try to have them discuss more issues that they are passionate about. Like, if we wanted to talk about police brutality or how the police can victimize people of color. These are things my students want to talk about. And I want to have those conversations with my students. It’s culturally relevant pedagogy. My students are mostly Black, so this is the kind of stuff they want to discuss. But realistically, I can’t do those things right now. I barely have time to keep afloat with all the other things on top of instruction, like we have a formative assessment (the AIMS test), we need to do this, we had some unexpected stuff the other day that came up in class, we’re planning field trips. Grading. It’s hard. We have so much going on. We have meetings every morning, it’s like we never have a morning off. I just have so much on my plate. Nothing is easy. We even have these extensive forms for behavior issues now, it’s just a bigger waste of time. So, on top of all the regular planning and meeting the needs of the curriculum, I have to make sure my timing for the EOC is there. So yeah, having discussions on things not directly related to the tested material is a challenge for me.

Aside from discussion and simulations, Olivia spoke about another of the “Proven Practices”: service-learning. I asked Olivia about the service-learning benchmark (“conduct a service project for the public good”). She responded that of all the untested civics benchmarks, this was one that she did not cover. She first wanted to talk about defining what service-learning actually meant “because so many teachers define it differently based on their own needs for meeting the standard in their classroom.” I explained my interpretation of consensus on the research about service-learning to the best of my knowledge, and she agreed. She then related to me a brief sub-narrative
about other teachers’ interpretations of service-learning that stemmed from the issue of time:

So, I think we all know what service-learning really means. However, it’s taken on a new meaning to meet the needs of the benchmark. During some PD (professional development) when we’re all together in the same room, I’ve talked to other teachers about the standard and they all seem to go the route of community service. And they all seem to be fine with it. Now, I know it’s wrong but I don’t do it either for the same reasons they shared with me. The few teachers I spoke with talked about how they didn’t have the time to undertake a full-on service-learning project, so they or the school requires community service again. I think it’s a poor substitute, but I can tell you I do the same.

Olivia further explained to me how she handled the benchmark with her students:

They do a community service project, but it’s not the same thing. They’re really not doing the same thing of what is meant to be required by them. So they did like three volunteer hours as part of the first 9 weeks requirement in my class. They have to do some kind of community service. My students got to choose what community service they could do. At first a lot of them bemoaned it, but I thought it was important to tie that in since we weren’t doing a full-on project.

Like Kelly, she would have liked to incorporate service projects, perceiving them as “valuable and powerful” experiences, she added the following about trying to do service-learning activities with her students:

Time is my biggest impediment. There’s just so much we are expected to do. I wish we could break down the course and just take a lot of the tedious, or some of the detailed stuff out that really the kids aren’t going to connect with and have bigger, broader picture stuff like service-learning projects. That would just be awesome, and I would love to do that with my students. But just finding time do everything and cover everything is already a lot of pressure.

I next asked Olivia a question about extracurricular commitments at her school.

She indicated to me that the school had a fair amount of offerings for students.

However, she also spoke to me about the lop-sided nature of extracurricular participation at Hurston Middle School:
I would say most of the students who do extracurricular outside of sports are in the advanced program (the gifted magnet program) of the school. We have a naturally segregated school here, and this stuff happens. But I think part of the reason is many of us have many struggles with our students. Some of our students don't have dinner on a regular basis, they have troubled home lives. So on top of tending to all the other stuff, many of us (the teachers) are overwhelmed with EOCs and tests and all these other things that are expected. So there are definitely less of us sponsoring programs. But it is important for students, especially ours, to have other stuff going on after school. Our teachers are committed, they just don't have the time. But I will say for myself, I have a lot on my plate. I have students all the time asking me to sponsor something new. But I can't. I wasn’t sure I’d make it through last year. It was just a tough year for me with everything. But on top of it all, I have other roles to play. I need to be a mom and I am going to be there for my family.

Stories of struggle with extracurricular activities are illuminating as they relate to civic education. Normally one might hope to see civics teachers encouraging and modeling these activities, it is clear with Olivia that teaching civics and preparing for the EOCA has not only drained her time in school, but her personal life as well. Extracurricular club sponsorship is out of the question.

Our conversation shifted to CCMS’s recommendation of instruction in economics and geography for highly effective civic education. Olivia had some strong feelings about the economics benchmarks and asserted:

I think there’s too much. And in the economics part, if we could just take that out altogether. We really need to get rid of it. It’s not tested, it’s difficult, and it just takes way too much time. I mean, why are you trying to do this? You’re trying to cram too much stuff in by requiring economics. I remember the first time I looked at economics. I looked at the vocabulary and immediately laughed. I thought to myself, “This is stuff you’re gonna learn in high school. I was just thrown for a loop. I couldn’t believe they included that stuff. But we did it. And I continue to cover it, but I really don’t emphasize it. We maybe spend a few days, but not really much. My students struggled with it. It’s just way over their heads right now. The looks on their faces were just completely lost. They weren’t ready, and I know it’s the same for my subsequent students. It’s not on the test, and it’s a bit unrealistic so we spend our time on other things they’re going to be tested on.
Like Kelly, Olivia elected to not focus on economics content with her students, believing her time could best be spent on EOCA testing content. She looked to her students for the meaning of content relevance in economics, and briefly mentioned how her first experience with teaching 7th grade economics benchmarks did not bode well for her students. Her negative experience reinforced her view on the inappropriate nature of economics in the curriculum.

In addition to economics, geography benchmarks are also included in the 7th grade social studies standards. When I spoke to Olivia about the geography benchmarks, she said that she tried to teach as much geography as possible at the end of the year, after the EOCA administration. Even though it was not tested, Olivia believed it was important and felt badly that geography had been reduced to “a short two-week unit” covering a variety of material. Nonetheless, she felt it was better that her students learn some geography rather than nothing. She said:

I’d spend more time on geography throughout the year if I could, because I think that’s how it could be done best. But I don’t have that luxury on account of time. And it’s truly unfortunate because my geography students loved learning in that class. I used to do such fun things, and my students really loved learning about all the cultural and human impacts of geography. I still think students should get it, but now it’s not even offered to them in their schooling.

Olivia still had strong feelings about her experiences as a geography teacher for ten years, and she missed it a great deal, pointing out the unintended consequences of substituting civics for geography in the 7th grade. As she stated, “Where are they going to get geography now?”

**Olivia – Time for EOCA practice**

Although the EOCA unquestionably affected the coverage of content and implementation of classroom practices, it also consumed more of Olivia’s classroom
time, like Kelly’s, with practice questions. Olivia talked to me about preparing for the EOCA and indicated that it was a “constant process” in her classroom. She provided a brief sub-narrative concerning time and EOCA practice:

As I mentioned before, the reading of the test is tough for my students. So, I have to go over these types of questions with them throughout the year. Whenever I can manage, I try to make sure we do a few questions together like the ones on the test. Like today we did some practice EOC questions, and I could see how hard it is for them. The wording is tough, and I could see them struggle. Especially on the questions I had with a primary source, like the Magna Carta language. Crazy. That’s a completely foreign language to my students. But that’s the type of questions that are on the test, so I have to take the time to prepare them. I don’t love doing it, and I know they don’t like it either.

Olivia made a concerted effort to help her students practice for the test. She explained to me again that she believed the test was inherently flawed because of the reading level, and she was very emotional in describing how her students struggled with it and how she empathized with their struggle. She admitted that she lacked enthusiasm for the test item practice but viewed it as a necessary evil, as did Kelly.

Olivia also mentioned her use of a daily civics question to serve as a warm-up activity for her students. She explained that she did this because it helped her “stay on track” and helped her students practice with familiar EOCA questions on a regular basis. She believed it was worth “a few minutes every day” to help her students go over questions that would challenge them in terms of content and reading level. She explained further that she “wouldn’t want to do tons of practice questions every day. But I know they need the practice so we do at least one a day. I make the time. It’s at least efficient.” To make sure I fully grasped just how much time the EOCA practice took in her already tight schedule, she gave this example:

So, every year I spend about three weeks before the test just for review. And basically, they’ll give you a list of vocab words. Together, we’ll create
flash cards, and I’ll give them quizzes on their flash card vocabulary. There’s a lot to review, so that’s why we take the time. So, again, there are some basic content words that they need to be familiar with. We do practice tests. So yes, they do practice tests and they do a review of the vocabulary. It’s really an intense review for the students. I’d rather be doing more valuable, actual civics stuff with them but my hands are tied. And they need the review. It’s not an easy test. So that’s why I take a lot of time. I know other teachers don’t take that much time to review but I have to because my students need as much time as possible.

Sandra

Sandra – Decisions about time for coverage of content – Because of my situation, it’s not as hard for me as it could be”

Of all three civic educators, Sandra seemed to handle the challenges of the EOCA with the least bit of anxiety and stress. There is no doubt that Sandra’s 30+ years of experience has helped her to deal with constantly changing issues and obstacles. She told me how she had “seen it all” and spoke to the cyclical nature of education. She explained that she tried to “teach the benchmarks, not the test” and to keep using many of the same “active learning” practices she used prior to the EOCA mandate. Generally, she felt “good teaching is just good teaching” and she believed in the importance of committing to her in-depth knowledge of “best practices” in her classroom. Sandra described her instructional context this way:

Listen, I know how blessed I am with these kids. I really don’t have the worries that other teachers typically have. And I would probably feel different if I was in a worse situation in terms of ability, but I like to think I would still make sure I’d be still doing some of the same stuff. But I could see how timing would be more of an issue. I get it. My friend who teaches lower-level kids tells me all the time how pressed for time she is. So for me, I’m lucky because many times I can just hit something once and move on. But for people like my friend they might have to teach more and more of the material. They can get stuck in a remedial loop, but they have to do it for their kids. I can move on, and know my kids are going to be okay. It takes me way less time to talk about some of this stuff, so I obviously have more time to do some of the more fun activities with my kids. My kids are high achievers, and that comes with its own challenges. But testing itself really isn’t one of them. All my kids pass the EOC.
However, because of the civics course and EOCA, she shared that she was more stressed out than she had ever been because of the pacing of the course. And although she taught gifted students, she was not immune to the effects of the time commitment that the content and test required. Sandra believed her teaching practices remained essentially the same, but may have diminished in certain ways. As I perused Sandra’s lesson plans, it was clear that she did many types of learning activities with her 7th graders. But although Sandra felt her teaching practices generally remained the same, she believed she had less flexibility in her schedule for coverage of content. She explained that the lack of flexibility prevented her from “going deeper” with as much of the material as she had hoped. She explained:

I have to get them to understand a lot of things in the quickest but most engaging way possible. That can be a struggle with the lack of time and flexibility. But I make it work as best as I can. Going deep is important, because it can help push my students’ thinking. And that can mean doing some things that are going to take more time, like an investigative research project or something like that. So I always try to do as much of that as I can, but again there’s only so much I can do. If I could manage the time, I’d have more student-led projects.

Depth of content was an important part of Sandra’s teaching philosophy, especially because of her students’ advanced abilities. When I asked Sandra to share with me an example of changes to her flexibility, she shared a lesson she did with her students during the “practice EOCA” (field test) year. Sandra felt she had more flexibility because the test “didn’t count” that year, so she could cover more things she thought the students should be exposed to in her class. For example, she thought it was important to cover juvenile law:

I still cover it [juvenile law] some, but not as much as I’d like, but juvenile law is important. It ties to the benchmarks on law, but I like to make it important to my students because this is the kind of stuff that directly affects them. That first year, I covered the juvenile justice system in way
more detail. It’s not tested, but it’s important for them to learn. But we’d go over these cases specifically of juvenile delinquency. These were actual court cases of things that happened. And sometimes they are out of the ordinary and the kids said, “Oh, that didn’t really happen.” And I’d say, “Yeah, it did.” And they were just sitting there with their mouths open. But I wanted them to understand this is actually something that did happen and I still want them to. The students told me how fascinated they were with it, and felt they really learned something useful. But we don’t cover it like we used to, and I’m sure some of it gets lost along the way. This year we’re doing a play about (the Supreme Court case) In re Gault, and you bet I’d spend more time on it if I could. It’s just upsetting because they need to really grasp this stuff and we could do more with it.

Sandra also focused on the issue of lack of depth because time constraints caused her students to perform worse on specific civics subjects. She felt if she could go “as deep as I do with some of the other stuff,” her students would have a better grasp on the more challenging material. Sandra provided this in-class example:

Enumerated and reserved powers are tough for my kids. It’s always a struggle, and I’m a bit to blame. They aren’t ever a huge portion of the EOCA, but they still need to understand because it’s an important concept. It’s weird. And admittedly I have to pick and choose what to spend more time on and what to go deeper with. It’s important, but it’s not like knowing the Bill of Rights. But every year they struggle with it. Last year my students did not enjoy learning too much about it, and I think it’s because they were just confused. They looked at me like I had a third eye growing out of my head. They asked so many questions like they always do, and I felt bad that we couldn’t stay on it longer. I really never spend too much time on it, because it’s barely tested and we have other stuff we need to cover so it gets lost a bit along the way. But I have choices to make because we don’t have all the time in the world. We have a lot to cover, and there is work to be done. I would certainly like to cover this more, but it isn’t realistic.

Sandra’s situation illustrates that teachers’ individual choices about what should be covered more and what could be covered less – depending on their students’ needs – is an important issue, despite what the item specifications of the EOCA say. Her concerns with the lack of time stem from her philosophy on teaching for inquiry and in-
depth, conceptual learning. But the nature of the current civics standards hampered
Sandra’s desire for richer pedagogical inquiry into all civics content.

Sandra also said that she determined how much time she spent on a civics
content area based on student performance. She recalled her planning for and use of
student scores:

I will see the scores of the EOC. I will get those scores in June. I will figure
out what I need to change to fix those things to make my instruction more
effective for next year. I will focus more on those areas of weakness and
be sure to give myself more time to cover those concepts.

When I asked her for an example, she reflected on her evaluation of the previous year’s
scores:

Last year I spent a lot of time looking at my scores. My students generally
did great. They always do great. But I found they really struggled with
some of the history. The Articles (of Confederation) and Enlightenment
and all that. So as I was reading over it I thought, “Shucks, I thought we
had that” but I realized I had to go back over it. And we did. We spent
more time on that, and I tried to come up with some new approaches. I
created more lessons for them to work on.

I asked how she made up for the time adjustments, and she said, “I didn’t.” She
explained that she had to cut time from other activities and that “this usually comes
more from the experiential learning benchmarks” that are not tested. She did this more
and more as the pacing for the test became more hectic.

In addition to changes in practices that focused on more in-depth learning,
Sandra told me that the EOCA dictated some of the decisions she made about
curriculum coverage in certain areas. In past years, she would often cover benchmarks
based on student interest. With the advent of the EOCA, Sandra found that she was
aligning her instruction more with content weight. She explained:

I would say I spend the bulk of my time on teaching the kids about the
structure and functions of government. The primary content in this course
is on the government. So, for example, we have been spending a great deal of time on the three branches of government. There’s so much to cover, and it takes up a good bit of my time. We just finished the legislative, and I started Monday talking about the laws and judicial branch. It was a good lesson, and I think the kids were interested. I’m not as excited to begin it, and it is an important part of the curriculum but it takes a great deal of time. If I had my druthers, I would cover other things with the students, things that are more immediately important to them. Again though, time. This law and judicial branch material are a huge part of the test, so we need to learn it.

As with Olivia and Kelly, Sandra and I discussed the civics benchmarks that were not tested, and she spoke frankly about her handling of each. Sandra said she attended to all but one of the five “untesteds,” but expressed her regrets about her instruction of some of them:

Any of those standards on the duties and responsibilities of citizens. One of the things I’ve done in the past is a unit on tying it to leadership. So, since the students are leaders of the school, I have them try to experience different activities for the school and get them to understand you have an obligation to be active when you’re in a position of leadership. I even tie mock voting into it, trying to get them to understand they have to participate in these type of things as an adult. They went to the labs this year in their social studies and voted. The students liked voting, and they got to firsthand experience a duty of citizenship at their school. It’s their duty to vote. It’s at the school level, but that’s where you can get them. And so I focus on how they can be better leaders, make better decisions for the community, and get more involved at the community level. It takes time, and I would do more with it if I actually could. But addressing the more experience-based benchmarks is a challenge for me, because the timing of everything is nutty. I tend to them as much as I can, but I know I could do more if given more time. And these kids are going to be leaders, so this is something we should be investing our time in.

Sandra mentioned time and again how important she felt these types of experiential activities were for her students, and recalled a recent classroom mock Congress for me in the following sub-narrative:

My second period really went away with it. The House of Representatives are the chattiest because the actual Speaker of the House talks the most and gets everyone all riled up. So the Senate’s sitting over there with no bills because they’ve passed all of theirs and they’re waiting over here and
I said, “That’s the process sometimes.” But the students do it all, they decided if they wanted to kill bills on school and tax reform—really! It’s crazy. And they love it, and they get so much more out of this than a textbook. And that’s why I do it. It would be fun to have a whole course dedicated to this kind of stuff, because I definitely don’t get to everything I want to.

I also inquired about discussion, another of the six proven practices, and Sandra explained to me how she incorporated discussion as a practice in her classroom on a regular basis. Her students were required to discuss a variety of concepts related to the benchmarks, and her notes in her lesson plans indicated a significant allotment of time for discussion in her classes. She stated that she tried to connect discussion to current events and to the appropriate civics benchmarks. She recalled a recent class discussion:

We were actually having a really good time and laughing a lot today as we discussed Trump. You know, the whole hacking thing with (Vladimir) Putin and (Donald) Trump? But I always try to bring stuff like that up and connect it, and it made sense because we were talking about voting and all that. But the kids were just appalled by that man’s behavior, and then we started talking about expectations of the president and how candidates behave and all that good stuff. We were having a good old time, but I had to cut it short. I really could let them go on all day, but we have lots to do. As I have mentioned, we’re on a tight schedule.

I asked Sandra to elaborate, and she spoke again about “the damn pacing guide” and her limited time. She refused to let it “dictate everything,” but she was also aware that “teachable moments” – as in the example of the Trump and Putin news – were harder to take advantage of than they used to be because of the time factor.

Like Kelly and Olivia, Sandra discussed the impact of limited time for service-learning. Sandra talked extensively about its importance, and reiterated how it could “help my kids, because they are some of the leaders of the school and they need to participate in that kind of stuff.” She explained that the closest she came to addressing
the service-learning benchmark was to require community service of her students, She stated:

They’re getting used to doing their community service, and I started doing community service when we started civics. Because I know that eventually they were gonna have to do community service in high school. But it’s also important that they see the value of it as an obligation of good citizenship. A lot of the kids, well they complain about it. They complain. They say, “I don’t want to do it” and I tell them too bad.

When I asked her if she felt it was a good substitute for students doing a service project as the benchmark stated, she exclaimed, “Absolutely not. But we just don’t have the time. I can’t do something like that and meet all the benchmarks and have my students pass the EOC. It’s just not possible, so we skip that benchmark altogether and leave it to community service hours that they do after school.” When I pressed Sandra further about her desire to incorporate service-learning projects, she provided me with this sub-narrative:

Service-learning is something I would love to do. I’ve been to several conferences and they have these great workshops. I’ve peeked my head into a few of them and they are just doing the most amazing things. There was this teacher from Illinois who was talking about initiatives for the environment, and I thought that was just great. I would love to do something like that with my kids. I even told her how awesome I thought it was. She encouraged me to do it with my students, and I told her my situation and she was disappointed but she understood.

Her experience demonstrated how she had to rationalize her lack of service-learning in the classroom, despite her willingness to try it with her students. Sandra continued:

If I could chuck some of the standards and make more room for service-learning I would do that. Because I was asked recently about Project Citizen (a nationally-recognized service-learning curriculum from the Center for Civic Education) and some other service opportunities, but we don’t have the time. And I hate having to shy away from all that great stuff. The kids would get so much out of it!
Sandra concluded our discussion on service-learning by expressing her belief that “we’ll never get to it so long as we have to cover all those benchmarks for the EOC. And service will continue to be sacrificed. I hate to say it, but it’s the truth.”

On the other hand, Sandra felt ecstatic about skipping the economics benchmarks:

There is no way on God’s green earth I am teaching economics. Why? First, we don’t have the time and it really belongs in another course. It’s a lot, and I have enough on my plate with all of those standards tied to the pacing guide. We also don’t have a fourth AIMS test because of the EOC, so I don’t worry about it being tested at all. Every year I consider going over it at the end of the course, but even then I don’t think we have enough time to do it justice.

When I asked her if she would ever cover economics, she told me “honestly, no.” She felt that the time it would take to cover difficult, complex economics concepts with 7th graders would be impossible to negotiate.

**Sandra – Time for EOCA practice – “I include it as much as I can”**

When I asked Sandra how she felt the EOCA impacted her daily instruction, aside from content coverage, she said that she gave her students “one or two daily civics questions” to answer. Kelly and Olivia had mentioned doing the same with their students. I asked Sandra if this practice was required by the district; she said it was not. She explained her approach:

So first I look at the bank of questions from the FJCC. They have questions that are tailored to the EOC. They’re much closer to those questions than those on the stupid AIMS test. And then I choose questions based on what we are currently covering. So today I chose one on rights, it was on the Bill of Rights. It had a primary source and all that. So my students came in, sat down, and they know what to do at that point. They answered the question on their own, and then we discussed it together. It’s good practice for them, and this way they’re familiar with the questions on a consistent basis.
Sandra felt her daily civics question served as a major component of the ongoing review process in her classroom. She also said she felt that the daily civics questions helped build up her “kids’ confidence” about their performance on the EOCA.

I asked her if she would start class the same way without an EOCA. She told me she would not, but under current circumstances she believed it was necessary and should be done in a “timely manner.” She said without the test, she might still do a daily civics question, but it would be “more relatable” to the students, would get them thinking more critically, and could be the starting point of an inquiry activity. However, her perceptions of what the students needed for the EOCA, like Kelly and Olivia, continued to take precedence.

**Concluding Remarks**

My interviews with each civics teacher yielded the overarching narrative themes of *defining civic education, conflict, and negotiations of time* as the teachers constructed meaning and made sense of their experiences. Their sense making experiences varied in focus and scope, but I noted that the teachers dealt with many of the same issues and challenges despite their different contexts, backgrounds, and classroom practices. They had to make many of the same decisions about their instructional practices and test preparation despite the different student populations they taught. In the next and final chapter, I explore each teacher’s story in relation to the CCMS’s “proven practices”.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I return to my two research questions: How do civics instructors make sense of teaching civics under the pressures of high stakes standardized testing? How does a high stakes test impact civics educators’ instructional choices in their classrooms? In searching for answers to these questions from my participants, I used narrative analysis to extrapolate three themes – making sense of the meaning of civic education, making sense of various kinds of conflict, and making sense of time issues as they made choices about instructional practices.

As I explored these themes, I also found that the proven practices informed my analysis – my own sense making – of the teachers’ practices. Below, I attempt to merge the themes with the proven practices. My study is not meant to judge or criticize the teachers’ practices, or to hold them accountable to the proven practices. The participants seemed very well-versed in what can be considered “best practices” for civic education, and in many cases the practices of the teachers indeed overlapped with the proven practices. Despite the challenges of the Civics EOCA, areas of alignment between the practices of these three civic educators and the proven practices emerged. All three teachers talked about what they felt they could and did do in their civics teaching, in light of the EOCA looming over their heads. They were also quite forthcoming about what they believed they would not or could not do because of the EOCA. Let us consider each of these overlapping elements and how they have played out in these teachers’ classrooms.
Sense Making and Instructional Choices: Content Instruction

Civic learning cannot begin without a grounding in content knowledge instruction in civics, government, history, law, geography, and economics (CCMS, 2011; NCSS, 2010; Swan, Barton, Buckles, Charkins, Grant, & Weisner-Hanks, 2013). In the Guidebook: Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning (2014), Florida’s civics legislation is used as a state policy exemplar for its benchmarks for civics content. (Guifoile & Delander, 2014). The standards and benchmarks for middle school civics in Florida also ambitiously includes instruction in two other subject areas – economics and geography – but these are not tested.

Due to the nature of the civics course and the interpretations of the standards and benchmarks, each teacher felt the course was primarily based on and prioritized civics content knowledge. Every teacher I worked with spoke about the sheer volume and depth of the benchmarks they were expected to cover over the course of the year. All three teachers reiterated the immense commitment of time and energy – both in planning and in instruction – needed to teach many abstract civics concepts and challenging topics in the benchmarks to their students. For example, they felt that they needed to be able to teach about law as a subset of teaching the judicial branch (e.g., the meaning of ‘rule of law’ and the differences among various types of law). They also found that federalism and the 10th Amendment, enumerated/expressed/delegated powers, landmark Supreme Court decisions, and all benchmarks related to foreign affairs contained very difficult material for them to teach and for their students to understand.

Additionally, the teachers had to incorporate historical content knowledge into their civics classrooms. Much of the first nine weeks of the school year focused on
foundations of government, and the teachers dove into historical concepts and events from Enlightenment philosophy to the writing of the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution. The teachers expressed deep concerns over the amount of history content in the civics curriculum and believed that a good deal of it was more appropriate for 8th grade U.S. history.

The proven practices recommend that instruction in social studies content areas must be rigorous and high quality, active and conceptual. Although Sandra and Olivia shared more classroom narratives that were aligned with the proven practices, Kelly also recalled some episodes of effective instruction that was active and rigorous. However, she was more reticent and seemed to still be in “survival mode” as a first-year teacher with an intense agenda.

All three teachers elected to eliminate economics instruction and to limit geography instruction, because these were untested 7th grade benchmarks. It is also worth noting that the teachers believed some of the benchmarks were inappropriate for the students and ought to be revised or eliminated. For example, they expressed great frustration about the benchmark that required students to compare forms of government (“Shouldn’t we just focus on our own government and let them get the hang of that first!?”).

All of the teachers clearly stated that their instruction suffered to some degree because of the EOCA. They categorized the untested, experiential civics benchmarks as the most valuable to their students’ civic learning, but they knew that these were not “content” in the traditional sense, would not be on the test, and were too time-consuming. Sandra was able to navigate the demands of the assessment relatively
easily without having to radically adjust her instructional practices but recognized that her students’ “gifted” status played a significant role in her – and their – success. She longed for the days when she taught geography, there was no standardized test, and she could do project-based and experiential learning activities from which she believed her students learned a great deal. She missed being able to go into more depth with the content so that it would be more meaningful for her students.

Olivia expressed the same views, but her feelings of being constrained by the EOCA were much more intense. She felt that she had to drastically change her instructional choices to accommodate the test in order for her students to succeed. It was clear that, while she believed that she was an effective teacher, she did not believe in some of her instructional practices (for example, more direct instruction). She, too, missed teaching geography; she believed her classes to be far more engaging, fun, and meaningful.

Finally, Kelly had had a successful internship experience at her school and could rely on what she learned from it. Yet as a novice teacher, she had difficulty reconciling the demands of the test with exemplary civics instruction. Kelly openly acknowledged that some of her instructional choices (direct instruction, note-taking, worksheets, etc.) ran counterintuitive to her own beliefs, but she believed that these practices allowed her to cover a broader range of material with her students.

**Sense-Making and Instructional Choices: Class Discussion**

The proven practices also recommend the use of discussion in the classroom to enhance civic learning. Discussion can serve as a powerful pedagogical tool, especially when focused on current events and controversial issues (Hahn, 2001; Hess 2004; Hess 2008; Hess; 2009; Nystrand et al., 1998; Parker, 2008; Parker & Hess, 2010). The
implementation of discussion can vary in practice depending on the class and the content, but it is heralded as an essential component of social studies education. Without question, each of the teachers believed in the power and value of discussion in the cultivation of future citizens.

Each teacher spoke about some type of discussion occurring in their classroom. Their discussions ranged in depth and length, but they all engaged their students in some form of structured dialogue as part of their lessons. Sandra spoke at length about discussion; she seemed to engage in it to a greater extent than Olivia and Kelly, especially when it came to current events. Her current events discussions usually occurred at the beginning of class, touching on topics of importance that she could sometimes relate to the benchmarks she was teaching. Sandra believed her students thrived in discussions, and she tried to offer opportunities for them as much as possible.

Olivia said she also managed to include discussion of current events from time to time, but to a lesser degree. Olivia’s discussions of current events were usually planned but occasionally spontaneous. Olivia explained that she might incorporate a relevant current events question during notes or direct instruction to engage students. If they had a “real world” example that would illustrate the civics content they were teaching and help students learn a concept better, they said they did not hesitate to use it.

Kelly seemed to use discussions the least. Like Olivia and Sandra, Kelly gauged students’ interest as a means of helping them to understand current events. She differed from the other two in that her discussions were mostly organic, spontaneous, and student-generated. She described them as “minimal but relevant”.
All three teachers expressed a few similarities with regard to discussion. First, all three felt it was potentially helpful with student performance on the Civics EOCA, as long as the content discussed was directly related to the test material. Second, all three teachers also stated that discussion never served as the central component or focus of a lesson, but was more of a supplementary pedagogical choice. Finally, each teacher shared a belief in the importance of discussion for promoting civic learning. They simply wished they had more time for it and expressed regret that discussions did not occur often enough in their classrooms. And with regard to controversial issues, the teachers said they tended to stay away from them because there was not enough time for the structured types of discussions these issues required.

**Sense Making and Instructional Choices: Simulations of Democratic Processes**

Learning experiences such as mock trials, mock elections, mock Congress, and Model United Nations can help develop both civic knowledge and political interest (CCMS, 2011; Deitz & Boekelman, 2012; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Lo, 2015; Miller & Singleton, 1997; Parker & Lo, 2016; Pautz, 2011, Torney-Purta, 2002). The use of classroom simulations is also highly encouraged not only for civic learning experiences but for developing skills like collaboration and critical thinking (CCMS, 2011; Dorn, 1989; Kolb, 1984; Frederking, 2005; Lenhart, Kahne, Middaugh, Macgill, Evans, & Vitak, 2010). Moreover, technology has changed the landscape of democratic simulations, in that students now have more options for interactivity and participation on entirely different platforms. Technological simulations offer many of the same civic benefits of traditional simulations, and have the potential of piquing the interest of students who may be less engaged (Bagley & Shaffer, 2011; Lenhart et al., 2010;
Shaffer, 2006; Torney-Purta, 1992). Each of my research participants employed some type of democratic simulation in their classroom.

Kelly’s simulations were more limited in nature, despite her belief in their potential benefits. Her favorite simulations were from the website iCivics (icivics.org), and she allowed her students to play games throughout the semester. She found the online simulations to be helpful to her students, and she tried to use the games to reinforce content knowledge when appropriate because some of the games were specifically linked on the site to Florida civics benchmarks. She found that iCivics was more than just “playing games,” it required students to think critically and directly experience various democratic processes in all three branches of government, the Bill of Rights, and the rule of law. In fact, CCMS (2011) cites the website as a prime example of offering meaningful, democratic simulations for students.

Sandra and Olivia both offered their students more simulations, such as mock trials, mock elections, and a mock Congress. They believed strongly in the importance of simulations in the classroom but also lamented the lack of time to incorporate more simulations into their instruction. Technology was an issue as well because their access to equipment was limited. That being said, Sandra and Olivia stated that each of the simulations they employed required students to cooperate with others, problem solve, think critically about a range of issues, and develop their own opinions. Like Kelly, Olivia used the iCivics simulations. Out of personal choice, Sandra did not use the iCivics games or any other technological simulations with her classes. Finally, Kelly elected not to conduct a mock trial or Congress, and with the rest of her colleagues at her school did not conduct a mock election for her students.
Sense-Making and Instructional Choices: Service-Learning

CCMS’s *Guardian of Democracy* report (2011) also calls for students to have experiential learning opportunities in their communities. Service-learning is widely hailed as a transformative, integral component of civic learning with the potential to enhance students’ civic engagement as adults (Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005; Mann, Dymond, Bonati, and Neeper, 2013; Saltmarsh, 2011; Wade, 2008; Wade & Yarbrough, 2007). A benchmark in the Florida civics curriculum requires students to conduct a service project, and is even cited as a state policy exemplar by the Education Commission of the States (2013). As mentioned before, however, this benchmark is not tested.

Despite the benchmark, none of the teachers shared classroom narratives about the implementation of service-learning. All three mentioned aspects of community service, but also recognized the inherent difference between the two. All three also expressed their interest in and desire to incorporate service-learning, but explained that this untested benchmark, perhaps more than any of the others, was simply not viable because of the pacing demands for the EOCA. The teachers also told me that they did not know of a single teacher in the district who was implementing service-learning projects in their classrooms.

Olivia was the most disappointed and frustrated by the lack of service-learning in her classroom, and felt her students would deeply benefit from the experience. She was the only one who considered trying to “fit it in” for her future students, but also worried that it would be a futile, unrealistic exercise as long as she was teaching civics. She recognized the irony of the EOCA’s unintended consequences of creating a benchmark that could not be addressed in such a restrictive climate without the time, training, and
resources to properly conduct service-learning opportunities that would engage her students.

**Sense-Making and Instructional Choices: Student Governance and Extracurricular Activities**

Since student governance and extracurricular activities occur outside of the traditional school schedule and are not civics pedagogical methods, I did not consider them to be a primary focus of this study. However, since they are two of the CCMS's proven practices, I did refer to them in the interviews. Opportunities for student governance are prime examples of the applicability of civic skills in real-life contexts. Student governance can actively engage students while potentially increasing their capacity for future civic engagement (Barber, 2003; Dobozy, 2007; McIntosh, Berman & Youniss, 2010; Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989).

Unfortunately, all three teachers taught in schools that lacked a student council or some form of student government. Kelly and Olivia were mystified by its absence. Although Sandra had sponsored the Hurston Middle School student council for a time, she had a very negative experience that caused her to “swear off” ever doing it again. In fact, none of the teachers said that they wanted to sponsor this activity.

Each teacher also discussed extracurricular activities offered in their schools. The proven practices stress the importance of a vibrant extracurricular culture to quality civic learning. Extracurricular activities have long been hailed as positive experiences that can help students grow as citizens (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Niemi & Junn 1998; Putnam 2000; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001; Ziblatt, 1965). Each participant in this study said that their schools provided their students with ample opportunities for extracurricular involvement. However, they also stated that the
extracurricular activities the schools offered were unrelated to civic experiences, such as a debate team or model U.N.

More telling was the teachers’ lack of involvement in sponsoring extracurricular activities at their school. As a first-year teacher trying to keep her head above water, Kelly explained she already felt overwhelmed at school and would not be able to handle an added responsibility. Although Olivia felt more skilled in the area of time management, she also mentioned limitations on her time as a reason not to take on such a responsibility. Sandra’s lack of interest in sponsoring an extracurricular activity was connected to her past negative experience with student council. Again, these teachers found it ironic that the demands of the test disconnected them from extracurricular activities that held potential civic benefits.

Where Do We Go from Here?

So what is to be done to make the most of a renewed focus on civic education? Standardized assessment within civics tends to focus more on memorization of civic knowledge (Godsay, Henderson, Levine, & Littenberg-Tobias, 2012; CCMS, 2011; CIRCLE, 2014). Yet research suggests that standardized tests are not accurate measures for civic competencies such as civic skills and dispositions (Education Commission of the States, 2013; CCMS, 2011; CCMS/CIRCLE 2011). Many other states (e.g., Texas, Alaska, and Alabama) are currently grappling with the idea of using the Naturalization Test as their measure of student achievement in civics. Meanwhile, Florida’s EOCA is the only one of its kind in the U.S. as a measure of students’ civic knowledge.

Civic knowledge is important; however, the type of civic knowledge students are learning is key. Whether students are expected to simply memorize and regurgitate
facts, as they do on the Naturalization Test, or to answer multiple-choice questions that are complex and difficult as they do on the EOCA, students are not being taught how to engage and participate in civic culture with their knowledge. Civic knowledge without civic skills and dispositions creates an incomplete citizen (CCMS, 2011).

Learning civics in a high stakes testing environment is teaching students the same lessons they learn in math, English/language arts, and science: the importance of testable content and the insignificance of other types of knowledge and understanding. Additionally, when teachers feel compelled to concentrate only on the tested standards and benchmarks, they may have to limit their pedagogical strategies to what is most useful for the test (Saye, 2013), however reluctantly they may do so. High-stakes standardized testing environments like Florida do not promote a “broad version of civic learning that encompasses...proven practices as inputs and three main categories of outcomes: knowledge, skills, dispositions”, but rather have the potential to narrow the curriculum and weaken the quality of civic education (CCMS, 2011, p. 34).

Perhaps one of the strongest drawbacks to standardized testing in civics is its narrowing of the curriculum. Narrowing of the curriculum is nothing new to the field of education. It has become a rampant problem throughout the country in multiple subjects. For the social studies classroom, narrowing of the curriculum essentially reduces the quality and range of active, inquiry-based learning (Au, 2009; McNeill, 2000; Segall, 2003). In Florida, for example, the EOCA assesses specific standards and benchmarks, but not all are treated equally (Florida Department of Education, 2012). Of the 40 civics benchmarks for middle school, five are not tested. Predictably, the more experiential standards (e.g., conducting a service project to benefit the community,
conducting a mock election and a mock trial) are the ones that are not directly assessed, which has the dual effect of making the benchmark seem both insignificant and a waste of valuable time. Teachers may often find that because they are teaching for a test, they are in the position of making difficult decisions about these other untested but essential benchmarks. As the teachers in this study illustrate, the experiential benchmarks are usually the ones that they believe promote more engaging civic education.

Other Issues and Considerations

Additional Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Since Florida is in the unique position of being one of the only states requiring civic instruction in middle school and the only state with a high stakes test attached to the standards, there are several avenues for further investigation. First, larger scale studies seeking to understand the implementation of the benchmarks can provide insight into the instructional efficacy of the curriculum. The Civics EOCA only provides quantitative feedback, based on questions developed by the state and not the teachers. Where are the areas of misunderstanding and why? How do civic educators generally interpret the standards? More importantly, how do educators interpret the purpose of the course? The civics course has been developed and implemented for seven years now, yet the collected data is mostly student test scores. And what of the test scores? What are we trying to achieve in assessing student civic knowledge?

According to Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools (2011) there is currently limited research on the ineffectiveness of standardized tests for measuring civic learning. Additional studies considering the efficacy of high stakes testing as a measurement of civic learning should be undertaken to strengthen the case against
high stakes testing and illuminate the perilous pitfalls of policy. The *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools* also mentions the use of alternative forms of assessment in other states, comparison studies could be of particular use in determining the most appropriate form of civic evaluation.

Longitudinal studies could also potentially reveal invaluable insights into the development of teacher’s conceptions of citizenship. Such studies could demonstrate how teachers make sense of citizenship from year to year, based on different educational contexts. Understanding adjustments in belief and practice over a longer period of time could illustrate the growth or stagnation of conceptions in citizenship. Kelly’s situation as a first-year teacher is particularly compelling to me, and I cannot help but wonder how she will manage after her first-year of teaching and the subsequent years to come. Unfortunately, Kelly also admitted to me her desire to leave education after just one year of teaching. We have entered a halcyon era of teacher shortage, are accountability measures not only potentially changing teacher practice but forcing out those most adept at teaching our children? We would do well to consider such possibilities.

**More Research on the Proven Practices**

Although the six proven practices have been widely adopted and supported, there is always room for improvement and further investigation. What do they look like in practice at the elementary and middle grade levels? Part of this gap in research can be explained by civics not being emphasized or required at the middle school level or elementary level in most states. More research steeped in these best practices of the PK-8 grades can further the argument for high quality civic education at all levels of education, thus potentially improving the overall quality and quantity of civic research.
Such research has the potential to influence states’ educational policies related to civic education.

**Simulations Research Needed**

Of the six proven practices recommended by the research, two of the practices call for more immediate, deeper research. First, the best practice of simulations and games has room for improvement. The largest problem facing simulation and game research is its ambiguity in its definition. Wright-Maley (2015a) has sought to create a better understanding of the definition of a simulation, but confusion continues to persist. Teachers, students, and researchers need a more comprehensive understanding of the components that deem something worthy of the label “simulation.” Some games could be considered a subset of simulations (Tobias and Fletcher 2012), and are also of value as a promising practice. Although it has been well documented traditional simulations have the potential for strong impact on civic learning, alternative simulation methods require more attention. Although the current research advocates for using technological games and simulations, there is more to be gleaned from their usage in the classroom. Understanding how teachers use technological games and simulations has the potential to shed further light on best practice. Examining factors such as student technological savvy, frequency of use, and duration, and curricular context of the implementation of simulations ought to be given consideration.

Technological games and simulations are continuously being developed and utilized. The beauty of technology is in its potential for diversity among programs. In developing simulations and games with the purpose of enhancing civic development, it would behoove researchers to develop central themes or guidelines to maximize effectiveness in the classroom setting. Research evaluating the most effective types of
technological simulations and games and its contribution to civic learning could prove beneficial to the education community. More specifically, understanding how different types of simulations and games could contribute to civic learning could help focus their use and purpose in the classroom for desired civic outcomes.

**School Governance Research Needed**

The best practice of participation in school governance also needs further research and improvement. The quantity and quality of research on school governance needs improvement. From a methodological standpoint, most of the research in this area stems from surveys or questionnaires. Student governance program evaluations, experiments, and longitudinal case studies could provide further insight into the most effective types of student governance activities. Richer and deeper qualitative measures of student governance have the potential to provide researchers with more information regarding highly effective or ineffective programs. Understanding the school climate, the social contexts of the school governance program, and the quality of participation of adults and students in such activities could potentially narrow the focus of student governance. Mcintosh, Berman, & Youniss (2010) conducted a five-year study on a student governance program related to school wide democratic deliberation. The study yielded positive effects on student community service participation and discussed the importance of adult involvement in developing civic engagement. Stronger, more comprehensive studies such as these should be implemented to support such findings and examine other areas of student governance.

**An Interesting Direction for Research on Civic Education?**

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) contend that creating a specific type of citizen is an inherently political act. A heuristic they developed explains three distinct models of
citizenship: personally responsible citizens, participatory citizens, and justice-oriented citizens. These three types of citizens have different assumptions related to solving civic issues. Personally responsible citizens focus on developing good character and following rules, thereby contributing to societal order and progress. Participatory citizens emphasize involvement in their communities, especially civic institutions, and – most importantly – voting. Critical democratic educators and researchers assert that justice-oriented citizenship is of the highest degree because it best promotes true democracy by focusing on systemic oppression and equity for all (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004; Goodman, Kuzmic, & Wu, 1992). Justice-oriented citizens believe in questioning, debating, and critiquing systems that continually reproduce and maintain injustice. If schools create environments focused on developing a truly educative and transformative civic experience, justice-oriented citizenship can be achieved. The skills and dispositions emphasized in the six proven practices promote this type of citizenship.

Do the instructional choices made by civics teachers have the potential to develop a particular type of citizen? What about their choices when high-stakes testing is involved? A study that uses this heuristic to consider the beliefs and actions of civics teachers, especially with regard to how the teachers view themselves, would be an interesting contribution to the literature.

**Final Comments**

Parker (2008) highlights a significant issue in the field of citizenship/civic education regarding the value of knowing (civic enlightenment) versus doing (civic engagement). Creating active citizens without the appropriate civic knowledge could be quite problematic. However, creating knowledgeable citizens disengaged from active participation could produce equally unfortunate problems.
The situation in Florida is a possible manifestation of this issue. Because of standards and benchmarks designed for a high-stakes test, civic knowledge is emphasized and civic engagement is marginalized. The three teachers in my study navigated the demands of the test by making concessions on civic engagement for the promotion of civic knowledge. Although civic knowledge is important, so is civic engagement. When both are considered, these two equally important dimensions of civic education have the potential to create knowledgeable and active citizens for our society. We must continually reflect and ask ourselves, what is it we want our students to know, and what do we want them to do? We must consider such questions in order to navigate the tricky path of our democratic republic.
1. Background:
Florida now requires civics in all public middle schools, as it is now considered a critical component of the curriculum. As a course coupled with high stakes testing, more time, focus, and resources for civic education has developed. Civics is no longer marginalized as an unessential component of schooling in Florida, which is typical of social studies courses without a linkage to high stakes testing (Soder, 2004). Although civics topics were required in the curricula since 2006, it now receives more time and resources (CCMS/CIRCLE Staff, 2014). Such a high stakes mandate holds districts and schools accountable for supplying civics education (CCMS/CIRCLE Staff, 2010). Simply put, it speaks to the adage in education of “if it’s not tested, it doesn’t matter. As mentioned above, along with new curricular requirement, it was mandated a high stakes test would also be delivered as to ensure accountability measures. The end of course test is created by the state and proctored by the teachers, and is worth thirty percent of the student’s final grade in the civics course (CCMS/CIRCLE Staff, 2014). Creating a civics requirement in the current climate of high stakes accountability has presented some challenges to its development and its teachers, and has also offered some serious questions for consideration related to the future of civic education.

Proponents of civic testing in Florida argue such a policy will improve students’ civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. However, as the policy on civic education is still relatively new, there has not been a great deal of research conducted concerning the impact of standardized testing and civic achievement in Florida. However, Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine (2014) found no substantial evidence supporting higher quality instruction in civics education. Lopez, Levin, Dautrich, and Yalof (2009) also found no difference in student outcomes related to civic achievement as based on varying state policies. At the present, there is no research supporting increasing civic achievement by means of a high stakes standardized test.

As teachers are the ones who are actually providing the instruction to our students, it is worthwhile and logical to determine how teachers have come to make sense of implementing civic education under the pressures of a high stakes classroom environment.
2. **Specific Aims:**

Although civic research consistently cites best practices in civic education, the extent to which teachers implement these best practices is unknown. Civic research has continued to rely on, support, and recommend the aforementioned practices regarding civic education. Furthermore, it continues to emphasize the role the teacher plays in the process of civic educator. Since teachers are the ones working with their students and making choices related to civic education, it is important to understand how teachers make sense of their roles as civic educators. Understanding the degrees to which teachers adopt and incorporate the best practices for civic education is of particular interest. However, the research remains scant regarding teachers’ usage of the practices, their interpretation of the practices, or even their beliefs regarding the practices. Even more scant is research regarding understanding of how teachers make sense of civic instruction under the pressures of a high stakes test. How teachers make sense of standards, resources, and accountability measures all contribute to their choices of instruction as civic educators, which is exactly where I’d like my research to explore further.

3. **Research Plan / Study Description:**

Over the course of 4 months, participants will be asked to participate in three separate, semi-structured interviews. For the purpose of transcription, the interviews will be recorded. Each interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Additionally, participants will provide me with access to their lesson plans/notes/outlines for archival data collection.

The study is qualitative operating from a constructivist paradigm. Data will be analyzed using narrative inquiry, searching for thematic narratives presented by the participants. Interviews and archival data will be coded.

4. **Possible Discomforts and Risks:**

No more than minimal risk.

Occasionally, the research participant may feel uncomfortable in the interviews, but participation is voluntary and all data will be coded and anonymity assured. There are no perceived risks to the research participant. No person other than the principal research investigator will have access to the data. The research participant will be assured that the collected data will not be used in any evaluation of performance. The principal investigator will use aliases or fictitious names in any written reports and omit references to the specific time during which the data was collected.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Possible Benefits:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The study will bring to light how civic educators teach civics under the pressures of a high stakes tests. There are potential benefits for social studies curriculum developers, district leaders, legislators, administrators, and professional development creators to consider the needs, strengths, and problems of civic teachers. Creating high quality curricular materials, creating high quality professional development, and policy considerations regarding student civic testing are just some of the potential benefits as it can further the research field of civic education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. Conflict of Interest:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is no inherent conflict of interest in this study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Participant:

My name is Joshua Carey and I am a doctoral candidate in Social Studies Education at the University of Florida. I am currently gathering data for a research project to explore how social studies teachers make sense of teaching civics under the pressures of high stakes testing. What I would like to do is interview you in an individual interview setting, and then ask for access to your written lesson plans for the purposes of collecting more data. This would entail a time commitment of roughly three to five hours total. No compensation is available, but I would appreciate your participation. If you are interested in participating in this study, please reply to:

Joshua Carey

Beaker3@ufl.edu

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joshua Carey
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

Interview Protocol One

Tell me about your background. Where did you grow up? Anything you’d like to share about you.

Tell me about your civic learning experiences during your P-12 schooling.

Tell me about your background in education? Why did you become an educator? Why civics?

What do you think is the purpose of civic education?

What type of learning experiences do you think are best practice for civics classrooms? How do you think these experiences reinforce your interpretation of the purpose of civic education?

What do you consider would be poor civic education?

What are your thoughts and feelings about the EOCA?

How do you feel about the civics standards and benchmarks?

How do you feel about the current climate of education in the US?

How do you feel about the current climate of education in Florida?

Interview Protocol Two

What types of civic knowledge are most emphasized in your class and why? How is this determined?

What do you think the EOCA emphasizes in terms of civic knowledge?

What other types of civic knowledge would you spend more time or change in any way in your class?

What do you feel are the best classroom practices for helping your students learn civic knowledge for the EOC? Why? How often do you engage in these practices?

What classroom practices would you like to do more of if you had the time?

Tell me about discussion in your classroom.
Do you ever have discussions on current events or controversial issues? What does this look like? Why or Why not?

Do you think discussion is helpful for your students’ performance on the EOCA? Why or why not?

**Interview Protocol Three**

What are your thoughts on service-learning? Do you intend to design or implement any kind of service-learning in the classroom? Why/why not? Do you feel it is helpful for the EOCA? Is there any kind of school wide service-learning?

What are your thoughts on games and simulations? Do you incorporate any games or simulations into your classroom? Why/why not? Do you feel it is helpful for the EOCA?

Tell me about other any other practices you employ in your classroom.

What do you think are the most effective classroom practices for preparing your students to pass the EOCA? Why?

What do you think are the least effective practices for the EOCA?

What type of training and support have you had for the EOCA?

What are your thoughts on the ability level of the test?

Tell me about your planning process. What guides your planning? What resources do you use? Why?

Do you ever feel you are teaching to the test?

Please look at the following reporting categories for the test. How do you feel about the organization of them? Is there anything you would change?

**Interview Protocol Four**

Tell me about the student government in your school.

Tell me about the type of extracurricular activities at the school. In what capacities are you involved?

How will you cover the untested benchmarks on the EOCA?

Of the tested benchmarks, which do you find to be the biggest struggle for your students on the EOCA? (Modified for novice teacher)
How do you determine this and why do you think this is the case? How do you address these challenges?

Which benchmarks do you spend the most amount of time and effort on in your classroom?

What is your opinion of the civics benchmarks?

How do you feel the EOCA affects your teaching of civics?

Tell me about any notable lessons that will help students perform on the EOCA.

Tell me about any notable lessons you think may not have been successful for student performance on the EOCA.

If the EOCA were removed from the course, how would that impact your instruction?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of the EOCA?

What are your final thoughts on the EOCA? How do you feel about teaching civics? What do you want other teachers to know?
LIST OF REFERENCES


Clandinin, D. J. (2013). Engaging in narrative inquiry. Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, Inc.


Misco, T. & Lee, L. (2014). “There is no such things as being Guamanian”:
Controversial Issues in the Context of Guam. Theory & Research in Social
Education, 42(3), 414-439.


Mishler, E. G. (1990). Validation in inquiry-guided research: The role of exemplars in

R. Crowson, & D. Shipps (Eds.). Shaping education policy: Power and process.

Montessori, M. (1912). The Montessori method: Scientific pedagogy as applied child

Morgan, W., & Streb, M. (2001). Building citizenship: How student voice in service-
learning develops civic values. Social Science Quarterly, 82(1), 154-169.

Murphy, J.B. (2004). Against civic schooling*. Social Philosophy and Policy, 21(1), 221-
Murphy.pdf

Office.


practice.

CT: Yale University Press.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joshua Cornelius Carey was born to Mike and Lisa Carey in 1987 in Melbourne, FL. Josh is one of two siblings, the younger of the two being his rascal of a brother Michael. Josh spent the first part of his childhood in New Jersey for several years, forever instilling in him the virtues of being a northerner. Eventually, the Carey clan relocated back to the Sunshine State and became permanent residents of Satellite Beach, FL.

Josh attended the University of Florida, receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2009 and a Master of Education degree in 2010. Josh went on to teach 7th grade civics for three years in St. Johns County, Florida. Eventually Josh went back to UF for one final degree, a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction. Josh is proud to be part of the elite “triple gator group.”

Josh’s research interests focus on civic/citizenship education, and he has presented at the National Council for the Social Studies Annual Conference. It is his hope to continue teaching and research in this burgeoning field of interest. Josh loves nothing more than working with preservice and in-service teachers and helping them advance the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools.

Josh spends his free time globetrotting and relishes in experiencing new cultures. He is also an avid birder, wildlife photographer, hiker, and generally a lover of all things outdoors. Josh is usually accompanied by his partner in adventuring, a boisterous Old English sheepdog by the name of Walter. If you’ve ever met Walter, you get it.