

## ABSTRACT

### CITIZEN TEACHER: A WORKSHOP MODEL FOR THE TEACHING OF CIVICS

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Voluntary participation in civic life is on the decline, resulting in many eligible voters not voting. The National Council for the Social Studies established a set of standards to define civic efficacy, but the literature on civic education demonstrates a majority of young adults do not make voting or political engagement a part of their daily lives. Exacerbating the climate for low civic engagement, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 removes civics as a requirement for public school students, resulting in schools placing less priority on civic education and more on reading and math which are tested under the act. American democracy and education are each dependent upon the success of the other. For democracy to succeed, citizens need background and education regarding their civic responsibilities. The question at the heart of this study centered on understanding how to create a classroom model for civics instruction to meet the standards set by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). The intention of the research was to develop a mechanism for incorporating “authentic” civic education into the “regular” classroom where students would experience and rehearse those “acts of civic efficacy” required to promote and sustain a democracy.

Using a constructivist framework, this mixed-methods study first utilized quantitative content analysis to identify the components of the writing workshop model best matched to the stated outcomes of the National Council for the Social Studies characteristics of an effective citizen. The core relationships discovered during the

content analysis of the writing workshop materials were used to develop an instructional model for civic efficacy. This model for civic efficacy was reviewed and critiqued via qualitative methods. Focus groups comprised of certified social studies educators, who currently hold teaching positions in public schools in a rural school district in the Midwest, reviewed the instructional model and critiqued its applicability to the civics classroom and provided feedback for improvement. The input of the focus group was used for further refinement of the civic efficacy model.

To develop the level of civic engagement in the classroom, this study identified those components of the writing workshop model, a model designed to facilitate interaction, learning, and growth of students as critical readers and writers, most appropriate for the design of an instructional model for civic efficacy. The model created in this research for civic efficacy captures the essence of what has made the writing workshop so successful: creation of a place where students experience the power of their own ideas and the ideas of the adults with which they work. Ultimately, the model itself promotes a civics curriculum in the same manner writing workshop pedagogy provides explicit experiences and opportunities for students to become writers. The model moves teacher and student towards civic efficacy through authentic engagement through its facilitation of explicit experiences and opportunities for students to become citizens.

The results of this study demonstrate the strength of the pedagogy in writing workshop in the instruction of civic efficacy. The data from the content analysis display a high frequency of coding in three of the seven civic standards used in this study; collaboration, cultural knowledge, and acceptance of responsibility. The instructional model designed for review by the focus group based on the content analysis reflected the

weight of these three categories deemed critical to writing workshop. The instructional model connects successful writing workshop pedagogy with the purpose for NCSS civic education as the model fosters teaching and learning which encourages students to speculate and think critically on civic matters valued by the student. Upon review, focus group members reported that the model would be effective in the civics classroom. The near perfect level of agreement found in the content analysis indicates concurrence on the critical factors required to engage students in civic efficacy.

The findings of this research demonstrate the emphasis a civics workshop model places on a systematic approach in providing students with opportunities to choose, self-govern, collaborate, problem-solve, question, and resolve a civic matter in a safe and structured environment. The start of a creation of a concept for how to do this consistently in a civics classroom is critical if we are to recognize that preparing students to be effective citizens is more than an important mission of our schools; it is the mission of democracy itself.