Opportunities and Challenges Within Project-Based Learning: An Exploration of Integrated Civics and Literacy Instruction in Diverse Third-Grade Classrooms

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Ms. Miller, Ms. Walker, and their students.

Thank you for letting me listen to and learn from each of you.

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During my initial introduction to the Rackham Merit Fellowship program, Emma Flores-Scott offered a suggestion that I've found myself coming back to over the past six years. Whenever you need some inspiration in your doctoral work, she advised, seek out a dissertation and read the acknowledgments section. I've read many acknowledgments sections over the years, and each one has inspired me in different ways. I'm grateful to all those dissertation writers for sharing the stories behind their work. And I'm grateful to the many people who have supported me on my journey.

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Abstract

At a time when educational policies threaten to marginalize social studies
instruction within elementary classrooms, it is imperative for both researchers and
teachers to think critically about how to create learning spaces that enable all students to
become active citizens. Research suggests that integrated social studies and literacy
project-based learning has the potential to provide young students from diverse
backgrounds with meaningful learning opportunities. Project-based learning, however,
can present instructional challenges to teachers, particularly to those who are new to the
approach. To explore both opportunities and challenges that arise from its use, I studied
third-grade teachers' enactment of a project-based civics and government unit that I
developed in collaboration with school district teachers and administration. During the
2018–2019 school year, I collected data in a Midwestern state within three schools
serving students from socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. In this dissertation, I
present two manuscripts that address specific instructional challenges that have been
identified within project-based research: fostering students' collaboration and supporting
students' writing development. Addressing these challenges is a crucial step in realizing
project-based learning's potential within integrated literacy and civics instruction.

In the first paper (Chapter II), I explore how one teacher created an inclusive
community of learners among her group of diverse students. Using an inductive
approach, I analyzed observations and video recordings of classroom instruction,

interviews with the teacher and focal students, and classroom artifacts. The findings highlight how the teacher modeled care and responsiveness, fostered discussion and collaboration, elicited and supported students' participation, and encouraged consideration of different perspectives. Analysis of the focal student data suggests that the teachers' instructional moves created a learning space that supported her students' engagement with her, with each other, and with the civics and government unit. The findings offer support for further examination of the relational dimensions of project-based approaches to civic education and have important implications for classroom teachers, researchers, and curriculum developers.

In the second paper (Chapter III), I explore two teachers' use of evidence-based writing practices within their enactment of the civics and government unit. The data included observations and video recordings of classroom instruction, multiple interviews with the teachers, and artifacts of instruction and student work. Analysis included deductive coding using a set of evidence-based practices as well as memo writing to test propositions and to search for alternative explanations. The findings reveal that the teachers used multiple evidence-based writing practices, and they highlight how the teachers' particular classroom contexts informed their decision making around these practices. The findings also illustrate challenges that demonstrate the difficulty of providing writing instruction that meets students' varied learning needs. In addition to illuminating a need for greater consistency in language and instructional approaches across learning domains, the findings highlight the need for additional exploration of resources (e.g., educative curriculum supports) and professional development

opportunities (e.g., focusing on curriculum mapping and strategy instruction) that can best support teachers' writing instruction within project-based contexts.

Together, these manuscripts address opportunities and challenges within third-grade teachers' enactment of a project-based civics and government unit within diverse classrooms. The findings add to existing research focused on project-based learning, integrated literacy and social studies instruction, and civic education, and they offer insight into how teachers can develop instructional practices that support their elementary school-aged students in becoming active participants in our country's democracy.

Chapter I

Introduction

Advocates of citizenship education cross the political spectrum, but they are bound by a common belief that our democratic republic will not sustain unless students are aware of their changing cultural and physical environments; know the past; read, write, and think deeply; and act in ways that promote the common good (NCSS, 2013, p. 5).

The statement above, drawn from the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2013), inspired the development of this dissertation study and continues to inspire me as I strive to support elementary school teachers in their integration of literacy and social studies instruction. Given the intensely divisive nature of the current political landscape (e.g., Iyengar, Lelkes, Levendusky, Malhotra, & Westwood, 2019) and policies that have influenced a decreasing trend in the amount of instructional time allocated for social studies (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012), we face an even greater imperative to provide educational spaces that will enable all students to participate fully in our country's democracy. According to the writers of the C3 Framework, there will always be "differing perspectives" on the specific objectives of civic education. "The goal of knowledgeable, thinking, and active citizens, however, is universal" (NCSS, 2013, p. 5). Through its exploration of teachers' enactment of a project-based civics and literacy unit, in this dissertation I aim to better understand how to support teachers and their students in working toward that goal.

Several prior experiences informed my interest in and approach to this study. First, my early work fostering university-community partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania shaped my desire to create rich and inclusive learning environments for young students. In one of the partnerships that I supported, Nutritional Anthropology students from Penn worked alongside elementary school students, teachers, and school leaders to grow school gardens. The partnership, which culminated with student-led cooking demonstrations at a community event, brought together multiple partners in West Philadelphia to create meaningful learning opportunities. The inspiration I gained from these partnerships fueled my later work as an elementary school teacher in Burlington, Vermont, where I collaborated with colleagues to design and teach project-based units for fourth and fifth graders. In one of the units focused on waste reduction, for instance, our students developed a successful campaign to replace the disposable plastic silverware in the school's cafeteria with reusable metal silverware. Although the unit provided multiple opportunities for the students to develop their content knowledge, their literacy skills, and their civic agency within the school community, I continually found myself seeking additional ways to support all of my students' learning.

This search led me to my doctoral program at the University of Michigan, where I joined Project PLACE (*Project-approach to Literacy and Civic Engagement)* as a Research Assistant and Instructional Coach. In these roles, I assisted with research investigating the impact of project-based instruction on the social studies and literacy achievement and motivation of second-grade students from high-poverty, low-performing school districts (Duke, Halvorsen, Strachan, Kim, & Konstantopoulos, 2020). Engaging in these roles developed my interest in exploring teachers' perceptions of the instructional

approach and resulted in a follow-up study that analyzed the 24 experimental teachers'
end-of-year interviews. The findings of the study show that teachers varied substantially
in their experience with the project-based curriculum; although the teachers were
generally positive in their perceptions of the enactment process, they highlighted
important challenges that face educators interested in transitioning to the use of a project-
based approach (Revelle, 2019).

Drawing on these experiences, the current study grew out of collaborative work
with a school district during the summer of 2017. Recognizing a need to better align their
curriculum with social studies and English Language Arts learning standards, the district
convened a team to develop a third-grade, project-based social studies curriculum
modeled in part after the Project PLACE units. In addition to contributing to the project
concepts and design principles of the four units, I worked closely with one teacher to
develop the civics and government unit.

My involvement in the curriculum development process fostered my curiosity
around how teachers enacted the civics and government unit and led me to select this site
for my dissertation study. In my initial design of the study, I drew from Remillard's
(2005) framework of components of teacher–curriculum relationships. As shown through
Figure 1.1, the framework illustrates how teacher characteristics intersect with
characteristics of the curriculum materials to influence the enacted curriculum and
acknowledges that the relationship is embedded within particular contexts.
Using this framework, I developed three research questions that guided my entry into the
work: (1) What does it look like to use a project-based curriculum to enact civic

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education with young children? (2) What factors influence teachers' efforts to enact the curriculum? (3) What factors facilitate and/or constrain students' learning opportunities?
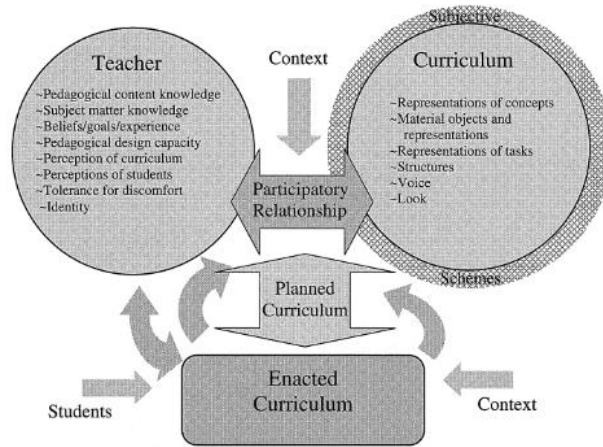
Figure 1.1: Remillard's (2005) framework of components of teacher–curriculum relationships

Recognizing the inequities in learning opportunities afforded to students from different socioeconomic backgrounds (e.g., Duke, 2000; Pace, 2008), I made the decision to focus the study on schools serving a socioeconomically diverse group of students (defined as schools in which at least 25% and no more than 75% of students qualify for free or reduced-priced-lunch). To learn from a variety of classroom contexts, I used the following criteria to guide the teacher selection process: 1) One teacher who has not taught the unit before; 2) One teacher who has taught the unit before; 3) One teacher who helped design the unit or who teaches at a project-based school. After soliciting a district administrator's nominations of teachers, I invited three teachers to participate in the study.

For participating classrooms, I collected multiple forms of data during teaching of the civics and government unit during second half of the 2018–2019 school year. For

each of the classrooms involved in the study, I observed and video recorded all lessons of the civics and government unit. I also interviewed participating teachers three times over the course of the unit and conducted two short interviews with four focal students from each classroom. Lastly, I collected artifacts of instruction (e.g., photographs of teacher documentation) and samples of student work (e.g., graphic organizers, written work, rubrics).

I began the data analysis process soon after data collection began. After each classroom observation, I reviewed my field notes, recorded reflections and questions on my observation guide, and I engaged in some initial coding of the data using an inductive approach (Charmaz, 2014). I transcribed all interviews and observations shortly after conducting them, and I also engaged in memo writing at least once a week to record emerging patterns and questions. Given that one of the teachers only taught half of the lessons from the unit, I made the decision to focus my analysis on the remaining two teachers. After finishing data collection, I reviewed all of the data and completed initial coding. As I reviewed these initial codes and my memos regarding the teachers' instruction, I engaged in "progressive focusing" (Parlett & Hamilton, 1976) of the research questions. In the process, I shifted my focus away from various factors that facilitated and constrained teachers' enactment of the unit (such as those found in Remillard's (2005) framework) and drew from Cohen, Raudenbush, and Ball's (2003) concept of instruction as dynamic interaction. Through this decision, I aimed to focus on the instruction within which the teachers enacted the curriculum and provide detailed descriptions of the opportunities and challenges within project-based learning. This process resulted in two research questions that are the focus of this dissertation: (1) How

does a third-grade teacher create a community of learners within a project-based civics and government unit? (2) How do two third-grade teachers enact evidence-based writing practices during a project-based civics and government unit?

Overview of the Dissertation

In this dissertation, I present two journal-length manuscripts. This format allowed for the analysis of two distinct aspects of the research, both of which respond to instructional opportunities and challenges within the research on project-based learning. Each paper is self-contained and includes its own literature review, methodology section, findings, discussion, and references. Following these two papers, the appendices provide further documentation of the work.

The first paper is titled **"***We Learn Better When We Learn With Each Other":*** *Creating an Inclusive Community of Learners Within a Project-based Approach to Civic Education.* Throughout my observations and review of one of the teachers' enactment of the unit, her commitment to creating a community of learners in her classroom emerged as a core component of her instruction. Given the challenge of supporting students' collaboration within project-based contexts (e.g., Blevins et al., 2016; Whitlock, 2013), I came to believe that a close examination of her instructional moves could contribute to a a deeper understanding of the relational dimensions of project-based civic education. Analysis of the observations, interviews, and artifacts of instruction and student work illustrates how the teacher created an inclusive community of learners among her group of diverse students by modeling care and responsiveness, fostering discussion and collaboration, eliciting and supporting students' participation, and encouraging consideration of different perspectives. The findings offer support for further examination

of the relational dimensions of project-based approaches to civic education and have important implications for teachers, researchers, and curriculum developers.

The second paper is titled *Writing Instruction During Project-Based Learning in Two Diverse Third-Grade Classrooms*. Recognizing the need to explore how to support all students' writing development within project-based contexts (Duke et al., 2020; Revelle, 2019), this study examined two teachers' use of evidence-based writing practices (Graham et al., 2012) within their enactment of the project-based civics and government unit. Analysis included deductive coding using a set of evidence-based practices as well as memo writing to test propositions and to search for alternative explanations. The findings reveal that the teachers used multiple evidence-based writing practices, and they highlight how the teachers' particular classroom contexts informed their decision making around these practices. The findings also illustrate challenges that demonstrate the difficulty of providing writing instruction that meets students' varied learning needs. In addition to illuminating a need for greater consistency in language and instructional approaches across learning domains, the findings highlight the need for additional exploration of resources (e.g., educative curriculum supports) and professional development opportunities (e.g., focusing on curriculum mapping and strategy instruction) that can best support teachers' writing instruction within project-based contexts.

In summary, this dissertation strives to better understand how third-grade teachers enact a project-based civics and government unit within diverse classrooms. Together, the papers address important challenges that have been identified in the research on project-based learning. The first paper builds on research in civics education and explores

how one teacher supported her students' collaboration by creating an inclusive

community of learners within her classroom, and the second paper draws on literacy

research to examine teachers' use of evidence-based writing practices within their

instruction. In addition to contributing to existing research focused on project-based

learning, both papers add to our understanding of how to foster the development of

"knowledgeable, thinking, and active citizens" (NCSS, 2013, p. 5), and they describe an

experiential approach to civic education. Through their detailed descriptions of the

opportunities and challenges afforded by a project-based approach, they offer insight into

how teachers can develop instructional practices that support their elementary school-

aged students in becoming active participants in our country's democracy.

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Chapter II

"We Learn Better When We Learn With Each Other": Creating an Inclusive

Community of Learners Within a Project-based Approach to Civic Education

Abstract

This case study examines a third-grade teacher's enactment of a project-based approach to civic education. The data included observations and video recordings of lessons from an integrated civics and literacy unit, interviews with the teacher and focal students, and artifacts of instruction and student work. Analysis of the multiple data sources illustrates how the teacher created an inclusive community of learners among her group of diverse students by modeling care and responsiveness, fostering discussion and collaboration, eliciting and supporting students' participation, and encouraging consideration of different perspectives. The findings offer support for further examination of the relational dimensions of project-based approaches to civic education and have important implications for teachers, researchers, and curriculum developers.

Introduction

In their position statement *Powerful, Purposeful Pedagogy in Elementary School Social Studies*, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) highlights the importance of engaging all young students in meaningful social studies instruction. "The advancement of 'liberty and justice for all,' as envisioned by our country's founders," they explain, "requires that citizens have the knowledge, attitudes and values to both guard and endorse the principles of a constitutional democracy" (NCSS, 2017). Despite a longstanding recognition of the importance of educating all students for participation in civic life (Dewey, 1900/1990; Noddings, 1999), a growing body of research highlights inequities in learning opportunities afforded to students from different backgrounds. These inequities, which span the areas of social studies (Pace, 2008; Wills, 2007) and literacy (Duke, 2000; Wright & Neuman, 2014), threaten to further exacerbate the opportunity gaps (Milner, 2012) that pervade our nation's schools and inhibit many students' abilities to participate fully in our country's democracy (Levinson, 2012). Given the intensely divisive nature of the current political landscape (e.g., Iyengar, Lelkes, Levendusky, Malhotra, & Westwood, 2019) and policies that work to narrow curricula (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012), we face an even greater imperative to provide educational spaces that will enable all students to become active citizens.

Research suggests that integrated social studies and literacy project-based learning (PBL) has the potential to provide young students from diverse backgrounds with meaningful learning opportunities (Duke, Halvorsen, Strachan, Kim, & Konstantopoulos, 2020; Halvorsen et al., 2012). Project-based learning, however, can be quite challenging to enact, particularly for teachers who are new to the instructional

approach (Condliffe et al., 2017; Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik, & Soloway, 1997). Within the research on PBL in social studies, one of the most commonly reported challenges is supporting students' collaboration (Blevins, LeCompte, & Wells, 2016; Whitlock, 2013). Given recent research that asserts the importance of the relational dimensions of civic education (e.g., Andolina & Conklin, 2019), there remains a need to better understand how teachers navigate this challenge. In this study, I examine how one third-grade teacher created an inclusive community of learners among her group of diverse students within a project-based civics and government unit.

Literature Review

Elementary Social Studies Instruction

Numerous studies have documented the dearth of social studies instruction in elementary classrooms. According to Heafner and Fitchett (2012), the marginalization of social studies in elementary classrooms is not a new trend, but the trend has intensified as a result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Mandated testing in English Language Arts, mathematics, and science has shifted instructional time and attention toward these areas, displacing instructional time previously allocated toward social studies (McMurrer, 2007). Within classrooms that continue to allocate time for social studies, many teachers continue to use traditional instructional approaches that focus on memorizing factual information (e.g., Wills, 2007). As a result, students have little experience with inquiry-oriented and/or project-based approaches. Recent research, however, shows that these approaches have potential to engage elementary school-aged students in meaningful social studies instruction (e.g., Duke et al., 2020) and to support them in contending with complex social studies content (e.g., Hughes, 2019).

Project-based Learning in Social Studies

Highlighted in the NCSS (2017) position statement as an instructional approach that supports "student discovery and engagement," project-based learning has seen a recent surge in popularity (Condliffe et al., 2017). Scholars have defined and enacted project-based learning in various ways since its first introduction during the early twentieth century's Progressive Era (Knoll, 1997), but a common set of features typically guides the use of the instructional approach. According to Thomas's (2000) review of research, projects within PBL are central to the curriculum, are focused on questions or problems that "drive" learning, involve the construction and transformation of knowledge, are student-driven to a significant degree, and focus on authentic or real-world challenges (p. 3). The Buck Institute for Education (BIE), a non-profit organization that works to build the capacity of teachers and school leaders to design and facilitate PBL, convened a group to develop criteria for evaluating the quality of projects. Their final product, *A Framework for High Quality Project Based Learning* (HQPBL, 2018), aims to describe high quality PBL in terms of the student experience and identifies the following six criteria:

1. "Intellectual challenge and accomplishment – Students learn deeply, think critically, and strive for excellence;

2. Authenticity – Students work on projects that are meaningful and relevant to their culture, their lives, and their future;

3. Public product – Students' work is publicly displayed, discussed, and critiqued;

4. Collaboration – Students collaborate with other students in person or online and/or receive guidance from adult mentors and experts;

5. Project management – Students use a project management process that enables them to proceed effectively from project initiation to completion;

6. Reflection – Students reflect on their work and their learning throughout the project" (pp. 3–5).

According to the framework, all six criteria must be at least minimally present in a project in order to consider it high quality.

Although PBL is commonly associated with the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines, a growing number of researchers and educators have found project-based approaches to be promising within social studies education (Duke, Halvorsen & Strachan, 2016). Several studies, ranging from second-grade classrooms (Duke et al., 2020; Halvorsen et al., 2012) to middle school history classes (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009) and secondary Advanced Placement (AP) U.S. Government and Politics courses (Parker et al., 2013), have found that students engaged in project-based approaches performed better on assessments than students experiencing more traditional instruction. Other studies have documented qualitatively how students engaged in project-based approaches demonstrated increases in their civic knowledge and their self-efficacy related to civic engagement (Mayes, Mitra, & Serriere, 2016; Whitlock, 2013).

Within the field of civic education, a growing number of researchers have studied a particular form of PBL—Action Civics. According to the National Action Civics Collaborative (NACC, n.d.), Action Civics is a "student-centered, project-based approach to civics education that develops the individual skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for 21st century democratic practice." The instructional approach involves

students in six stages: examine your community; choose issues; research an issue and set a goal; analyze power; develop strategies; and take action to affect policy. Similar to the findings from the previously mentioned PBL studies, research examining students' participation in Action Civics has demonstrated gains in students' civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions (e.g., Blevins, LeCompte & Wells, 2016). At the high school level, students engaged in Action Civics programs have reported greater confidence in their rhetorical skills as well as their listening and empathy skills (Andolina & Conklin, 2018).

Together, these studies illustrate the potential of project-based approaches to civic education to engage students in meaningful learning opportunities. The studies also highlight a challenge within teachers' enactment of PBL that is particularly relevant to civic education: supporting students' collaboration. As described below, both the broader research on PBL and the research focused on social studies PBL identify the challenge of getting students to work together productively. There remains a need to further explore this challenge for multiple reasons. First, research indicates a positive effect of cooperative learning on students' achievement and attitudes (e.g., Kyndt et al., 2013). Furthermore, respect and cooperation play a central role in learning standards related to civic education (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2013). According to *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards* (NCSS, 2013), civics should teach the virtues "such as honesty, mutual respect, cooperation, and attentiveness to multiple perspectives" that citizens should use in their interactions with each other on public matters (p. 33). Finally, a growing number of scholars assert that the relational dimensions of citizenship are key to solving the

challenges faced by democratic societies (e.g., Cramer & Toff, 2017; Dobson, 2012). In

describing their "Expanded Model of Civic Competence," for instance, Cramer and Toff

(2017) assert,

> In this model, the competence of listening to and understanding the different lived experiences of others cannot be considered separately from levels of factual knowledge. Rather than placing knowledge of objective facts alone at the center, this view of democracy also values the ability of citizens to interact with one another and share experiences as a necessary condition for collectively governing each other and shaping each others' futures in a just manner (p. 758).

Drawing on this model, Cramer and Toff (2017) identify implications for civic education

and suggest that curricula should support students in working together and becoming

"better listeners to others' points of view" (p. 767).

Supporting Students' Collaboration

In their review of implementation challenges faced by teachers using PBL, Marx

et al. (1997) document the difficulty of supporting students' collaboration and suggest

that specific structures must be in place for students to work together

productively. Within the social studies PBL literature, Whitlock (2013) identified

students' ability to work together as a challenge within her study of a fifth-grade

classroom engaged in a project-based economics unit. Although her study found that

students improved their behavior and teamwork skills over the course of the unit, the lead

teacher in her study spent considerable instructional time addressing issues such as

bullying, disrespect toward teachers, and challenges within small-group work.

Blevins et al. (2016) also identified student collaboration as a challenge in their

investigation of an Action Civics program. In their study, the researchers planned and

hosted two iterations of a summer civics institute for 149 students entering fifth through

ninth grades. After engaging in a Community Issues Fair at which they met with a variety

of civic leaders, the students in the study worked in groups to select a community issue, conduct research, create a blog to communicate their findings and possible solutions, and create an advocacy project to help raise awareness of their issues. Although their survey and qualitative data revealed increases in students' sense of civic efficacy and agency, the researchers found that students struggled with the idea and process of arriving at a consensus when choosing a community issue. They also found that the students struggled to work together to identify solutions and create a plan of action.

In contrast to the literature cited above, more recent research exploring Action Civics illustrates its potential to develop a classroom climate that supports collaboration among students. Andolina and Conklin (2018), for example, examined high school students' experiences with Mikva Challenge's *Project Soapbox*, an Action Civics program that engages students in writing and delivering a speech about a community issue of importance to them. Drawing on data collected from nine schools and over 200 students, the study found that participating students made gains in their self-assessment of their civic and rhetorical skills. The study also found a key impact in students' report of their listening and empathy skills. Specifically, students reported that listening to their peers' speeches fostered their sense of empathy and connection to one another. Andolina and Conklin (2018) assert that the form of empathetic listening fostered within Project Soapbox "warrants consideration as a central democratic skill that should be taught in classrooms" (p. 397). They further explain that a curriculum that supports students in attending to and developing concern for the experiences and perspectives of others "may hold important seeds of political change" (Andolina & Conklin, 2018, p. 398).

In a follow-up study, Andolina and Conklin (2019) explored the factors that shaped students' experiences with Project Soapbox. In addition to highlighting the positive influence of students' choice in the topics they selected for their speeches, they found that teachers' varying goals revealed themselves in the differences in their instructional practices and in the strength of their classroom climates. According to the researchers, some teachers "had intentionally invested significant time in cultivating a classroom community in which students developed trust and respect for one another" (p. 28). Recognizing the potential influence of the classroom climates, the researchers suggest that subsequent research should further explore these relational dimensions of civic education and their impact on students' learning.

Research outside of PBL has documented several aspects of teacher guidance that are positively associated with student collaboration. In their review of research, for instance, van Leeuwen and Janssen (2019) highlight the importance of how teachers focus attention on students' problem solving strategies. However, there remains a need to explore additional ways in which teachers can foster a classroom community within project-based contexts focused on civic education. As described below, bridging the worlds of civic education and social emotional learning could provide an important opportunity to further our understanding of the relational skills that are essential to students' active participation in our country's democracy.

Theoretical Framework and Research Question

I drew from multiple theoretical lenses in my effort to understand how teachers can support students' collaboration within a project-based context. The first theoretical perspective conceptualizes instruction as dynamic interaction and encourages researchers

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to examine the instruction within which different resources are used. The second

theoretical perspective, which highlights the importance of the relational dimensions of

civic education, guided my exploration of the interactions between the teacher and the

students and amongst the students.

Instruction as Dynamic Interaction

In their seminal piece on educational resources, Cohen, Raudenbush, and Ball

(2003) challenge researchers to think beyond access and allocation of resources in

evaluating educational quality. Rather, they assert, researchers need to recognize that

schools and teachers with similar resources can use those resources very differently.

Conventional resources such as class size or curriculum, they suggest, "only count as

they enter instruction, and that happens only as they are noticed and used" (p. 128).

Cohen and colleagues conceptualize instruction as a dynamic interaction of teachers and

students, around content, within environments (see Figure 2.1).
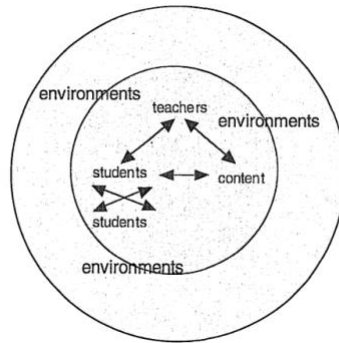
Figure 2.1: Cohen, Raudenbush, and Ball's (2003, p. 124) depiction of instruction as
interaction that is situated in context.

Cohen et al. (2003) encourage researchers to view instruction as "a stream, not an

event," that "flows in and draws on environments" and they assert that the central focus

in research should not be on resources alone but the instruction in which resources are

used (p. 122). Although the PBL studied in this paper is supported by a detailed set of curriculum materials, I respond to Cohen and colleagues' charge by focusing on the instruction in which the project-based curriculum is used. More specifically, this study focuses on the interactions between the teacher and the students and amongst the students as they engage with content from the civics and government unit.

Relational Skills for Democratic Citizenship

According to Andolina and Conklin (2019), a growing number of scholars suggest that we should develop interpersonal practices such as listening, particularly to those different from ourselves, in order to "improve trust, develop community, build empathy, and foster equity" (p.5). These scholars move beyond the push for more discussion in civic education (e.g., Hess, 2009) to argue for supporting the development of social relationships within the classroom. In their exploration of schools and social trust, for example, Flanagan, Stoppa, Syvertsen, and Stout (2010) suggest that the development of trusting social relationships among teachers and students contributes to youths' sense of belonging, their affective connection to the broader society, their development of a public identity, and their inclination to act in the interest of the common good.

The growing interest in relational citizenship skills follows a growing interest in developing students' social and emotional learning (SEL) skills. Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, and Gullota's (2015) overview of SEL's past, present, and future emphasizes the rapid growth of the SEL field over the past 20 years and outlines five SEL competence domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. According to this framework, the domains of social awareness and relationship skills include the abilities to consider

different perspectives, empathize, feel compassion, and listen actively. These skills overlap considerably with the virtues put forth within *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards* (NCSS, 2013). According to the C3 Framework, citizens should be able to use virtues such as mutual respect and attentiveness to multiple perspectives when they interact with each other on public issues. Given that a growing number of states have implemented SEL standards (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2019) and that SEL programs are operating in a growing number of schools across the country (Weissberg et al., 2015), a focus on civic-oriented SEL offers many potential benefits. Bridging the worlds of civic education and SEL provides an important opportunity to further our understanding of the relational skills that are essential to students' active participation in our country's democracy.

In an effort to further this understanding and address the challenging nature of supporting students' collaboration within project-based contexts, this study explores the following research question: How does a third-grade teacher create a community of learners within a project-based civics and government unit?

Method

To explore the research question, I used a single case study design. According to Stake (1995), "The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well. . .what it is, what it does" (p. 8). The current report focuses on one case, or classroom, as the third-grade teacher enacts a project-based civics and government unit. Through focusing on one case, I aim to contextualize the experience of the teacher and her students and draw from multiple

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sources to access the ways the teacher fosters a community of learners within the classroom.

Participants

During the summer of 2017, I had the opportunity to collaborate with a school district administrator and a team of teachers to develop a third-grade, project-based social studies curriculum for use across a district. In addition to contributing to the project concepts and design principles of the four units, I worked closely with one of the teachers, Ms. Walker[1], to develop the civics and government unit. My involvement in the curriculum development process fostered my curiosity around how teachers enacted the curriculum and led me to select this site for this study. In an effort to better understand the learning opportunities afforded to a diverse group of students, I studied third-grade teachers in schools serving students from socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. For the purposes of this study, teachers had to have a demonstrated interest in social studies education, defined as a willingness to teach the unit and to engage in conversations with the researcher about the enactment process. Schools serving a socioeconomically diverse group of students were defined as schools in which at least 25% and no more than 75% of students qualify for free or reduced-priced-lunch. After soliciting a district administrator's nominations of teachers who met these criteria, I invited the teachers to participate in the study.

In the process of analyzing data from the larger study, I made the decision to focus this report on Ms. Walker's instruction. Throughout my observations and review of Ms. Walker's enactment of the unit, her commitment to creating a community of learners

[1] All names of people and places are pseudonyms.

in her classroom emerged as a core component of her instruction. Given the challenge of supporting students' collaboration within project-based contexts (e.g., Blevins et al., 2016; Whitlock, 2013), I came to believe that a close examination of her instructional moves could contribute to a deeper understanding of the relational dimensions of project-based civic education.

Ms. Walker, a White woman, served on the social studies curriculum development committee, and she and I worked together to develop the civics and government unit that became the focus of this study. At the time of the study, Ms. Walker was in her third year of teaching third grade at Broadway Elementary School. Prior to teaching third grade, Ms. Walker worked as a math and literacy tutor across grades K–5 and earned her master's degree in elementary education. She taught an abbreviated version of the civics and government unit during the school year prior to that of the study.

Prior to starting classroom observations, I solicited Ms. Walker's assistance in identifying four students to serve as focal students. To respond to the challenges identified within PBL research, I used the following criteria to guide the focal student selection process: 1) a student who the teacher anticipates will engage successfully with the unit (i.e., as defined by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004, a student who will invest cognitively, behaviorally and emotionally with the unit); 2) a student who exhibits below-grade level skills in literacy and/or social studies; 3) a student who presents behavioral challenges, particularly in regard to collaborating with other students; 4) a student who could potentially struggle with the project's charge to "make a difference" (Mayes et al., 2016, p. 633). For the purposes of this paper, I focus on two of the focal students, Trey and Naasir. In our initial interview, Ms. Walker identified Trey as a

student who sometimes found it difficult to collaborate with other students, and she identified Naasir as a student who might struggle to engage with the project. The purpose of this sampling strategy was not to use these cases to generalize across all students but to explore how these particular students experienced Ms. Walker's effort to create a community of learners within her classroom.

During the time of the study, Ms. Walker had 21 students in her classroom—11 boys and 10 girls. Six of Ms. Walker's students qualified for English Language services and four of her students had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). A new teaching assistant (TA) began working in Ms. Walker's classroom soon before she started teaching the civics and government unit; although the TA supported all of the students, she worked most directly with one of the students who qualified for special education services.

Setting

Hanging above the front entrance to Broadway Elementary School is a sign that reads, "Serving the community since 1944." The school enrolled almost 300 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade during the 2018–19 school year and qualified for Title 1 funding. At the time of the study, 51% of the students within the school qualified as economically disadvantaged, and families within the school identified with the following racial/ethnic groups: 48% White, 17% Hispanic/Latino, 16% African American, 14% two or more races, and 5% Asian. Although I was unable to collect background data for all of the students in the classroom, Ms. Walker shared during our first interview that four of her students' families (19%) identified as White and larger proportions than the school average identified as Hispanic/Latino and African American.

Curriculum

In developing the new social studies curriculum, we designed the units to be inquiry-oriented and project-based and to provide opportunities for teachers to engage in culturally responsive practices. We also designed the units to align with the state's social studies standards and the C3 Framework (NCSS, 2019) and to address selected reading and writing standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). As described in the curriculum design principles (see Appendix A), the C3 Framework (NCSS, 2013) informed the inquiry-oriented principles used throughout the design process. Second-grade units developed by Duke et al. (2017) guided the development of the principles related to project-based learning, the structure of each lesson in the third-grade units, and the format of the lesson plans, a prepared social studies curriculum from a neighboring county informed some of the content included in the unit, and the school district's definition of culturally responsive teaching informed the final set of principles.

The civics and government unit developed from these design principles consists of 18 lessons in which teachers support students in exercising their rights and responsibilities as citizens by writing letters that argue their position on a public issue relating to the state (see Appendices B and C for an abstract and overview of the unit). Each lesson was designed to take between 40–50 minutes, and most lessons within the unit follow the same format, drawn from Halvorsen et al. (2012):

1. Whole-group instruction and discussion (usually 10 minutes) – The teacher generates students' interest and excitement about the project and provides explicit teaching.

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2. Guided small-group or individual instruction (usually 20–30 minutes) –
   Students work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

3. Whole-group review and reflection (usually 10 minutes) – Students share their
   work and the teacher clarifies confusions and reviews key terms.

In all but two of the lessons, the curriculum encourages teachers to have students work in either pairs or small groups for at least a portion of the lesson. We designed the unit to provide students with opportunities to conduct research and identify various perspectives on the issue, to discuss why peoples' positions may differ, and to learn how to justify their own position with reasons. To assist students in determining who should receive their letter, we developed lessons to guide them in exploring concepts such as representative government and to help them learn about diverse civic leaders who have made a difference in the state. To help guide teachers in their initial teaching of the unit, we designed the lessons around a single driving question: What can the state do to reduce plastic pollution in the Great Lakes? Although the curriculum materials invite the teachers to focus the unit on a different public issue that is important to them and their students, the teacher within the current study focused on the issue of plastic pollution in the Great Lakes.

Data sources

Due to its emphasis on multiple perspectives, the case study approach requires the use of a variety of data sources (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Stake, 2005). During the 2018–2019 school year, I collected multiple forms of data during Ms. Walker's teaching of the civics and government unit.

Observations. I observed, video recorded, and took field notes on all 18 lessons of the civics and government unit. The teacher's enactment of the unit began in late-February and ended in mid-April, with a total of 22 days of instruction (several lessons spread over more than one day). In an effort to maintain ecological validity, I assumed the role of observer-as-participant during classroom observations. As such, I informed students that I was interested in learning about their social studies lessons and that it was my job to video record the lessons and to write down what I noticed about the work they did. Other than asking occasional questions about the students' work, my engagement with the students and the practice of teaching was limited. When the teacher asked questions of me, I did my best to reflect the questions back to her (e.g., "That's a good question, what do you think?), and I explained that my goal was to learn from her and her experiences so I could support the district's work. Given that social studies units are not typically enacted with a second adult in the room (particularly a co-author of the unit plan), this approach aimed to maximize the extent to which the findings reflected how the teacher would have enacted the unit on her own.

Interviews and informal conversations. I interviewed the teacher three times over the course of the study—prior to teaching the unit (38 minutes), midway through her enactment of the unit (65 minutes), and after completing the unit (80 minutes) (see Appendix D for Teacher Interview Protocols). I also engaged in informal conversations with the teacher after many of the lessons. I used these interviews and conversations to learn more about the teacher's background and instructional approach prior to teaching the unit as well as her goals for the unit, how she engaged with the curriculum materials and her perceptions of students' learning opportunities. I also elicited her ideas regarding

future revisions to the unit and professional learning experiences that could be beneficial to teachers enacting the unit. Additionally, I conducted two short interviews (10–15 minutes) with the four focal students—prior to the start of the unit and after the completion of the unit (see Appendix E for Student Interview Protocols). The purpose of these interviews was to learn more about the students' backgrounds and thoughts and feelings about social studies and literacy. I also used these interviews to better understand the students' experiences with the unit and to engage them in reflecting on artifacts (e.g., posters, exit tickets, final drafts of their letters) they created throughout the unit.

Classroom artifacts. Throughout the teacher's enactment of the unit, I collected artifacts of instruction (e.g., photographs of the teacher's notes on the white board) and samples of student work (e.g., graphic organizers, written work, rubrics) from the classroom. Although I collected the final drafts of all of the students' letters, I prioritized collecting a range of artifacts from the focal students as they engaged in learning activities that led up to the final product.

Data Analysis

I began the data analysis process soon after data collection began. After each classroom observation, I reviewed my field notes, recorded reflections and questions on a post-observation guide (see Appendix F), and I engaged in some initial coding of the data using an inductive approach (Charmaz, 2014). I transcribed all interviews and observations shortly after conducting them, and I highlighted each observation transcript with different colors to indicate each focal student's participation in the lesson (e.g., I highlighted all of Trey's contributions in blue). I also engaged in memo writing at least once a week to record emerging patterns and questions. After finishing data collection, I

reviewed all of the data and continued using an inductive approach to the coding process.

My original research questions, which broadly explored teachers' enactment of the unit, resulted in a wide range of descriptive, process, and in vivo codes, from "teacher goals" to "using turn and talk" to "'whole-body listening and learning'" (Saldaña, 2016). As I reviewed these initial codes and my memos regarding Ms. Walker's instruction (see Appendix G for an example), I engaged in "progressive focusing" (Parlett & Hamilton, 1976) of the research questions and made the decision to focus one of my questions on how Ms. Walker created a community of learners within her enactment of the project-based civics and government unit. Through this decision, I aimed to focus on a single finding that responds to a challenge identified in prior research (e.g., Blevins et al., 2016; Mayes et al., 2016).

As I engaged in focused coding of Ms. Walker's instruction, I started by reviewing my list of initial codes and identifying those that related to Ms. Walker's effort to create a community of learners within her classroom (e.g., *listening*, *lifting students' ideas*, *orienting students to each other*). I took several passes through the data to refine these codes (e.g., I split the code *responding to students' needs* into *responding to physical needs*, *responding to emotional needs*, and *responding to learning needs*). In the process, I developed a codebook that includes each code, a description, and an example, and I engaged in axial coding (Charmaz, 2014) to group the codes into categories (see Appendix H). I also reviewed artifacts of instruction to triangulate my findings and to search for confirming and/or disconfirming evidence, and I completed another pass of the data to inform my interpretation of the focal students' experiences. Thus, I tested and refined my assertions regarding how Ms. Walker created a community of learners with

multiple passes of the data, and I continued to use memo writing throughout the process as a way to examine how the data did or did not "fit together" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 123).

Validity

In addition to striving toward ecological validity through my observer-as-participant status and a naturalistic study design, I strove for the holistic approach to validity put forth by Cho and Trent (2006) that is "ever present and recursive" (p. 327). In doing this, I worked toward validity, or credibility in my descriptions and interpretations, in four ways: triangulating data sources, member checking, reflecting on my subjectivities, and collecting and analyzing data through an iterative process.

As described by Yin (2018), a major strength of case study research is the opportunity to collect information from multiple sources. This opportunity allows for data triangulation, or using different sources to corroborate findings. In addition to comparing findings across data sources (e.g., a teacher's comments in an interview and her instructional moves), I tried to continually remain alert to data that challenged my findings and to be open to revising my interpretations.

In addition to triangulating the data, I used multiple forms of member checking, or sharing data and interpretations with informants to check for their actions and perceived accuracy, to challenge threats to the study's validity. Post-unit interviews with the teacher provided an opportunity to share interpretations with her and check for accuracy. Furthermore, I met with Ms. Walker after sharing a draft of my findings with her, and she approved of my representation of her and her classroom and my interpretation of how she created of a community of learners within her classroom.

My subjectivities undoubtedly influenced the research process. According to Peshkin (1988), the personal qualities that we bring to the research process "have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement" (p. 17). Peshkin, however, also describes subjectivity as potentially "virtuous" in its ability to help researchers make "a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected" (p. 18). As a White woman, a former elementary school teacher who enacted project-based approaches, a former facilitator of university-community service learning partnerships, a current doctoral candidate whose work has focused largely on PBL, and a co-author of the unit being studied, I am aware that my different identities and experiences shaped the development of this study and the impressions I formed during data collection and analysis. As an experienced classroom teacher, I believe that project-based curriculum can offer a way to support teachers in providing students with meaningful learning opportunities, but I am aware of challenges inherent in adopting the approach and am open to learning from other teachers' experiences. Notably, in the process of co-developing the unit, Ms. Walker and I developed a strong working relationship with each other that we both characterize as mutually respectful. In an effort to resist interpreting the data to match my experiences and expectations, I engaged in reflexive memo writing throughout the study. I continually thought about and reflected on how my background, my past experiences as a teacher, my relationship with Ms. Walker, and my feelings about PBL and civic education influenced the data I collected and the interpretation process, and I endeavored to remain open to evidence that challenged my interpretations.

As previously mentioned, I used an iterative process for data collection and analysis that enabled "continuous re-examination and reflection" of the data (Kourtizin, 2002, p. 133). In addition to re-examining my subjectivities, I continually reflected on my positionality within the research, how the data supported or challenged my ideas, and the way I chose to write about my findings. By engaging in this dynamic, cyclical process of data collection and analysis, I consciously worked toward accurate and ethical representation of Ms. Walker and her students in my examination of how she created a community of learners throughout her enactment of the unit.

Findings

It's a Thursday afternoon toward the end of March, and Ms. Walker is transitioning her students to their social studies work. As the 21 third graders find their way to brightly colored squares on the rug at the front of the classroom, Ms. Walker says to one of her students, "Naasir, if you're more comfortable sitting in a chair over here, we can do that for you, okay?" The teacher claims her own spot in a chair at the corner of the rug and says, "We're waiting for Layla and Kiana." She thanks the students as they get settled on the rug and continues, "I wait for everybody because we're a learning community and when we don't have all of our learners, our learning isn't quite as rich. Because we learn better when we learn with each other…"

This exchange between Ms. Walker and her students marks the mid-point of the class's engagement with the project-based civics and government unit. The exchange also illustrates Ms. Walker's deep commitment to creating an inclusive community of learners within her classroom. Throughout Ms. Walker's teaching of the unit, she revealed several

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ways in which she carried out this commitment: by modeling care and responsiveness, by fostering discussion and collaboration among her students, by eliciting and supporting all of her students' participation, and by encouraging consideration of different perspectives.

Modeling Care and Responsiveness

Ms. Walker's care for her students permeated her interactions with them. Whether she was talking with them one-on-one or facilitating a whole-class discussion, she continually communicated that she valued them. For example, when Kiana, a student who struggled with absenteeism, walked into the classroom late one morning, Ms. Walker invited her to the back table so she could get her caught up on the work she had missed that week. As Kiana approached the table, Ms. Walker greeted her with a smile and a "hello" and asked her whether she was feeling better. After Kiana affirmed that she was better, Ms. Walker replied, "I'm so glad you're here today. I missed you."

Ms. Walker exhibited this same sense of care within whole-class discussions. After the class returned from spring break, for instance, Ms. Walker shared with her students,

> I'm excited because it's April which means that we have April, May, and part of
>
> June and then you're done with third grade. Which is bittersweet for me…part of
>
> it is exciting, right? It's exciting that you have done so much in third grade that
>
> you're ready to move onto fourth grade. But it's kinda bitter because I'm going to
>
> miss you guys. I'll miss you so much.

Another way in which Ms. Walker displayed care for her students was by working with them at their level. When meeting with students one-on-one and when checking in

with small groups, she continually crouched down beside her students so that she could listen to their ideas and support them with their work.

In addition to exhibiting care for her students, Ms. Walker continually revealed a commitment to responding to her students' needs. When describing her classroom of students, she replied,

> My classroom of students this year is energetic, curious…they don't filter what they say necessarily so a lot of times you know exactly what they're thinking and feeling, which I try to channel into a positive thing because it's good for me to know what they're thinking. Because then I can be responsive to them.

During our second interview, Ms. Walker elaborated on her commitment to responding to the needs of her students. When I asked her how much flexibility she has in her schedule, she described her collaboration with her partner teacher and the pros and cons of trying to keep the curriculum consistent across the two classrooms. "I think that any classroom should have a level of responsiveness, autonomy, and flexibility because we're talking about human beings," she explained.

This responsiveness revealed itself in many of Ms. Walker's interactions with her students, including the following response to one student's physical needs. Ms. Walker had just read aloud a biography of Genevieve Gillette, and she asked her students to tell a partner one thing Gillette did to work for the common good. As her students turned and talked to each other, Ms. Walker crouched beside Kiana and Trey to listen in on their conversation. After Kiana shared about Gillette's commitment to developing state parks, Ms. Walker engaged in the following conversation with her student, Trey:

Ms. Walker: Do you have anything to add to that, Trey, or are you still waking up a little bit?

Trey: I'm still waking up a little bit and I didn't get that much breakfast. . .

Ms. Walker: Well, when we go to our desks to work, I'll make sure you get some food, okay?

After transitioning the class to reading additional biographies about diverse leaders in the state, Ms. Walker retrieved an extra breakfast from the back of the room and brought it to Trey's desk. As Trey ate the bagel and cream cheese, he turned his attention to reading a biography of Andrew Blackbird.

In addition to supporting students' physical needs, Ms. Walker also revealed her commitment to supporting students' emotional needs. She continually elicited her students' thoughts and feelings, and she offered assistance to students who needed support re-engaging with their work. When one of her students shared that she felt like she was being excluded from her group, for instance, Ms. Walker took the time to listen to her concerns and then accompanied the student back to her group. "I bet they could use some of your artistic stylings on their poster," she suggested. Ms. Walker then asked the other two members of the group, "What do you guys think? How can she participate?" One of the students responded, "She can help me color the words," and the three students proceeded to finish working on their poster together.

Lastly, Ms. Walker made a strong effort to respond to her students' varied learning needs. During our interviews, it became apparent that Ms. Walker's endorsement in the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) influenced this effort. When describing her teaching of the unit, she explained, ". . . I have a high [English Learner]

population in my class that needs extra support and so sometimes I have to make things be small group when they're whole group or vice versa depending on what I think will work for them." This responsiveness further revealed itself in how Ms. Walker fostered discussion and collaboration among her students.

Fostering Discussion and Collaboration Among Students

During our initial interview, Ms. Walker shared that one of her goals as a beginning teacher was to improve her facilitation of class discussions. In support of this goal, she communicated clear expectations for her students and used several specific instructional moves. Throughout her enactment of the unit, for example, Ms. Walker continually emphasized the importance of "whole-body listening and learning." During one of the lessons, for instance, the students discussed the different purposes of state government and viewed videos to learn about how other states have attempted to solve the issue of plastic pollution. The students worked in small groups to develop posters illustrating the purposes of government that were shown in the videos and then had an opportunity to share their posters with the rest of the class. Prior to sharing, Ms. Walker said, "We're waiting for you to show us that you're ready to listen. Don't start yet. We need to set our expectations, remembering that you might be excited that you're going to share too but when it's not your turn to share, your materials are quiet. Your eyes are on the speaker."

After observing Ms. Walker's repeated references to "whole-body listening and learning," I asked her during our second interview what the phrase meant to her. She responded,

I want [the students] to think about how they can make themselves physically

ready to learn. And so we talk at the beginning of year. . . when you look at a

person your whole body is engaging in the listening. . . it looks like your voice is

off, your mouth is closed, you're looking at the speaker, or you're looking at

something that shows that you're engaged. You might be nodding. . . your

shoulders are facing the direction that the learning is in. . . calm body, sounds are

off, all these things, kinda like a check, check, check.

In addition to clearly communicating these expectations, Ms. Walker used

additional instructional moves that oriented students toward each other (Reisman et al.,

2017) during whole-class discussions. When students added onto other students'

comments, Ms. Walker often responded with positive reinforcement. After finishing her

read aloud of *The Water Walker*, for instance, Ms. Walker asked her students how they

could predict what a character would do next in a story. When Connor said they should

pay attention to the character's feelings, Benjamin responded, "if somebody is sad and

throwing a temper tantrum, like Connor said, you'd probably predict, oh somebody is

going to do something to cheer him up." Ms. Walker then responded, "Okay, I like how

you're building off of what Connor said. I can tell that you're listening to your classmates

when you respond like that to each other."

Another way in which Ms. Walker oriented students to each other was through

her use of turn and talks during whole-group discussions. Early in the unit, for example,

the teacher modeled how to examine an image of plastic pollution and then asked

students to engage in the process with a partner. "So right now, you're going to turn and

talk to a friend about something else you see, think, and wonder about the image." During

these turn and talks, Ms. Walker continued to play an active role, first scanning the rug to make sure every student was talking with a partner and directing students toward each other when needed. She typically circulated around the rug and crouched beside several pairs of students to listen in on their conversation, and she sometimes asked the pairs questions to probe their thinking or assisted them in communicating clearly with each other. At the end of the lesson in which students started planning their writing, for instance, Ms. Walker asked students to turn and talk with a partner who was not in their small group about the opinion and reasons they recorded on their planning sheets. After guiding several of the students toward each other, she crouched beside one of her students who had difficulty engaging with peers and asked, "Okay, are you ready to say it in a way that your audience can understand what you're saying? Okay, say it nice and clearly." She then reminded his partner, "Listen carefully to Naasir."

Ms. Walker also used whole-class discussions to encourage students to support each other. When the students gathered on the rug one afternoon to reflect on the letter drafting process, one of the students shared, "I found it challenging coming up with what to write sometimes. Because my mind is either focused on something else or I can't come up with anything sometimes. It's kind of a machine that comes out with nothing." Ms. Walker turned to the rest of the class and asked, "What is some advice if you're having a hard time getting started and you don't know what to write about?" Several students proceeded to share their advice with the student, from taking a break and getting a drink of water to removing distractions from their desks. During our final interview, Ms. Walker reflected on her ability to facilitate discussion. "The kids have true discussions

when they are driving the ship," she explained, "And I've had to really step back. . . if they're talking about what they want to talk about, they're going to have real discussion."

Unlike her facilitation of whole-group discussions, which she identified as one of her instructional goals in our initial interview, Ms. Walker acknowledged that the structure of the lesson plans influenced her commitment to supporting her students' collaboration as they worked in partners or small groups. During our first interview, she recognized that it can be easier to teach "whole-group everything" but she said she wanted to "[let] the kids do that important small-group work. Where they have to negotiate things with each other and learn how to work together. . . and construct their learning together." During our second interview, she further explained, "I think teachers, including myself, can get into the habit of having a very teacher-directed lesson because it's faster and it's easier but I like that this forces you to put the onus on the kids. . ."

Throughout the unit, Ms. Walker communicated with her students the importance of being able to work cooperatively with peers. At the close of one of the lessons that involved partner reading, Ms. Walker explained,

> I could tell a lot of people were really interested in the topic because you were reading, and you were focused with your partner. A few of us still need to work on how best to be focused on working with a partner. . . So, in third grade we're learning a lot about the world but one of the things we're also learning is how to work together with a partner. And if we can't work together with a partner, we're going to have a hard time doing our learning.

To further communicate the importance of working with partners, Ms. Walker elicited her students' ideas regarding how to collaborate effectively. During the fourth lesson of

the unit, for example, Ms. Walker assigned pairs to read an article about a cause of plastic pollution and record the main idea and details from the article onto a graphic organizer. Prior to sharing some of her own expectations for dyad reading, Ms. Walker asked, "What are some things we need to remember when we're reading with a partner or with a group?" In response, the students suggested staying on task and spreading out around the room to give other partners enough space.

During both partner and small-group work, Ms. Walker continually circulated around the classroom to support her students. When the students worked in small groups to create posters about the different branches of government, for example, Ms. Walker made an effort to check in with each of the groups. "So, it looks like you have a plan," she said to one of the groups, "Are you listening to all ideas? Do you all feel like you're being heard by your group?" Later in the unit, Ms. Walker emphasized the value of students supporting each other. As the students worked on planning their letters, she explained

> If you finished your support, then that's great because you're a resource for the other kids in your group and in the class. Because this is a good opportunity for us to be a community of learners where we work together to learn. So, if you're done, you should be checking in with your group and seeing if they need help.

As illustrated through these instructional moves, Ms. Walker fostered discussion and collaboration among her students by communicating high expectations around "whole-body listening and learning," orienting students to each other, using turn and talks, facilitating whole-class discussions, and encouraging students' collaboration during partner and small-group work.

Eliciting and Supporting Participation From all Students

Within this context of collaboration, Ms. Walker elicited and supported participation from her students by continually asking questions of her students and encouraging a variety of voices to respond, using "warm calling," lifting her students' ideas and experiences into class discussions, and encouraging "strong speaker voices."

Some of the questions Ms. Walker asked students related to their understanding of the different learning tasks. During a lesson in the middle of the unit, for example, when the students transitioned from learning about the public issue to planning their letter writing, she inquired, "What questions do you have so far looking at this and thinking about what we're going to be doing? Do you have any questions or is there anything that we need to explain better about what we're doing?" Later in the unit, after students had started drafting their writing, Ms. Walker asked, **"**Why don't you tell me your feedback on the writing process? How is this going for you? What's going well? Or what do you think you need some help with so I know what we need to work on?"

Other questions Ms. Walker asked related more to the content of the lesson. During one lesson, for instance, the students watched a short video about plastic pollution in the ocean and the teacher asked, "What does that, what you see here, make you wonder about plastic pollution in the Great Lakes? Somebody who hasn't shared this morning who has an idea?" During a later lesson in which the class focused on identifying the main idea and details within articles about plastic pollution, Ms. Walker asked, "Okay, what is a third supporting detail? I've heard a lot from Crystal and I love to hear from you. I'm wondering if somebody else can share this time. Jade?" During our final interview, Ms. Walker commented on the importance of calling on a wide range of

students. "I'm not saying I'm super successful about that all the time, but it is on my mind," she explained, "And I sometimes have to check myself."

In addition to asking questions and encouraging a variety of students to participate, Ms. Walker used the practice of "warm calling" (Boucher, n. d.) to support students who might be reluctant to participate in class discussions (i.e., alerting students that she would be asking them to share prior to calling on them during whole-class discussions). For example, during the lesson in which students viewed videos to learn about how other states have attempted to solve the issue of plastic pollution, Ms. Walker engaged the students in a discussion about one of New Jersey's solutions. After asking the students about the specific problem they were trying to solve, Ms. Walker engaged students in the following exchange:

> Ms. Walker: So, when New Jersey banned Styrofoam, which of these things did that state government do? Get ready to answer soon, Marcy, okay? I'm going to come to you. Conor?
>
> Conor: To, um, make and enforce laws.
>
> Ms. Walker: Yeah, they made a law to ban Styrofoam. Can you think of another thing that it does, Marcy?
>
> Marcy: To keep people safe.
>
> Ms. Walker: To keep people safe, yeah, again if we get plastic in our waterways and it ends up affecting the food that we eat.

Similar to other exchanges throughout the unit, Ms. Walker alerted Marcy that she would be calling on her and gave her time to generate her response. In describing these instructional moves during our final interview, Ms. Walker explained,

I try to give wait time for the kids, especially the English Learners but even some

of the other kids who tend to hang back because they don't feel confident. That's

why I do a lot of the turn and talks. So that they can get those ideas out, practice

with a friend and then share out.

As discussed earlier, Ms. Walker often used turn and talks to orient students to

each other. As shown through her comments, she used this same instructional move to

support her students' participation. Ms. Walker also supported her students' participation

by lifting their ideas into class discussions. After turn and talks, for instance, she would

often draw on what she heard to engage students who were not as eager to raise their

hands and share their ideas with the whole class. Toward the end of the class's discussion

about *The Water Walker*, Ms. Walker said to her students, "I want you to think about that

question. [The author's] asking you, reader: What are you going to do about it? Think

about that and share what you could do about it with someone who's sitting close to

you." As the students started talking excitedly with each other, Ms. Walker circulated

around the classroom and crouched beside Marcy and her partner. After a few minutes,

Ms. Walker rang a chime to get the students' attention and engaged the students in the

following exchange:

> Ms. Walker: I heard some really interesting things as I was walking around.
>
> Marcy, can you share with us what you said in answer to the question? What are
>
> you going to do about it? Talking about water that's being polluted.
>
> Marcy: I can put up signs or something like stop polluting water.
>
> Crystal: That's what I said.

Ms. Walker: You had that same idea? Because you are becoming writers, you are

writers that are becoming really good at communicating your ideas. And so

naturally one of the things you think of doing is writing about it. On a poster, for

example.

In this example, Ms. Walker listened to her students' ideas, encouraged one of her

student's participation, and affirmed her students as real "writers."

Lastly, Ms. Walker supported her students' participation by encouraging "strong

speaker voices." To assist students in developing their speaking skills, Ms. Walker often

passed a microphone to students before they shared their ideas with the class. During the

first lesson of the unit, for example, the teacher had the students brainstorm "need to

know" questions that needed to be addressed in order to address the public issue. After

modeling the process and giving students an opportunity to write their questions on sticky

notes, Ms. Walker said, "Kiana had a really good question. . . So, I'm going to have her

tell us what she's thinking. I'm going to have you use the microphone, Kiana, because

you're working on your strong speaking voice. You have a really nice idea to share."

Kiana proceeded to share her question into the microphone, "How can we make more

people know about this situation?" As shown through these examples, Ms. Walker used a

variety of instructional moves to elicit and support her students' participation.

Encouraging Consideration of Different Perspectives

In addition to including all students' voices in classroom discussions, Ms. Walker

welcomed and encouraged consideration of different perspectives on the public issue.

After watching a video about the plastic bag ban in California, for instance, one of the

students asked, "Do we keep them or get rid of them?" Ms. Walker responded,

That's a really good question. You're noticing, and actually we saw this on the video. . . there were some people who disagreed with the ban—who said that it wasn't good for their business, that it's not going to be good for the people who can't afford to pay the ten cents for plastic bags. So just what you're saying happens with a lot of issues—where you have some people disagree with each other. And how do we come to a resolution when we disagree about something? Let's think about that, okay? Let's think about that and notice that. I think we might have to be thinking about that throughout this unit.

Later in the unit, when the students were exploring different points of view on the issue of plastic pollution, Ms. Walker encouraged one of the students to share his thinking. "Benjamin has a different perspective I'd like him to share," she explained, "Put your eyes on Benjamin. Try to follow along with his reasoning for this." Benjamin then shared his concern regarding banning Styrofoam:

Styrofoam is less expensive, but if you ban Styrofoam you only have the more expensive options. Keep buying more expensive things and you lose more money. And you have to keep paying your employees. So, if you spend too much money on the plastic or other things you're going to end up having no more money and you're going to have to close down.

When it came time for the students to share their opinion on an exit ticket, Ms. Walker reminded them, "I don't know if you remember me saying this before but there are 21 kids in our class. . .That means there could be 21 points of views. . . because all of our opinions can be a little bit different."

During our final interview, Ms. Walker expanded upon how she encouraged students to respect different perspectives.

> Something that we talk about very, very early on in the year. . . is how we're here this year to learn and we learn from each other. We talk a lot about how we all look different when we're learning and we can expect different things from each other but that together, we're going to do our best learning. . .So we can learn from each other and we respect each other when somebody needs some extra time to think about something. Or when somebody is responding in a way that is different from us—how we can have respectful discussions and conversations about how our thinking is different.

In addition to highlighting different perspectives within her classroom, Ms. Walker encouraged her students to learn from each other and respect different ways of thinking about the issue.

A Community of Learners in Action

When I asked Ms. Walker during our final interview how her students responded to the unit, she shared that she could see a lot of growth in her students' ability to work together. A closer look at two of the focal students' experiences with the unit further illustrates the students' growth in collaborating and becoming members of the community of learners.

Naasir: From "bored to death" to "task force" participant. During our initial interview, Ms. Walker described Naasir as a student with learning differences who sometimes showed obstinance toward engaging in classroom activities. Later in the unit, she explained that Naasir qualified for English Language services and a 504 plan and that

the school was working on developing an individualized education plan (IEP) for him. According to Ms. Walker, Naasir could be quite rigid in his thinking, and his inflexibility often influenced his interactions with his peers and his engagement with writing activities. In her explanation of selecting him as a focal student who might struggle to engage with the project's charge to make a difference, Ms. Walker said, "I can see him saying, maybe, like what's the point or not agreeing and therefore not wanting to do it, potentially."

When I asked Naasir during our first interview what he thought about when he heard the words social studies, he responded, "Probably I'm bored to death because I want social studies to be over." In the same interview, I asked Naasir what he considered to be a possible solution to plastic solution in the Great Lakes. He proceeded to explain,

Oh yeah, I have one but it's not from school. I just thought of it. Get a giant bag, scoop all the animals in the ocean, and then probably just take them to a new planet that was just discovered or something. That looks like the Earth. A planet that looks like the Earth and dump all of them in there...A giant bag and then take them to outer space.

Throughout the unit, there were times when Naasir struggled to engage with his peers and resisted engaging with the issue of plastic pollution. During lesson nine, for instance, Naasir was working with a small group of students and, according to Ms. Walker, he became "hyper focused" on reading aloud with a French accent. When one of his groupmates, a student Ms. Walker identified as "very passionate about following the rules" became frustrated by Naasir's behavior, Ms. Walker joined their group and attempted to redirect them. Given Naasir's "resistance to budge," Ms. Walker decided to

pull Naasir aside and provide a space for him try out his accent. When describing this decision, Ms. Walker recognized the need to help Naasir be more flexible during social interactions, but she also recognized the need to meet him where he was. She further explained,

> . . . a lot of times I address the thing that he's kind of focused on and then we move on. And with him, I am firm a lot of times. I'm like, Naasir, we're focused on this right now, that can wait…I could tell this time he wasn't going to let go. I know him well enough now to know the kind of things. . .

In this instance, Ms. Walker used her knowledge of Naasir to be responsive to his emotional needs. After trying out his French accent with Ms. Walker, Naasir was able to join the rest of the class on a rug for a whole-class discussion about what the students had learned in their small groups.

Over the course of the unit, Naasir revealed a growing willingness to engage with the classroom community. After reading articles about different causes of plastic pollution, for instance, Ms. Walker called on Naasir during the whole-group discussion at the end of the lesson. "Naasir, can you share what you said to me earlier?" she asked. Naasir responded, "People are using the plastic things and throwing them away. And also people are drinking more from plastic bottles because they think tap water will do something to them." In this example, Naasir effectively used what he learned from his reading to engage with his classmates. This engagement was further revealed through his involvement with a special "task force."

During one of our interviews, Ms. Walker explained that Naasir typically spent his recess time alone on one of the playground's swings. She said she was pleasantly

surprised to learn that he had joined a student-initiated "plastic pollution task force" that emerged from their class discussions. Composed of a group of students who did not usually spend time together at recess, the task force committed themselves to cleaning up the plastic on their school's playground. At the end of the unit, Ms. Walker remarked, "He's grown a lot this year. . . [the task force] engaged him socially and with the curriculum."

As shown through these examples, Ms. Walker made an effort during the unit to respond to Naasir's emotional needs and lift his ideas into class discussions. Within this context, Naasir shifted from being "bored to death" with social studies to actively participating in the classroom community's "plastic pollution task force."

Trey: From struggling collaborator to active contributor. As previously described, Ms. Walker identified Trey as a student who sometimes found it difficult to collaborate with other students. During our initial interview, she explained, "Historically, whenever we do group work, he's in tears. . . it's stressful for him to collaborate." She further remarked, "He is really bright. . . but he has this self-perception that he can't do it and that he's not good at things."

Despite Trey's inclination to struggle during group work, there was only one lesson during the unit in which he had difficulty engaging with other students. During lesson four, he and Graham struggled to focus on reading an article about microplastics. Ms. Walker tried to redirect them and then decided to have them work separately. When reflecting on the group sharing that occurred after this partner work, Ms. Walker explained,

. . . they had to share out and [Trey] didn't have something to share and he was really upset. But he didn't have something to share out because he and Graham were over there (*points at small rug*) and they weren't focused. But I think that was a really good natural consequence because he felt that and it showed me that he does care. He wants to be seen as a knowledgeable person and he wants to participate in the community. So that was really interesting to see.

After experiencing this challenge, Trey showed improvement in his ability to engage with his peers. For example, during my first interview with him after lesson five, I asked him to reflect on working with a partner to learn about how different states have addressed the issue of plastic pollution. He explained how he and his partner collaborated on their poster and indicated that he enjoyed working as a team.

Later in the unit, after the students learned about the three branches of government, Ms. Walker asked the students to turn and talk with each other about which branch of government could help them address the public issue. As the students began talking with each other, Ms. Walker crouched down beside Marcy and Trey. Trey proceeded to share with his partner, "I think the legislative branch." When Ms. Walker asked him to explain why, he responded, "It could make a law that says no littering." Ms. Walker then asked Marcy, "Do you agree or disagree with Trey?" and Marcy responded, "I agree." After telling Trey that she would like him to share with the whole group, Ms. Walker pulled the students back together and Trey shared with the group, "I think the legislative branch because they could make a law that says no littering." A handful of students proceeded to make a hand signal to indicate their agreement with his idea. In this

example, Ms. Walker's supported Trey in sharing with a partner and then contributing his idea to the whole-class discussion.

Trey's letter further reveals his engagement with the unit and the community of learners. He focused his letter to his state Representative on developing a law that would require people to recycle plastic items, and he shared during our final interview that he was proud of the effort he put into his writing and his revisions. Before I thanked Trey for talking with me, he asked, "Will Representative Turner listen to me? Because I'm pretty sure he will, but will he actually?" In addition to mirroring the emphasis on listening that characterized Ms. Walker's instruction, Trey expressed that his ideas were worthy of listening to. Trey's question illustrates his transition from struggling to engage with classroom activities to actively participating as a member of the classroom (and broader) community.

Discussion

As shown through her instructional moves, Ms. Walker demonstrated use of many strategies to create an inclusive community of learners among her students: modeling care and responsiveness, fostering discussion and collaboration among her students, eliciting and supporting students' participation, and encouraging consideration of different perspectives. When examined alongside the focal students' engagement with the unit, the findings have important implications for teachers, researchers, and curriculum developers.

The findings from this study add to recent research that suggests that civic education must attend to the context in which it occurs (Andolina & Conklin, 2018; 2019). In her investigation of children's civic learning in the "in-between" spaces in

school, Hauver (2017) argues that civic education requires "explicit efforts to disrupt discourses and patterns that separate and exclude" and requires educators to "accept greater responsibility for modeling and fostering the sorts of civic thought and action that help democratic societies thrive" (p. 379). Ms. Walker's instruction offers a window into how teachers can follow through on this responsibility. Her instruction also offers support for Cramer and Toff's (2017) "Expanded Model of Civic Competence" (p. 758), described earlier. In addition to providing her students with opportunities to gain factual knowledge about civic and government (e.g., learning about the public issue and the structure of state government), Ms. Walker created a classroom community that valued listening to and learning from each other.

Relatedly, Ms. Walker's instruction offers support for further examination of the relational dimensions of Cohen, Raudenbush, and Ball's (2003) conceptualization of instruction. By modeling and encouraging SEL skills such as listening actively and considering different perspectives, Ms. Walker provides support for the link between SEL skills and project-based approaches to civic education. Given the challenge of fostering a culture of collaboration within PBL, addressing the relational dimensions of the instructional approach is a crucial step in realizing PBL's potential within civic education. As discussed in Limitations and Areas for Future Research, additional research should explore these relational dimensions with teachers who bring varying experiences and beliefs to their enactment of PBL and who teach in a range of different contexts.

Similar to research that explores teachers' enactment of curriculum materials (e.g., Ball & Cohen, 1996; Remillard, 2005), the current study offers additional evidence

to suggest the central role of teachers in shaping the enacted curriculum. As shown through the findings, Ms. Walker's knowledge, experiences, beliefs, and goals all influenced the ways in which she enacted the project-based unit and created a community of learners within her classroom. As suggested by previous project-based research (e.g., Rogers, Cross, Gresalfi, Trauth-Nare, & Buck, 2011) teachers' orientations need to be taken into account when considering how professional learning experiences can be responsive to teachers and what they bring to the enactment process.

In regard to curriculum development, it became clear through my interviews with Ms. Walker that she viewed the curriculum as unique from other curricula used by the school district. She noted that the format of the lesson plans provided space for students to "construct their learning together." As previously described, almost all of the unit's lesson plans encouraged teachers to have students work in either pairs or small groups for at least a portion of the lesson. Furthermore, many of the lesson plans encouraged teachers to use turn and talks during whole-group discussions. As shared in the findings, Ms. Walker acknowledged that the structure of the lesson plans influenced her commitment to supporting her students' collaboration. However, her active involvement in this collaborative work (e.g., circulating among pairs of students, probing their thinking, assisting them in communicating with each other), revealed itself as a defining feature of her instruction. Thus, the findings from this study suggest that developers of PBL curricula should attend carefully to structuring opportunities for students to work together, and they should encourage teachers to adopt an active role in supporting students during this collaborative work.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

There are several limitations to this study that are important to recognize. The first is the exclusive focus on a teacher who, as a co-designer of the unit, brought a unique background to her enactment of the curriculum. Although the focus on Ms. Walker limits the generalizability of the study, it allows for a detailed account of the instructional moves that may have supported the creation of an inclusive community of learners. Future research should study a broader range of teachers who bring varying experiences and beliefs to their enactment of the unit.

Another possible limitation relates to my potential influence on Ms. Walker's instruction and her response to interview questions. Although I encouraged her to try to enact the unit as she would if she was not participating in the study, my presence (and the presence of a video and audio recorder) may have influenced her teaching and decision making. Similarly, the fact that I conducted the interviews might have made Ms. Walker more reluctant to speak negatively about her experience with the unit. However, at the beginning of each interview I encouraged Ms. Walker to be honest in her responses, and the findings suggest that she was willing to share about challenges with her experience.

My role as a co-developer of the unit could also be considered a limitation of the study. Although I continually reflected on how my different identities influenced the data I collected and the interpretation process, my subjectivities undoubtedly shaped the research process. However, as previously noted, I made a strong effort to remain open to evidence that challenged my interpretations and to resist interpreting the data to match my experiences and expectations.

A final limitation relates to the limited amount of data that addresses the influence Ms. Walker's instruction had on her students' engagement with the unit. In their Action Civics research with high school students, Andolina and Conklin (2019) concluded, "Subsequent research would do well to design instruments that are more focused on assessing these relational dimensions and their impact" (p. 31). Although the classroom observations and focal student interviews enabled me to capture some aspects of students' engagement, additional forms of data (e.g., student surveys, more in-depth interviews) could offer deeper insight into how the relational dimensions of instruction influence students' engagement in civic education and the extent to which they become active citizens.

Conclusion

Given the challenge of supporting students' collaboration within project-based contexts and the growing recognition of the importance of fostering the relational dimension of civic engagement, this study offers an important window into how teachers can create inclusive communities of learners within their classrooms. Through modeling care and responsiveness, fostering discussion and collaboration, eliciting and supporting students' participation, and encouraging consideration of different perspectives, Ms. Walker created a learning space that appeared to support her students' engagement with her, with each other, and with the civics and government unit. The findings have important implications for teachers, researchers, and curriculum developers who are interested in bridging the worlds of civic education and social-emotional learning within project-based contexts and supporting students' active participation in our country's democracy.

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Chapter III

Writing Instruction During Project-Based Learning in Two Diverse Third-Grade Classrooms

Abstract

This study explored two teachers' writing instruction during a project-based civics and government unit in diverse third-grade classrooms. The data included observations and video recordings of teachers' enactment of the unit, teacher interviews, and artifacts of instruction and student work. Analysis included deductive coding and memo writing to test propositions and to search for alternative explanations. The findings reveal that the teachers were able to use multiple evidence-based writing practices during their enactment of the unit. The challenges they experienced demonstrate the difficulty of providing writing instruction that meets students' varied learning needs. The findings illuminate a need for greater consistency in language and instructional approaches across learning domains and the need for additional exploration of the particular resources and professional development opportunities that can best support teachers' writing instruction within project-based contexts.

Introduction

Over the past decade there has been a growing emphasis on opinion/argument writing in the elementary grades. Drawing from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2011 writing framework, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) called for an unprecedented thirty percent of writing instruction and assessments to be allocated to persuasive writing. Furthermore, the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2013) suggest that students should be able to use evidence to develop claims in response to compelling questions by the end of fifth grade. Together, these national learning standards in the United States reflect a change in expectations around developing students' ability to understand and engage in academic forms of argumentation. According to O'Hallaron (2014), "…the implementation of these reforms means that even the youngest students will soon be asked to engage in a kind of reasoning and writing that has generally not been addressed until the advanced grades" (p. 305).

These heightened expectations around writing are coupled with inequities in learning opportunities afforded to students from underserved communities. In one study that explored second graders' opportunities to read and write text during social studies instruction, Strachan (2016) found that students in low-SES school settings had fewer opportunities than students in high-SES school settings to write independently or to an audience other than the teacher. These inequities, which have also been found in literacy instruction across the school day (Duke, 2000; Wright & Neuman, 2014), threaten to

further exacerbate the opportunity gaps (Milner, 2012) that pervade our nation's schools. They also threaten to inhibit students from developing the writing and argumentation skills needed to participate fully in a healthy democracy (Andrews, Torgerson, Low, and McGuinn, 2009).

As educators try to develop practices that can engage all students in the type of higher-order reasoning that is necessary to meet the demands of writing, a growing number of educators are exploring project-based instruction as a possible approach (Duke, 2014). Research suggests that integrated literacy and social studies project-based learning (PBL) has the potential to provide young students from low-socioeconomic status backgrounds with meaningful learning opportunities (Duke, Halvorsen, Strachan, Kim, & Konstantopoulos, 2020; Halvorsen et al., 2012), but PBL can be quite challenging to enact, particularly for teachers who are new to the instructional approach (Condliffe et al., 2017; Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik, & Soloway, 1997). Although teachers report that curriculum materials can be helpful with their transition to using the approach (Revelle, 2019), there are still a variety of challenges that teachers need to navigate. Within the research on PBL in social studies, some of the most commonly reported challenges are finding instructional time and scaffolding student learning (Parker et al., 2013; Whitlock, 2013). Recent research suggests that scaffolding students' writing development can be particularly difficult within project-based contexts (Duke et al., 2020; Revelle, 2019). Given the importance of developing students' writing skills, there remains a need to better understand how teachers navigate this challenge. In this study, I examine two teachers' writing instruction across a project-based civics and government unit in diverse third-grade classrooms.

<center>**Literature Review**</center>

Project-based Learning

   Scholars have defined and enacted project-based learning in various ways since its first introduction during the early twentieth century's Progressive Era (Knoll, 1997), but a common set of features typically guides the use of the instructional approach. In his review of research on PBL, for instance, Thomas (2000) identified a set of five criteria that are needed in order to classify a project as PBL. According to Thomas, projects within PBL are central to the curriculum, are focused on questions or problems that "drive" learning, involve the construction and transformation of knowledge, are student-driven to a significant degree, and focus on authentic or real-world challenges (p. 3). The Buck Institute for Education (BIE), a non-profit organization that works to build the capacity of teachers and school leaders to design and facilitate PBL, convened a group to develop criteria for evaluating the quality of projects. Their final product, *A Framework for High Quality Project Based Learning* (HQPBL, 2018), aims to describe high quality PBL in terms of the student experience and identifies the following six criteria:

1. "Intellectual challenge and accomplishment – Students learn deeply, think critically, and strive for excellence;

2. Authenticity – Students work on projects that are meaningful and relevant to their culture, their lives, and their future;

3. Public product – Students' work is publicly displayed, discussed, and critiqued;

4. Collaboration – Students collaborate with other students in person or online and/or receive guidance from adult mentors and experts;

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5. Project management – Students use a project management process that enables them to proceed effectively from project initiation to completion;

6. Reflection – Students reflect on their work and their learning throughout the project" (pp. 3–5).

According to the framework, all six criteria must be at least minimally present in a project in order to consider it high quality.

Although project-based learning is commonly associated with the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines, a growing number of researchers and educators have found project-based approaches to be promising within social studies education (Duke, Halvorsen & Strachan, 2016). Several studies, ranging from second-grade classrooms (Duke et al., 2020; Halvorsen et al., 2012) to middle school history classes (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009) and secondary Advanced Placement (AP) U.S. Government and Politics courses (Parker et al., 2013), have found that students engaged in project-based approaches performed better on assessments than students experiencing more traditional instruction. Other studies have documented qualitatively how students engaged in project-based approaches demonstrated increases in their civic knowledge and their self-efficacy related to civic engagement (Mayes, Mitra, & Serriere, 2016; Whitlock, 2013). Probing deeper into the literature provides useful insight into some of the challenges that can accompany a project-based approach.

Supporting Students' Learning within PBL

A common challenge reported within the literature on project-based learning relates to teachers' ability to scaffold their students' learning. In an early review of research on project-based learning, for example, Thomas (2000) concluded that the

effectiveness of project-based learning may depend on "the incorporation of a range of supports to help students learn how to learn" (p. 34). In a more recent literature review of project-based learning, Condliffe et al. (2017) highlight the importance of using assessments to tailor scaffolds to students' current levels of understanding and fading scaffolds over time as students apply their new knowledge and skills on their own. They suggest that PBL design principles need to be more specific around how scaffolds are determined and faded.

The PBL studies focused on social studies offer additional evidence to support Condliffe et al.'s (2017) claim. At the secondary level, for instance, Parker and colleagues (2013) collaborated with teachers and scholars across a variety of fields to develop a PBL curriculum for the Advanced Placement U.S. Government and Politics course. Placing students in civic roles such as legislator, cabinet secretary, interest group member, judge, journalist, lobbyist, and citizen, they sought to have students "experience" government and politics while studying them intensively. In their quasi-experimental study of 289 students in 12 classrooms across four schools, they found that students enrolled in the PBL course scored higher on the AP test than students enrolled in traditional AP courses in both moderate- and high-achieving schools. They also found that PBL students in the high-achieving schools were better able than traditional students to apply the AP content to a complex problem in a novel situation, though the researchers found a floor effect on their deeper learning assessment within the moderate-achieving schools. Given these findings, Parker and colleagues emphasize the importance of developing reading, writing, and other scaffolds that can help less prepared students succeed in PBL contexts.

In one of the largest studies of project-based learning to date, Duke et al. (2020) found evidence to suggest that scaffolding students' writing development can be a particular challenge within PBL contexts. Using a cluster randomized controlled trial, the researchers investigated the impact of PBL instruction on the social studies and literacy achievement and motivation of second-grade students from high-poverty, low-performing school districts. The study assigned 48 teachers at random in within-school pairs to the experimental or to the comparison group and asked the experimental group teachers to teach four PBL units (economics, geography, history and civics and government). Comparison group teachers were asked to teach their regular social studies curriculum, and they agreed to teach 80 lessons over the course of the year to keep the amount of social studies instruction constant across the two groups. The project-based units addressed social studies and literacy standards; made use of research-supported instructional practices; involved students in addressing a real problem, need, or opportunity in the world; and provided opportunities for students to make choices about the project and to collaborate with one another.

Although the researchers found that students in the project-based classrooms showed higher growth in social studies and informational reading than students in traditional classrooms, they did not find a significant difference between the groups' writing development. One possible explanation they provide is that the amount of writing and writing support included in the units was not sufficient for significant effects. However, the researchers did find that teachers whose implementation of PBL was more consistent with the unit's lessons had students with higher average growth in writing. The finding that teachers varied in their success in implementing writing instruction in PBL is

supported by evidence from Revelle's (2019) follow-up study. In their end-of-year interviews, all 24 of the experimental teachers reported that their students were engaged and learned from the curriculum, but half of the teachers discussed the difficulty of engaging all of their students in the lessons, particularly during the writing portion of the projects. "The biggest challenge," reported one teacher, "would be motivating the reluctant writers to produce anything." Another teacher shared, "There was a lot of writing and rewriting and rewriting. . . .It was hard to keep [students'] interest in some parts." Some of the teachers perceived the curriculum as appropriate for their more advanced students but considered it too rigorous for their struggling students, and they discussed the difficulty of scaffolding student learning, including writing, for students working at significantly different levels and rates. These findings are consistent with previous research (e.g., Marx et al., 1997) that suggests the importance of providing teachers with more tools for differentiation within project-based curriculum and offering teachers a variety of strategies for supporting student learning.

Writing Instruction in the Elementary Grades

The challenge of teaching writing to elementary school students is echoed in the literature on evidence-based writing instruction. In their rationale for conducting a meta-analysis of writing instruction, for instance, Graham, McKeown, Kiuhara, and Harris (2012) highlight studies that "have raised serious concerns about the quality of writing instruction received by students in the elementary grades" (p. 880). In one of the studies, Gilbert and Graham (2010) surveyed elementary teachers from grades 4–6 across the United States about their writing practices. The random sample of teachers reported that the writing activities they assigned included writing-to-learn activities, but other types of

writing such as persuasive writing, writing to inform, writing to describe, and research reports were assigned infrequently. Such a limited repertoire of instructional attention to writing is not surprising given that they reported teaching writing for only 15 minutes a day and that their students spent just 25 minutes a day writing texts of a paragraph length or longer. As previously mentioned, Strachan (2016)'s examination of opportunities to read and write text during social studies instruction in second-grade classrooms also raises concerns around the quality of students' writing instruction. Strachan found that all of the second-grade classrooms in her study provided limited opportunities to write independently or for an audience other than the teacher; these opportunities were even more limited for students in low-SES school settings.

In their review of evidence for successful practice in writing instruction for 7- to 14-year olds (with a focus on what they termed *argumentational writing*), Andrews et al. (2009) examined 16 experimental and quasi-experimental studies and found that positive effects were observed for instruction that included the following conditions. In addition to using a writing process model that included planning, drafting, editing, and revising, the teachers used heuristics that scaffolded students' use of particular writing structures and devices (e.g., a detailed planning sequence), explicit explanations and goals, teacher modeling, peer collaboration, and procedural facilitation or coaching. Given that some of the studies focused on instruction in middle school, the teachers also used oral argument, counterargument, and rebuttal to inform students' written arguments. Research such as that conducted by De La Paz et al., (2016) offers additional evidence of instructional practices that support the development of middle school students' argument writing,

although there remains a need for research exploring elementary school teachers' use of evidence-based writing practices.

Theoretical Framework and Research Question

This study draws from multiple theoretical lenses to explore teachers' enactment of writing practices within project-based learning. In addition to drawing from Cohen, Raudenbush, and Ball's (2003) concept of instruction as dynamic interaction, the study also draws from the tenets of the evidence-based practice movement (Graham, Harris & Chambers, 2016).

Instruction as Dynamic Interaction

In their seminal piece on educational resources, Cohen and colleagues challenge researchers to think beyond access and allocation of resources in evaluating educational quality. Rather, they assert, researchers need to recognize that schools and teachers with similar resources can use those resources very differently. Conventional resources such as class size or curriculum, they suggest, "only count as they enter instruction, and that happens only as they are noticed and used" (p. 128). Cohen and colleagues conceptualize instruction as a dynamic interaction of teachers and students, around content, within environments (see Figure 3.1).
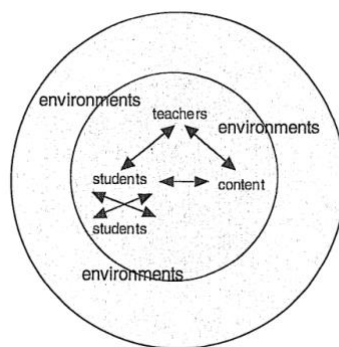
Figure 3.1: Cohen, Raudenbush, and Ball's (2003, p. 124) depiction of instruction as interaction that is situated in context.

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Cohen et al., (2003) encourage researchers to view instruction as "a stream, not an event," that "flows in and draws on environments" and they assert that the central focus in research should not be on resources alone but the instruction in which resources are used (p. 122). Although the PBL studied in this paper is supported by a detailed set of curriculum materials, I respond to Cohen and colleagues' charge by viewing the writing practices within the project-based curriculum as a resource and by seeking to understand how and to what extent the resource is used within instruction. More specifically, I explore how the teachers use evidence-based writing practices within their enactment of a project-based civics and government unit and the interactions around their use.

Evidence-based Writing Practices

According to Graham, Harris and Chambers (2016), the underlying assumption of the evidence-based practice movement that emerged in the 1990s was that "practitioners in a field should apply the best evidence available to make conscious, informed, and judicious decisions for their clients (p. 211)" Although the movement began in medicine (e.g., Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray, Haynes, & Richardson, 1996), it spread to fields such as education and has since involved using evidence to make decisions about assessment, instruction, evaluation, and management. In their review of reviews of evidence-based practice and writing instruction, Graham et al. (2016) argue that although the application of evidence-based practices does not guarantee teachers' success with writing instruction, "teachers' use of instructional procedures with a proven track record is likely to increase their success, which will in turn increase their desire and motivation to teach writing" (p. 222)." Graham et al. further explain that evidence-based practices can provide teachers

with a "general roadmap for teaching writing," but they offer an important caveat. According to these researchers,

> . . . teachers who apply such knowledge to their own classrooms will benefit most (as will their students) if they contextualize it with what they know about their students and the experience and practical knowledge they have acquired about how to teach writing, making it work within their own particular context (p. 222).

In the process of studying teachers' use of evidence-based writing practices, this study honors Graham et al.'s caveat and strives to understand how teachers contextualize such practices within their particular environments.

The specific evidence-based writing practices that are the focus of this study come from the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Educator's Practice Guide to *Teaching Elementary School Students to be Effective Writers* (Graham et al., 2012). In an effort to offer educators specific, evidence-based recommendations that address the challenge of teaching writing in elementary school, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) convened a panel of academic researchers and practitioners to combine their expertise with the findings of rigorous research to develop specific recommendations for educators. The Practice Guide provides four overarching recommendations that are each described with activities and strategies teachers can implement in their classrooms to increase their students' writing achievement. Using the Institute of Education Sciences' criteria for the level of evidence, the authors assigned one of three levels of evidence (strong evidence, moderate evidence, minimal evidence) to each recommendation (see Appendix I). Given the rigorous and consensus-centered approach of the Practice Guide, this study uses that document as a heuristic for examining writing instruction within a project-based context.

Recognizing the growing emphasis on opinion/argument writing in the elementary grades and the challenge of supporting students' writing development within project-based contexts, this study explores the following research question: How do two third-grade teachers enact evidence-based writing practices during a project-based civics and government unit?

Method

To explore this question, I used a collective case study design (Stake, 1995). Researchers using a case study approach aim to understand a phenomenon through multiple perspectives and data sources (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The current report focuses on two cases, or classrooms, as the third-grade teachers enact writing practices within an integrated civics and literacy project-based unit. Through focusing on these cases, I aimed to contextualize the experience of the teachers and their students and access the ways the teachers made sense of their enactment of writing practices.

Participants and School Contexts

During the summer of 2017, I had the opportunity to collaborate with a team from a school district in a Midwestern state to develop a third-grade, project-based social studies curriculum for use across the district. In addition to contributing to the project concepts and design principles of the four units, I worked closely with one of the teachers, Ms. Walker, to develop the civics and government unit. My involvement in the curriculum development process fostered my curiosity around how teachers enacted the curriculum and led me to select this site for this study. In an effort to better understand the learning opportunities afforded to a diverse group of students, I studied third-grade teachers in schools serving students from socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. For

the purposes of this study, teachers had to have a demonstrated interest in social studies education, defined as a willingness to teach the unit and to engage in conversations with the researcher about the enactment process. Schools serving a socioeconomically diverse group of students were defined as schools in which at least 25% and no more than 75% of students qualify for free or reduced-priced-lunch. After soliciting a district administrator's nominations of teachers who met these criteria, I invited the teachers to participate in the study.

  Ms. Miller and Riverside Elementary School. At the time of the study, Ms. Miller, a White woman, was in her 13th year in the classroom and in her sixth year in third grade at Riverside Elementary School. Prior to starting her teaching career, she completed an undergraduate teacher education program majoring in science and minoring in language arts, and she later earned a Master of Arts in Reading. Ms. Miller served as a member of the district's science committee, and she taught the full civics and government unit during the school year prior to the study. During our initial interview, she indicated that she did not consider social studies or writing to be areas of strength in her teaching.

  Riverside Elementary School enrolled approximately 300 students in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade during the 2018–19 school year, and the school qualified for Title 1 funding. At the time of the study, 33% of the students within the school qualified as economically disadvantaged, and families within the school identified with the following racial/ethnic groups: 47% White, 21% Hispanic/Latino, 20% Asian, 9% two or more races, and 3% African American.

  Ms. Miller had 19 students in her classroom including ten boys and nine girls. Three of Ms. Miller's students qualified for English Language services and two of her

students had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Ms. Miller shared a teaching assistant with several other classrooms. When the assistant was present during social studies lessons, she typically worked with one of the students who qualified for special education services.

Ms. Walker and Broadway Elementary School. Ms. Walker, a White woman, was in her 3rd year teaching third grade at Broadway Elementary School at the time of the study. Prior to teaching third grade, Ms. Walker worked as a math and literacy tutor across grades K–5 and she earned her Master of Arts in Elementary Education. Ms. Walker served on the social studies curriculum development committee, and she and I worked together to develop the civics and government unit that became the focus of this study. She taught an abbreviated version of the unit during the school year prior to the study. During our initial interview, she described herself as someone who has been motivated to learn about government for a long time.

Broadway Elementary School enrolled close to 300 students in kindergarten through fifth grade during the 2018–19 school year, and the school qualified for Title 1 funding. At the time of the study, 51% of the students within the school qualified as economically disadvantaged, and families within the school identified with the following racial/ethnic groups: 48% White, 17% Hispanic/Latino, 16% African American, 14% two or more races, and 5% Asian.

Ms. Walker had 21 students in her classroom including 11 boys and 10 girls. Six of Ms. Walker's students qualified for English Language services and four of her students had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). A new teaching assistant began working in Ms. Walker's classroom around the same time she started teaching the unit. Although the

teaching assistant supported all of the students, she worked most directly with one of the students who qualified for special education services.

Curriculum

In developing the new social studies curriculum, we designed the units to be inquiry-oriented and project-based and to provide opportunities for teachers to engage in culturally responsive practices. We also designed the units to align with the state's social studies standards, the C3 Framework (NCSS, 2019) and to address selected reading and writing standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). As described in the curriculum design principles (see Appendix A), the C3 Framework (NCSS, 2013) informed the inquiry-oriented principles used throughout the design process. Second-grade units developed by Duke et al. (2017) guided the development of the principles related to project-based learning, the structure of each lesson in the third-grade units, and the format of the lesson plans, a prepared social studies curriculum from a neighboring county informed some of the content included in the unit, and the school district's definition of culturally responsive teaching informed the final set of principles.

The civics and government unit developed from these design principles consists of 18 lessons in which teachers support students in exercising their rights and responsibilities as citizens by writing persuasive letters to state-level leaders that argue their position on a public issue relating to the state (see Appendices C and D for an abstract and overview of the unit). Each session includes a detailed lesson plan that was designed to take between 40–50 minutes. Most lessons within the unit follow the same format, drawn from Halvorsen et al., (2012):

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1. Whole-group instruction and discussion (usually 10 minutes) – The teacher generates students' interest and excitement about the project and provides explicit teaching.

2. Guided small-group or individual instruction (usually 20–30 minutes) – Students work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

3. Whole-group review and reflection (usually 10 minutes) – Students share their work and the teacher clarifies confusions and reviews key terms.

The students spent the first half of the unit learning about the issue through a variety of sources (e.g., informational texts, photographs, videos). They explored different perspectives on the issue and learned about how other states have addressed the issue. In determining who should receive their letter, students explored concepts such as representative government and they learned about government leaders at the state level. Although the first half of the unit involved some writing (e.g., at the end of Session 4, students wrote about what they had learned about the public issue), the majority of writing instruction occurred during the second half of the unit (see lessons 10–18 in Appendix C). During these lessons, the teacher guided students through a writing process (i.e., planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) that culminated with students sending their letters to their intended audiences.

To help support teachers in their initial teaching of the unit, we designed the lessons around a single driving question: What can the state do to reduce plastic pollution in the Great Lakes? Although the curriculum materials invite the teachers to focus the unit on a different public issue that is important to them and their students, the teachers within the current study focused on the issue of plastic pollution in the Great Lakes.

Other than Ms. Walker's involvement in the curriculum development process, the teachers engaged in limited professional development around the unit. More specifically, district leaders introduced teachers to the four new social studies units over about an hour prior to the beginning of the 2017 school year.

Data Sources

Due to its emphasis on multiple perspectives, the case study approach requires the use a variety of data sources (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Stake, 2005). For participating classrooms, I collected multiple forms of data during the teachers' enactment of the civics and government unit during the 2018–2019 school year.

Observations. I observed, video recorded, and took field notes on all 18 lessons of the civics and government unit. Both teachers' enactment of the unit included 22 days of instruction, as they both took more than one day to teach several of the lessons. In an effort to maintain ecological validity, I assumed the role of observer-as-participant during classroom observations. As such, I informed students that I was interested in learning about their social studies lessons and that it was my job to video record the lessons and to write down what I noticed about the work they did. Other than asking occasional questions about the students' work, my engagement with the students and the practice of teaching was limited. When the teachers asked questions of me, I did my best to reflect the questions back to them (e.g., "That's a good question, what do you think?"), and I explained that my goal was to learn from them and their experiences so I could support the district's work and inform the field. Given that social studies units are not typically enacted with a second adult in the room (particularly a co-author of the unit plan), this

approach aimed to maximize the extent to which the findings reflected how the teachers would have enacted the unit on their own.

Interviews and informal conversations. I interviewed the teachers three times over the course of the study—prior to teaching the unit, midway through her enactment of the unit, and after completing the unit (see Appendix D for Teacher Interview Protocols). I also engaged in informal conversations with the teachers after many of the lessons. I used these interviews and conversations to learn more about the teachers' backgrounds and instructional approaches prior to teaching the unit as well as their goals for the unit, how they engaged with the curriculum materials and their perceptions of students' learning opportunities. I also elicited their ideas regarding future revisions to the unit and professional learning experiences that could be beneficial to teachers enacting the unit.

Classroom artifacts. Throughout the teachers' enactment of the unit, I collected artifacts of instruction (e.g., photographs of teacher documentation) and samples of student work (e.g., graphic organizers, written work, rubrics) from the classrooms. Across the two classrooms, three families did not provide consent for me to use their children's classwork in the study.

Data Analysis

I began the data analysis process soon after data collection began. After each classroom observation, I reviewed my field notes, recorded reflections and questions on a post-observation guide (see Appendix J), and I engaged in some initial coding of the data using an inductive approach (Charmaz, 2014). I transcribed all interviews and observations shortly after conducting them, and I engaged in memo writing at least once

a week to record emerging patterns and questions. After finishing data collection, I reviewed all of the data and continued using an inductive approach to the coding process. My original research questions, which broadly explored teachers' enactment of the unit, resulted in a wide range of descriptive, process, and in vivo codes, from "teacher goals" to "using turn and talk" to "writing process" (Saldaña, 2016).

As I reviewed my initial codes and memos regarding the teachers' instruction, I engaged in "progressive focusing" (Parlett & Hamilton, 1976) of the research questions and made the decision to focus one of my questions on how the two teachers enacted evidence-based writing practices during the unit. At this time, I created two forms of enactment calendars—one that provides a broad overview of the enactment timeline and another that includes a brief summary of each of the lessons across the unit (see Appendices K and L for excerpts from the calendars). These calendars enabled me to view broader patterns in the teachers' writing instruction (e.g., how many days they spent on each of the writing lessons and whether they followed the general structure of the lesson plans).

I then transitioned to a deductive approach to coding, using the WWC Practice Guide (Graham et al., 2012) as a heuristic for examining the teachers' writing pedagogy (see Appendix I). I coded specific writing practices used by the teachers and discussed within the teacher interviews and copied and pasted examples of each practice into a separate document. Under "Expand students' concept of audience," for instance, I identified instances in which the teachers referred to the recipients of students' letters. During session 10, for example, Ms. Miller asked her students, "Who could you write your letters to?" and engaged her students in a discussion about possible recipients.

After compiling and reviewing the practices used by each of the teachers, I developed a set of propositions for each teacher (e.g., Ms. Walker used a variety of strategies to encourage students to collaborate as writers; Ms. Miller gave her students choice over their selected audiences). I tested and refined the propositions developed through this process with multiple passes of the data, and I also reviewed artifacts of instruction to triangulate my findings. Throughout my analysis, I continued to use memo writing as a way to examine how the data did or did not "fit together" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, p. 123).

Validity

In addition to striving toward ecological validity through my observer-as-participant status and a naturalistic study design, I worked toward validity, or credibility in my descriptions and interpretations, in four ways: triangulating data sources, member checking, reflecting on my subjectivities, and collecting and analyzing data through an iterative process.

As described by Yin (2018), a major strength of case study research is the opportunity to collect information from multiple sources. This opportunity allows for data triangulation, or using different sources to corroborate findings. Along with comparing findings across data sources (e.g., a teacher's comments in an interview and her instructional moves), I tried to continually remain alert to data that challenged my findings and to be open to revising my interpretations.

In addition to triangulating the data, I used multiple forms of member checking, or sharing data and interpretations with informants to check for their perceived accuracy, to challenge threats to the study's validity. Post-unit interviews with the teachers

provided an opportunity to share interpretations with them and check for accuracy. Furthermore, I met with both teachers after completing my analyses to share my findings with them, and they approved of my representation of them and their classrooms and my interpretation of their writing instruction.

My subjectivities undoubtedly influenced the research process. According to Peshkin (1988), the personal qualities that we bring to the research process "have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement" (p. 17). Peshkin, however, also describes subjectivity as potentially "virtuous" in its ability to help researchers make "a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected" (p. 18). As a White woman, a former elementary school teacher who enacted project-based approaches, a former facilitator of university-community service learning partnerships, a current doctoral candidate whose work has focused largely on PBL, and a co-author of the unit being studied, I am aware that my different identities and experiences shaped the development of this study and the impressions I formed during data collection and analysis. As an experienced classroom teacher, I believe that project-based curriculum can offer a way to support teachers in providing students with meaningful learning opportunities, but I am aware of challenges inherent in adopting the approach and am open to learning from other teachers' experiences. In an effort to resist interpreting the data to match my experiences and expectations, I engaged in reflexive memo writing throughout the study. More specifically, I continually thought about and reflected on how my background, my past experiences as a teacher, my relationships with the teachers, and

my feelings about PBL and writing instruction influenced the data I collected and the interpretation process, and I endeavored to remain open to evidence that challenged my interpretations.

Throughout the study, I strove for the holistic approach to validity put forth by Cho and Trent (2006) that is "ever present and recursive" (p. 327). I used an iterative process for data collection and analysis that enabled "continuous re-examination and reflection" of the data (Kourtizin, 2002, p. 133). In addition to re-examining my subjectivities, I continually checked my propositions against confirming and disconfirming evidence and examined the way I chose to write about my findings. By engaging in this dynamic, cyclical process of data collection and analysis, I consciously worked toward accurate and ethical representation of the teachers and their students in my examination of how the teachers enacted evidence-based writing practices within their teaching of the civics and government unit.

Findings

Throughout their enactment of the civics and government unit, both Ms. Miller and Ms. Walker used many of the recommendations put forth in the What Works Clearinghouse's (WWC) Practice Guide for *Teaching elementary school students to be effective writers* (See Appendix I, Graham et al., 2012). As the teachers used these evidence-based writing practices, they both experienced challenges that offer important insight into difficulties educators might encounter when teaching writing within project-based contexts. After sharing two vignettes that illustrate teachers' use of the evidence-based practices, I offer findings that relate to each of the WWC Practice Guide's overarching recommendations.

Ms. Miller – Providing Purpose for Students' Work

On a Wednesday morning in early January, Ms. Miller began the first lesson of the civics and government unit by showing her third-grade students a short video of a researcher from the University of Michigan discovering plastic pollution in her hometown on the shoreline of Lake Michigan. Captivated by the video, the students listened carefully as the researcher left them with the following charge, "We need to raise awareness about plastic pollution so that others can learn about this important issue. This includes people that you know but also people working at the state level. Everyone, including young people, needs to get involved."

After showing the video, Ms. Miller elicited from students some initial ideas regarding why plastic can be problematic. "Because fish think it's food," shared one student. "It can have bad chemicals in it," commented another student. Ms. Miller recorded their ideas and then presented her students with a collection of small plastic items including a sandwich bag, a lunch tray, and a water bottle. She asked students to identify some benefits of plastic and wrote their ideas (e.g., "it's lightweight and easy to find") on the chart paper. Ms. Miller then oriented the students to the compelling question that would drive their work throughout the unit, "What can our state do to reduce plastic pollution in the Great Lakes?" She further explained, "You're going to be writing an opinion letter to someone in the government. . . but in order to do that, we have to think about, we have to make a plan."

Before drawing the lesson to a close, Ms. Miller guided her students through brainstorming questions they had about the issue and the letter writing project. "How much plastic is in the Great Lakes?" asked one student. Another student wondered,

"Who should we write to?" Ms. Miller recorded the students' questions on chart paper

(see Figure 3.2) and then informed them that they would be spending the next couple of

weeks learning more about the public issue and their state government so they could

develop their opinions and decide who should receive their letters.
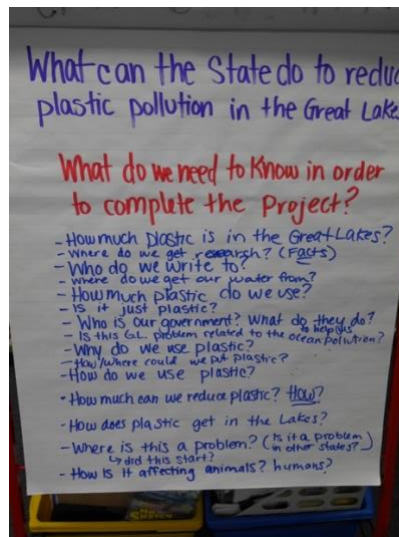
Figure 3.2: Ms. Miller's record of students' questions about the project

Ms. Walker – Supporting a Collaborative Planning Process

In another third-grade classroom across town, Ms. Walker engaged her students

in Lesson 10 of the civics and government unit. After reminding students of all of the

work they had done to learn about the public issue, she oriented the students to the

supporting question guiding their work that morning, "How do I share my opinion in a

letter?" She further explained,

> *We can't just send anything in the mail. It's not going to make any sense if we just*
>
> *write something without any organization or without any purpose. We have to be*
>
> *very thoughtful about how we share our opinion so that when it's read it makes*
>
> *sense. And maybe something will happen. . .*

Ms. Walker then guided her students through identifying the key features of a mentor letter and the strategy of using an opinion writing planner. She said to her students,

> *I love this graphic organizer. It's so helpful in writing opinion letters. Because you can write your point of view right here, your opinion, what you think. . . and then you can write your reasons here (points to planner). . .and then things that you read and watched and learned about the public issue that support your reason.*

After modeling how to use the opinion writing planner (see Appendix M) using information from the mentor letter, Ms. Walker informed her students that they would be working in small groups to discuss their points of view and to begin work on their planners. "Because our learning community has lots of ideas," she explained, "more ideas than just one person would have."

Ms. Walker then divided the class into small groups of three students and circulated around the room to support their work. When she noticed that one of the groups was making good progress with their planners, she remarked,

> *I love that your group is writing reasons and support. Keep doing that for a little bit, as long as you can think of something. And if somebody in your group is having a hard time thinking of it, you can help each other come up with those reasons, okay?*

Prior to wrapping up the lesson, Ms. Walker gathered her students back to the rug at the front of the classroom and asked them to find a partner who was not in their small group. "Share with them your opinion, reasons, and support," she explained, "As much as you

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have." As the students partnered up and shared their work with each other, Ms. Walker

knelt beside a pair of students to listen in on the progress they had made.

Provide Daily Time for Students to Write

As illustrated through these vignettes, both teachers provided daily time for

students to write during the second half of the civics and government unit (see lessons

10–18 of Appendix C). According to the WWC Practice Guide, teachers in first grade

and above should dedicate at least thirty minutes of instructional time to teaching a

variety of writing strategies, techniques, and skills and another thirty minutes to writing

practice. The Practice Guide specifies that writing instruction and practice can occur

across the school day (i.e., not just during writing time but also within other domains

such as reading and social studies). Thus, the teachers' writing instruction during the

project-based unit assisted them in reaching the 60-minute goal. Despite multiple snow

days during her enactment of the unit, Ms. Miller's writing lessons within the civics and

government unit averaged 45 minutes in length, and Ms. Walker's writing lessons

averaged 52 minutes in length. During one of our interviews, Ms. Miller described the

affordances of the curriculum in regard to allocating time for writing. "Writing,

unfortunately, has become a subject that is backburner," she explained, "And that's one

of the great things about this particular [curriculum] is that it integrates social studies and

writing so you're double dipping."

Although the teachers allocated significant instructional time to writing during

their enactment of the project-based unit, they discussed the challenge of finding that

instructional time and coordinating the instruction with other writing instruction within

their school day. When I asked Ms. Walker during our first interview if she foresaw any

challenges to teaching the unit, she responded, "What I always consider my biggest challenge is finding the time." In light of these time constraints, Ms. Walker made the decision to postpone completion of a separate narrative writing unit once her students started drafting their letters during the civics and government unit. During our final interview, I asked Ms. Walker about her decision to try to engage students in two different writing pieces at the same time and whether she has tried to align her writing instruction with her social studies and science instruction. She responded,

> I've tried to do that, like make a master scope and sequence for the year. . .It's challenging when you have curriculum, you have expectations and then trying to massage all the expectations to do what you think is best practice. To do that is difficult, though it's probably a very rich experience, I would imagine.

Thus, Ms. Walker recognized the potential value of aligning her writing instruction across the part of her day set aside for writing and the time of day in which writing occurred within the content areas but expressed the difficulty of doing so within the context of curricular expectations.

Ms. Miller also made the decision to try to teach a separate writing unit while she was teaching the civics and government unit. Within the opinion writing unit, which Ms. Miller found on the website Teachers Pay Teachers, the students wrote on a topic of their choice (e.g., Should kids have cell phones in school?). According to Ms. Miller, the free choice unit focused more on "format and structure than the content." Toward the end of the civics and government unit, however, Ms. Miller found that it "became daunting" to teach both units at the same time and decided to postpone the remainder of the free choice unit until after finishing the civics and government unit. "We hit that point where

it was too much information at once" she explained, "I think it was confusing them." She later shared that if she had taught the free choice unit prior to teaching the Civics and Government unit, she thought her students' writing would have been "even more stellar." Thus, both teachers' reflection on the unit illustrates the challenge of finding instructional time for writing and the related challenge of mapping curriculum across the school year in a strategic way.

Teach Students the Writing Process

The second recommendation within the WWC Practice Guide is divided into two parts: 1) Teach students the writing process and 2) Teach students to write for a variety of purposes. Under the first part of the recommendation, the Practice Guide states, "Students need to acquire specific strategies for each component of the writing process" (Graham et al., 2012, p. 15). According to the Practice Guide, strategies can range from outlining ideas during the planning process to peer revising and should be taught through a gradual release of responsibility (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). More specifically, teachers should ensure that students have the background knowledge and skills needed to use a strategy and then describe the strategy, model its use, articulate the purpose of the strategy, and have students collaborate in small groups to practice applying the strategy. Teachers should then provide opportunities for students to engage in guided practice on their own and work toward applying the strategy independently (Graham et al., 2012, p. 18).

Throughout their enactment of the civics and government unit, both Ms. Miller and Ms. Walker guided their students through a writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing). Although they differed in their approaches, both

teachers took 11 days of instruction to engage students in this process. As Ms. Miller

transitioned her students in lesson 10 from learning about the issue to writing about the

issue, she reminded her students of the steps of the writing process,

> So in our writing process, the first step that we've talked about is prewriting. And
>
> today we're going to begin prewriting and then as we move into next week's
>
> social studies lessons we'll get into drafting and revising and editing and
>
> publishing. But today we're going to look at prewriting in the planning phase of
>
> the writing process, gathering our data, gathering our reasons and supporting
>
> them.

As her students transitioned to the revising phase of the writing process during lesson 14,

Ms. Miller recorded the different components on the white board (see Figure 3.3) to

review the work they had done and what they still needed to accomplish.
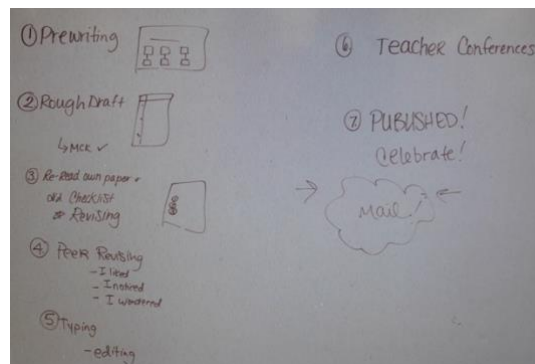
Figure 3.3: Ms. Miller's depiction of the writing process during lesson 14.

Ms. Walker used slightly differently terminology in her depiction of the writing

process but, similar to Ms. Miller, she also made an effort to help students understand

where they were in the process. In her classroom, each student wrote their name on a

sticky note for each of their writing projects, and they indicated where they were in the

process by moving their sticky note to the appropriate column on the writing projects

section of the chalkboard on the back wall of their classroom (see Figure 3.4).
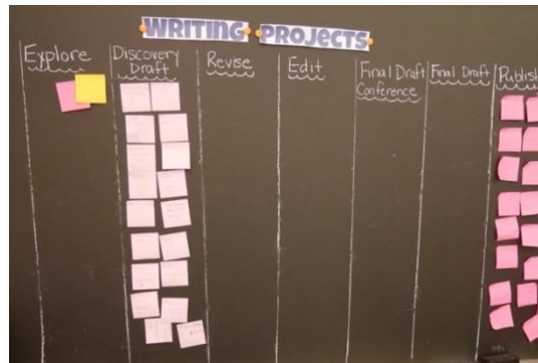
Figure 3.4: The writing projects section of the chalkboard in Ms. Walker's classroom.

As her students transitioned to the revising stage of the process, she engaged them in the

following discussion,

> Ms. Walker: So looking at the writing projects wall. If we're done with our draft,
>
> we're ready for what phase of writing? What kinds of things should we be doing?
>
> Jade?
>
> Jade: We go back over our work to make sure our spelling is good.
>
> Ms. Walker: What you're saying is more like editing. More importantly, you want
>
> to revise.
>
> Jade: Making sure it makes sense.
>
> Ms. Walker: And that your writing is saying your ideas in the way you want to
>
> say them. So that's what you're doing today? Say it in your own words. Graham?
>
> Graham: So basically we're changing what we don't like and what doesn't make
>
> sense.
>
> T: After you've done your revisions, you can move onto editing. To make sure
>
> your spelling is right and punctuation is where it needs to be.

As shown through these examples, both of the teachers named the different components of a writing process and oriented their students to where they were in the process. As they guided their students through the process, they introduced strategies to their students but struggled to engage in the process of gradually releasing responsibility to their students (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983).

Ms. Walker's teaching of writing strategies varied over the course of the unit. As shown in the vignette of her instruction, she explicitly described the strategy of using an opinion writing planner and gave students a purpose for their planning work. Furthermore, she provided an opportunity for students to collaborate in small groups to practice applying the strategy. As Ms. Walker's students progressed with their planning, however, this explicit strategy instruction became less evident. For example, the lesson plans encourage teachers to have the students review their articles and notes from earlier in the unit to help them identify reasons to include in their letters. During her one-on-one interactions with students she encouraged them to look back over their work from earlier in the unit, but she noted during our final interview that her students would have benefitted from more explicit instruction around how to use information from the articles in their writing. In reflecting on this challenge, Ms. Walker shared, "I felt like we were pretty much up to our elbows in just doing what was in front of us. Getting through that. So I didn't want to add on another layer." During the same interview, Ms. Walker also questioned the language used within the curriculum materials. Rather than use the word "support" when working on their writing planners (see Appendix M), Ms. Walker wondered if it would be beneficial to orient the students toward finding "evidence." It

could have provided a good opportunity, she said, to introduce the students to a new vocabulary word and to better support them through the research process.

Similar to Ms. Walker, Ms. Miller did not provide explicit strategy instruction or modeling around drawing from research during the writing process. As her students worked on drafting their letters, Ms. Miller encouraged them to use the sources they had read earlier in the unit. "All of these articles that are chock full of numbers and statistics," she explained, "Those are all available to you. Use these, these are your resources. You may use them to your advantage to help you with your writing." In her instruction, however, Ms. Miller did not model how to use information from the articles in her sample letter, and she did not provide her students with any additional support with the process. In my observations of Ms. Miller's writing lessons, I only noticed one student referring back to the articles he had read earlier in the unit. Although Ms. Miller highlighted this student's work as the class reflected on one of their writing lessons (i.e., "He didn't just make up the facts, he read the facts and used those in his article."), she did not provide explicit strategy instruction around finding reasons and support for their opinions.

As the teachers transitioned to the revising and editing phases of the writing process, they both taught strategies recommended by the WWC Practice Guide—peer revising and using a checklist. In regard to the checklist, they focused their instruction on the Writing Pathways Opinion Writing Checklist (Calkins, Hohne, & Robb, 2015) provided by the district. They reviewed the checklist with their students and encouraged their students to attend to each of the categories (e.g., lead, organization, elaboration, spelling, punctuation). The lesson plans for these phases of the writing process encourage

teachers to teach specific strategies based on their students' needs (e.g., elaborating on reasons). Both of the teachers, however, opted to forego this instruction and focus exclusively on the checklist. As the students worked their way through the twelve different categories on the checklist and responded to the question, "Did I do it like a third grader?" I often observed them checking the "Yes!" box without consulting their draft or making any revisions or edits to their writing. After noticing that many students went through this process quickly, I asked Ms. Walker if she thought the checklist was helpful to her students. She responded,

> I think that this is one of those times when I look at the long game because this is
> a tool. . . they need to encounter this tool many, many times. Maybe some of them
> are implementing it now, using the tool now, maybe some of them will use the
> tool next year or in 5th grade or 6th grade.

Ms. Walker's reflection reveals that she viewed her students' use of the checklist along a developmental trajectory. She used the opportunity to introduce the strategy of using a checklist, and she envisioned students progressing to more independent use of the strategy over time.

Through both of these examples (i.e., teaching students to locate evidence and teaching students strategies for revising and editing), the teachers revealed how challenging it can be to engage third graders in the more advanced stages of the WWC Practice Guide's recommendation ("gradually release writing responsibility from the teacher to the student, guide students to select and to use appropriate writing strategies, and encourage students to be flexible in their use of the components of the writing process" (Graham et al., 2012, p. 1)). In addition to influencing their teaching of the

writing process, the teachers' use of strategy instruction also influenced the way in which they assisted their students in writing for specific purposes and audiences.

Teach Students to Write for a Variety of Purposes

To assist students in writing for a variety of purposes, the WWC Practice Guide advises teachers to "help students understand the different purposes for writing, expand students' concept of audience, teach students to emulate the features of good writing, and teach students techniques for writing effectively for different purposes" (Graham et al., 2012, p. 1). As the vignettes reveal, the teachers provided students with a clear purpose for their work (i.e., writing an opinion letter to someone in the government to help raise awareness about plastic pollution in the Great Lakes), guided students through mentor texts for them to emulate, and expanded their concept of audience (i.e., providing an opportunity to write for someone beyond the teacher).

Expand students' concept of audience. In regard to expanding students' concept of audience, the WWC Practice Guide states, "Students should learn to adjust their tone and word choice to better convey their meaning and suit their audience." The Practice guide further asserts that guiding students through this process can support them in thinking of writing "as an authentic means of communication to accomplish a variety of goals" (Graham et al., 2012, p. 21). This process requires students to be knowledgeable about their audience and the ways in which they can adapt their writing to communicate effectively. A goal of the unit was to have students learn about how the state government is organized and about state-level leaders (e.g., their State Senator and Representative and State Department leaders) who might be able to help them address the public issue and to then use this knowledge to inform their selection of audience. As shown through the

following examples, Ms. Walker and Ms. Miller navigated the audience selection process in different ways.

As Ms. Walker's students transitioned from learning about the public issue to planning their letters in session 10, she directed them to think about the audience for their letters.

> So what we've been working on in social studies is we discovered there's a public issue of plastic pollution in the Great Lakes. And we talked about ways that we can solve the issue. And one of the ways that a lot of you said is we can contact or talk to people in the government and let them know that this problem needs to be solved and maybe give them some suggestions for what can be done. So we're going to be writing letters to people in the government to let them know what our opinion is. So who remembers, who should we be contacting?

When one of Ms. Walker's students called out, "The legislative branch," she responded, "The legislative branch is a great place to start." She elicited from the students the names of the State Senator and the State Representative for their district and when the students started drafting their letters, Ms. Walker shared addresses for the legislators and encouraged her students to select one of them for their audience. During our final interview, I asked her if she considered expanding the audience to other state-level leaders (e.g., the State Department leaders, whom the students learned about earlier in the unit). Ms. Walker responded, "most of them need a lot of direction so I felt like I was just kind of guiding them in that way. . ." Thus, Ms. Walker viewed the narrowing of audience options as a way to support her students' writing development.

During the same interview, Ms. Walker noted that it would have been helpful to provide her students with additional information about the legislators and their work related to the public issue. The students' State Representative, for instance, had recently introduced two relevant bills—one to prevent the use of polystyrene foam in food packaging and another to charge a 10-cent tax for each plastic bag used in grocery stores. Ms. Walker explained that she wished she had informed her students about these bills, but she felt limited by time constraints.

In addition to feeling constrained by time, Ms. Walker also expressed her belief in the importance of focusing on the structure of her students' writing. "The craft and the voice and all that," she explained, "comes later. . .starting in fourth or fifth grade." Within her instruction, Ms. Walker prioritized supporting students in organizing their thinking over helping them tailor their tone and word choice to suit their intended audiences. As shown through Appendix N, many of her students' opinions remained broad in scope (e.g., "I think we should make a law about plastic pollution") and were not tailored to their specific audiences. None of the letters, for instance, referenced the legislators' commitment to the environment (which the students learned about earlier in the unit) or specific bills they had introduced (see Appendix O for an example of a students' final draft).

In contrast to Ms. Walker, Ms. Miller did not limit her students to writing to their state legislators. Although the social studies standards to be addressed in the unit focus on understanding of state government, Ms. Miller decided to broaden the possible audiences beyond the state level. This decision emerged in session 10 during a class discussion about recycling. One of Ms. Miller's students realized that her neighborhood did not have

recycling bins and when Ms. Miller asked her what she could do about it, the student

suggested getting a recycling bin and writing to the government to request recycling pick

up. In response to this idea, Ms. Miller told her students,

> You might not even write to the government. . . you could write to the property
>
> manager. Is it Ms. Penny? You could write Ms. Penny and say, we'd really like
>
> do some recycling. Is there a way to get a recycling bin here?

Following this exchange, Ms. Miller led the class through brainstorming possible

audiences for their letters and she recorded their ideas on the white board. At the local

level, they brainstormed Ms. Penny, the school principal, and the mayor. At the state

level, they identified their State Senator and Representative and the Governor. After

asking "Who's bigger than that?" Ms. Miller recorded "President = U.S." at the bottom of

the list. When I asked Ms. Miller during our final interview about her decision to broaden

the audience options, she explained, "I felt like that was more student-led at that point.

Those were more their ideas and I didn't want to discount them." Ms. Miller's response

indicates that she aimed to honor her students' input by broadening their audience

options. Following this decision, however, she did not engage her students in additional

discussion about their audience selections or how to tailor their letters to their intended

recipients. As the students reflected on their writing during the subsequent lesson, for

instance, one student engaged in the following conversation with Ms. Miller:

> Student: I don't know who I'm writing to, but I feel kinda scared. Because, I don't
>
> know, if I'm writing to the President, I'm going to feel scared.

Ms. Miller: I don't think you should feel scared. I think maybe some nervousness would be good. But I think this is a really good writing step, a good step for you guys as writers.

Student: I'm scared because if he gets, if I spell a word wrong, he takes stuff seriously and so if he takes stuff so seriously he might kick my family out of the country.

Ms. Miller: No. You know what? We're going to edit all of these to make sure there are no spelling errors. Bad spelling or invented spelling is not an issue that will get you deported, no worries.

Through this exchange, Ms. Miller minimized her student's concern about writing to President Trump and assured him that he would feel more confident as he made progress with his writing. Although nine of Ms. Miller's students decided to select President Trump as their target audience, the class did not engage in any further discussion about him or his stance on the public issue (e.g., At the time of the study, President Trump had proposed eliminating the $300 million Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (Spangler, 2019)). Similar to Ms. Walker's students, many of Ms. Miller's students struggled to tailor their opinions to their selected audience. The student who wrote to her property manager, for instance, wrote about banning plastic rather than needing recycling bins within their living community. Thus, both teachers' instruction reveals both the opportunities and challenges that can accompany teachers' efforts to expand their students' concepts of audience.

Teach Students to Become Fluent With Handwriting, Spelling, Sentence Construction, Typing, and Word Processing

The third recommendation within the WWC Practice Guide encompasses a variety of different evidence-based practices: "Teach very young writers how to hold a pencil correctly and form letters fluently and efficiently; Teach students to spell words correctly; Teach students to construct sentences for fluency, meaning, and style; and Teach students to type fluently and to use a word processor to compose" (Graham et al., 2012, p. 1). In regard to the first part of this recommendation, both teachers worked with at least one of their students on using a pencil grip to improve their letter formations. During lesson 11, for instance, Ms. Miller asked one of her students to get out his pencil grip and reminded him, "Pinch, pinch, finger underneath."

During the last several lessons of the unit, both teachers also gave students an opportunity to use a word processor to compose their letters. Before Ms. Walker's students started typing their letters, she modeled how to access Google Classroom and how to use a simple letter template she created for them. As her students began typing, she positively reinforced their typing skills. "I love that you're keeping your fingers at home row like that," she remarked, "That's good typing." When Ms. Miller's students finished typing their letters, she shared, "I want to you compliment you on your ability to use technology and to send the emails yourself. I was impressed by how you were able to use the commands."

In regard to teaching students how to spell words correctly and supporting students with their sentence construction, both Ms. Miller and Ms. Walker demonstrated some use of these writing practices. During lesson 13, for instance, Ms. Miller elicited different linking words (e.g., because, for example) from her students and encouraged her students "to try to use linking words to connect your opinion to reasons or examples."

Furthermore, as she reviewed the opinion writing checklist with her students in the following lesson, she made reference to an earlier lesson in which she taught students "to vary how many words are in each sentence."

Although I observed few examples of explicit spelling instruction across the classrooms, the teachers did recognize students' efforts to improve their spelling. During Lesson 12, for example, Ms. Walker concluded the lesson by asking her students to give her feedback on the writing process.

> Ms. Walker: "How is this going to for you? What's going well? Or what do you
> think you need some help with so I know what we need to work on? Jade?
> Jade: I think what I need to work on is realizing when a word isn't spelled
> correctly.
> Ms. Walker: So you're saying the first time you write the word you want to start
> writing it right the first time and not just save everything for editing. I can tell that
> means you're maturing as a learner. Because you realize it takes you a long time
> later. . . you know you're growing as a speller when we're doing word work and
> you're learning spelling patterns. You're growing as a speller so you're noticing
> those words and how they're misspelled.

Before ending the lesson, Ms. Walker encouraged her students to try to balance their desire to spell words correctly with their need to get words down on paper. She further explained, "I don't want you to make your drafting be something that you don't want to do, you know you don't want to write a word because you don't know how to spell it." Thus, Ms. Walker recognized the value of students' growing ability to draw from their word work during the drafting process but also encouraged them not to let spelling slow

down the drafting process. As illustrated below, the teachers' enactment of the final WWC Practice Guide recommendation influenced the way in which they taught spelling and sentence construction during the revising and editing process.

Create an engaged community of writers. Under its recommendation to create an engaged community of learners, the WWC Practice Guide suggests, "Teachers should participate as members of the community by writing and sharing their writing, give students writing choices, encourage students to collaborate as writers, provide students with opportunities to give and receive feedback throughout the writing process, and publish students' writing and extend the community beyond the classroom" (Graham, 2012, p. 1). During their enactment of the civics and government unit, both teachers gave their students writing choices by giving them an opportunity to craft their own opinion and choose the recipient of their letters. Both teachers also supported students in publishing their writing by sending their typed letters to their intended audiences via email or the postal service. The teachers' engagement with the other components of this recommendation further reveal the opportunities and challenges within project-based writing instruction.

Participate as members of the community. In regard to how the teachers participated as members of the community, the WWC Practice Guide states that teachers should "model how the ability to write affects their daily lives, demonstrate the importance of writing to communicate, model the perseverance required to create a good piece of writing, and express the satisfaction that can come from creating a meaningful text" (Graham et al., 2012, p. 35). Within the civics and government unit, the lesson plans encourage teachers to model the letter writing process using a public issue that is

different than the issue the students write about. The curriculum materials provide a sample planner and letter focused on wind farms in the Great Lakes (an issue that students are introduced to earlier in the unit) from which teachers can draw to model their letter. Throughout their instruction, Ms. Walker and Ms. Miller made different decisions regarding whether to draw on the sample provided.

In her enactment of the unit, Ms. Walker drew from the sample planner and letter that were provided in the curriculum materials to model writing a letter. In explaining to her students why she decided to model a letter focused on a different public issue, she said, "I didn't want to do this on the same issue that you're writing about because I want you to do your own thinking about your issue." During subsequent lessons, Ms. Walker modeled how to write an introduction with a clear opinion and supporting paragraphs that included reasons for her opinion. Although she did not model writing a conclusion to her letter due to time constraints, she did engage her students in a discussion about the conclusion of the mentor letter that they read earlier in the unit. Thus, Ms. Walker provided her students with multiple models of letters and encouraged her students to develop their own opinions on the public issue. As shown in Appendix N, her students expressed a variety of opinions in their letters. However, about a quarter of her students' opinions remained broad in scope (e.g., "I think we should make a law about plastic pollution").

In contrast to Ms. Walker, Ms. Miller made the decision to write her letter about the same topic as the students—plastic pollution in the Great Lakes. Prior to introducing her opinion to her students, she explained,

It's important to always be thinking about what you believe in and why you

believe in it. To be honest, my opinion kinda changed this year after our studies.

The more I read and the more I thought about it, I thought about how I use plastic

in my own life…

Ms. Miller then wrote her opinion on chart paper, "I believe we should ban plastic bags at

grocery stores." Although Ms. Miller encouraged her students to choose an opinion that

reflected their own beliefs, she also gave them permission to copy her ideas. As the

students started drafting their letters, one of the students told Ms. Miller that she didn't

know what to write. In response, Ms. Miller pointed to her example (see Figure 3.5).
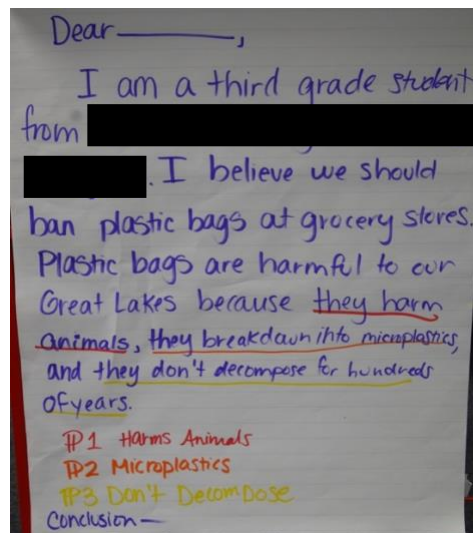
Figure 3.5: The introduction to Ms. Miller's sample letter

When the student looked at the sample letter and asked, "I can copy that?" Ms. Miller

nodded her head yes. During our final interview, I asked Ms. Miller why she decided to

write her letter about plastic pollution in the Great Lakes. She responded, "I would say

more student confusion at that point…I wanted to give them something a little more

useful that they could use. At that point, I think they needed more support with the

current topic." When Ms. Miller and I reviewed the final drafts of her students' letters, she reflected on one of her student's letters in the following way,

> He did a lot more copying my example…and I'm okay with that because it's a good way for him to learn the process. Because he himself is not developmentally ready to take it somewhere on his own. And use his own examples.

According to Ms. Miller, she focused her letter on plastic pollution in an effort to support her students who struggled with writing. As shown through Appendix N, nine of Ms. Miller's 19 students wrote about the need to ban or charge for plastic bags at grocery stores. That group of nine included students who Ms. Miller identified as struggling writers as well students who seemed to engage more independently with the writing process. Appendix P provides an example of one of these letters. To illustrate the way in which one student drew from Ms. Miller's sample, the text that matches the text from Ms. Miller's letter is indicated in blue. Through their varying ways of participating in their classrooms' writing communities, Ms. Miller and Ms. Walker influenced the ways in which their students took up their modeling of the letter writing process.

Encourage students to collaborate as writers. Ms. Miller and Ms. Walker also differed in how they encouraged their students to collaborate as writers. Although the civics and government unit guides students to write individual letters to address the public issue, many of the lessons provide opportunities for students to work together on their writing. During lesson 10, for instance, the lesson plan encourages teachers to have students work in small groups to discuss their opinions and to complete a writing planner (see Appendix M). As illustrated through this session, Ms. Walker and Ms. Miller adopted different approaches to their enactment of this recommendation.

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After modeling how to use the writing planner, Ms. Walker informed her students that they would be working in small groups to discuss their points of view and to begin work on their planners. She then divided the class into groups of three and, as illustrated in the vignette of her instruction, she circulated around the room to support their work. As described in more detail in Chapter II of this dissertation, Ms. Walker often referred to her class as a "community of learners," and she used a variety of instructional moves to support their work together. In addition to modeling care and responsiveness, she fostered discussion and collaboration, elicited and supported students' participation, and encouraged consideration of different perspectives. During our final interview, Ms. Walker discussed her students' ability to work together. "I can see a lot of growth in them," she explained, "From even the beginning of the unit to the end but especially from the beginning of the school year until now with their group work."

Ms. Miller's approach to supporting group work contrasts with Ms. Walker's approach. During session 10, for example, Ms. Miller informed her class that they would be working in groups to discuss their opinions and to work on their planners. She then divided her students into two groups of eight and one group of three and told the students that she would circulate around the classroom to support their work. Throughout the small group portion of the session, however, Ms. Miller spent the majority of the time working one-on-one with one of her English Language Learners. During the 20 minutes that the groups worked together, the two large groups struggled to identify reasons for their opinions. As students engaged in disagreements with each other and the volume in the room increased, one of the students expressed with exasperation, "Everyone is

making too much noise. I think everyone should just calm down for a minute." When Ms. Miller brought the students back together at the end of the lesson, she reflected,

I noticed that some moments today were actually really good dialogue. Really good talking back and forth about what you really believe in. I noticed some of you had some really good arguments and reasons why you felt a certain way. I also noticed some of us were not very respectful group listeners and taking time to hear what other people were saying. And you know what? The person you're hurting the most is yourself. Because now you won't have strong reasons. And you're going to want as much information and as much support for those reasons as possible.

When I later asked Ms. Miller about her decision to form larger groups of students than the lesson plan called for, she explained that she misread the lesson plan. She also described her inclination to "let students go" and then have them reflect on the experience. She further explained, "And then reaching back and saying, yesterday when you worked in your groups, what worked, what didn't work?" In this same exchange, Ms. Miller discussed the challenge of knowing what type of interactive modeling would support students in their collaborative work.

Provide students opportunities to give and receive feedback. An additional finding under creating an engaged community of writers relates to how the teachers provided students with opportunities to give and receive feedback throughout the writing process. According to the WWC Practice Guide, "Students need to know whether their writing is accurately and appropriately conveying its message" (Graham et al., 2012, p. 37). The Practice Guide suggests that students can develop this knowledge by sharing

their writing and responding to written and verbal feedback from their teacher and their peers.

Over the course of the unit, both teachers provided opportunities for some of their students to share excerpts from their writing during the whole class review and reflection portion of the lessons. At the end of lesson 12, for instance, Ms. Miller gathered her students on the rug and asked for several volunteers to read aloud a paragraph from their letter. When Liam, the student who used information from the articles, shared one of his paragraphs with the rest of the class, Ms. Miller responded, "That's nice that you have actual statistics, some facts from one of the articles, right? And we could even say according to and say who told you that statistic. So that it seems stronger, okay?"

At the beginning of the same lesson, Ms. Walker asked if any of her students would like to share their introduction. When eight hands shot up into the air, Ms. Walker called on her student, Crystal, to share her writing. "You didn't finish your introduction," she said, "but can we see what you wrote so far?" After the student nodded her head yes, she read aloud her introduction and stopped when she noticed a letter missing from the recipient's name. "So you're noticing," Ms. Walker commented. "What kind of feedback can you give her? What did she do well? What can she work on?" Ms. Walker asked her students. When one student responded, "I think she did a pretty nice job with the introduction," Ms. Walker encouraged him to be more specific. "Because she said who she is," he explained. After several more students shared their feedback, Ms. Walker said, "Crystal, thank you for letting us take a look at your work. We appreciate giving you feedback." In this example, students had opportunities to both give and receive feedback on their writing.

Both Ms. Miller and Ms. Walker also engaged in one-on-one conferences with many of their students and provided them with some written feedback. As the teachers enacted this recommendation, however, they had difficulty providing meaningful feedback to all of their students and supporting their students in providing feedback to each other. Ms. Walker spent considerable time supporting her students during their writing time by circulating around the classroom and working with individual students at the back table, but she struggled to conference with all of her students. Over one third of Ms. Walker's 21 students qualified for English Language and/or Special Education services, and she often called those students to work with her at the back table when it came time for them to make progress with their writing. Although she continued to circulate amongst the other students, she spent the majority of writing time with students who she felt needed the most support. The English Language Learner teacher came to the classroom one day a week to assist two of the students with their writing, but he was not a consistent source of support for the students or the teacher. During a post-lesson conversation after teaching lesson 13, Ms. Walker remarked on the challenge of taking the time to support her students who struggled with writing while engaging her more advanced writers.

Toward the end of the unit, both teachers found it challenging to find the time to support the revision and editing process. The curriculum materials provided peer and teacher feedback forms that included the following prompts: *I noticed. . . I liked. . .I wonder. . .* In regard to the teacher feedback form, the teachers indicated that they did not have enough time to complete the form for each of their students. Instead, Ms. Walker provided brief written feedback for some of her students (e.g., "Find the correct spelling

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of the circled words before you type.") and she made changes to her students' writing within Google Documents. This approach influenced Ms. Walker's ability to address other recommendations within the WWC Practice Guide (e.g., Teach students to spell words correctly; Teach students to construct sentences for fluency, meaning, and style). Rather than gradually accepting responsibility from teachers (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), students simply clicked a check mark beside each change to accept the edit.

Ms. Miller adopted a similar approach to the revising and editing process. During several one-on-one conferences with her students, for example, she took over the typing process for them. When explaining this decision during our final interview, Ms. Miller discussed her work with one of her struggling writers,

> I took over the typing for him and help him get [his ideas] in. Took that part of the thought process out and just let him make sure his ideas were there. And made sure, okay, what is your reason one? What's your example or evidence? . . . So his was a little more hands-on, one-on-one, but that's what he needed. . .

Although Ms. Miller talked about eliciting students' ideas, I observed her on several occasions making changes to students' writing with little input from the students. As she assisted one of her students, for instance, she sat at the student's computer and made multiple revisions and edits (e.g., "Because you're saying 'you are' it needs to be apostrophe, r, e.") while the student stood beside her, looking away from the computer and playing with a pen. During our final interview, Ms. Miller discussed the challenge of supporting students who worked at varying speeds. She explained, ". . . it was frustrating because I had some kids who couldn't figure out how to write an address and I had other

kids who were writing sincerely and their name." Across both classrooms, the teachers created opportunities for their students to receive feedback on their writing, but they found it difficult to meet their students' diverse learning needs.

Discussion

Throughout their enactment of the civics and government unit, Ms. Walker and Ms. Miller both used writing practices that are supported by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Educator's Practice Guide to *Teaching Elementary School Students to be Effective Writers* (Graham et al., 2012). In fact, they both enacted at least part of all the overarching recommendations put forth by the guide. They both provided their students with daily time to write, they guided their students through a writing process, and they introduced strategies related to different components of the process. Furthermore, they expanded students' concept of audience, provided mentor texts for the students to emulate, and gave students an opportunity to use a word processor to publish their writing. In regard to creating an engaged community of writers, they both participated as members of the writing community, they provided their students with writing choices, they provided opportunities for students to give and receive feedback, and they published students' writing beyond the classroom. Thus, both teachers revealed an ability to enact many evidence-based writing practices during their teaching of the project-based civics and government unit.

Although the study does not explore the difference between writing instruction within project-based and non-project-based contexts, the findings suggest distinct affordances to teaching writing within a project-based context. Given the integrated nature of project-based learning, the approach has the potential to support teachers in

reaching the 60 minutes of daily writing instruction and practice recommended by the

WWC Guide for grades one through five (Graham et al., 2012). Furthermore, project-

based learning can afford students an opportunity to develop knowledge through a variety

of sources and interactions (e.g., throughout the civics and government unit, students read

articles, examined photographs, watched videos, and engaged in conversation with each

other) and practice a range of skills for a real-world purpose. For example, when learning

strategies to use during specific phases of the writing process (e.g., outlining ideas while

planning), students have an authentic purpose for learning and applying the strategies and

an authentic audience for their work. According to research conducted by Block and

Strachan (2018), this authentic purpose and audience also has the potential to elicit

greater student effort with regard to spelling and sentence construction. Lastly, the

collaborative structures within project-based learning (e.g., peer revising) can support

teachers in creating engaged communities of writers within their classrooms. Together,

these features suggest that project-based learning could offer unique benefits to students'

writing development.

Similar to research that explores teachers' enactment of curriculum materials

(e.g., Ball & Cohen, 1996; Remillard, 2005), the current study also offers additional

evidence to suggest the central role that teachers play in shaping instruction. In their

review of evidence-based practices and writing instruction, Graham and colleagues

(2016) echo the importance of recognizing the crucial role teachers play in bringing their

professional skills and judgment to bear to make evidence-based practices fit their

particular situations. Although the current study explores how teachers contextualize the

practices within their particular environments, more work needs to be done to engage

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teachers in professional learning opportunities around these practices and better understand how they make judgments regarding the benefits and limitations of these practices within their contexts (Graham et al., 2016). The challenges the teachers experienced offer insight into potential areas on which to focus such professional development.

Professional Learning Opportunities

The findings of the study suggest a need for professional learning opportunities that go beyond the limited initial professional development provided in this case, to offer teachers space to engage deeply with curriculum resources and to think critically about how to support the diverse needs of their students. Although the teachers made an effort to enact many evidence-based writing practices throughout the unit, they both struggled to provide explicit strategy instruction and to give their students meaningful opportunities for giving and receiving feedback on their writing. As research shows that a process writing approach alone is not sufficient to support struggling writers' development (Graham & Sandmel, 2011), both of these challenges could serve as focal points for professional learning.

Teachers could also benefit from exploring how their participation in the writing community influences their students' writing development. As shared in the findings, Ms. Miller and Ms. Walker shared their writing in different ways—whereas Ms. Miller modeled writing a letter focused on the same public issue her students were writing about, Ms. Walker chose to model her writing using a different public issue. Although Ms. Miller aimed to scaffold her struggling students' writing development, her decision resulted in many of her students (some who were not struggling writers) copying her

opinion and reasons. Ms. Walker told her students that she chose to write about a different public issue because she wanted them to do their "own thinking about [the] issue," but some of her students struggled to identify a strong opinion about the issue. Professional learning opportunities could engage teachers in considering avenues for scaffolding students' writing that enable them to maintain some choice and agency over the writing process while providing them with differentiated support.

Professional learning opportunities could also assist teachers in recognizing the central role that their expectations play in shaping their instruction (e.g., McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Tennebaum & Ruck, 2007). As shared in the findings, Ms. Miller made several instructional decisions based on her feeling that her students were not "developmentally ready" to do the work on their own (e.g., her decision to model a letter using the same public issue the students were writing about). In the case of Ms. Walker, she expected her third-grade students to make progress with organizing their writing, but she did not expect them to tailor their tone and word choice to suit their selected audiences. Professional learning opportunities could support teachers in exploring their beliefs and could engage teachers with samples of students' work to help them calibrate their expectations for students to what has been shown to be possible given specific instructional conditions.

Both Ms. Miller and Ms. Walker echoed this need for additional professional learning and support. During our first interview, for instance, I asked Ms. Walker whether she had received any professional development around integrating literacy and social studies instruction. "There's been some mention of it," she responded, "There hasn't been explicit guidance as to how to implement it. Which I think is, as an aside,

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essential. But I haven't seen it." During our final interview, Ms. Miller explained, "I also think the district needs to give us more writing support. I shouldn't be looking at Teachers Pay Teachers so I can find something quickly to do opinion writing." The teachers' comments speak to the importance of engaging teachers in professional learning opportunities that cohere with the curriculum they are expected to teach. In their review of the research on professional development for enhancing writing instruction, McCarthey and Geoghegan (2016) provide support for models of professional development developed by Wei, Darling-Hammond and Adamson (2010) and Desimone (2009). These models highlight the importance of focusing on particular content, engaging teachers in active learning, cohering with schoolwide reform efforts, involving collective participation, and developing learning opportunities that are intensive and ongoing.

Educative Curriculum Supports

Considering existing research on the role that educative curriculum features can play in teachers' learning (Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Davis, Palincsar, Smith, Arias, & Kademian, 2017; Drake et al., 2014), research could also explore how these features could be used to further support teachers' writing instruction within project-based contexts. In her investigation of how teachers use project-based curriculum materials, Farmer (2019) asserts that curriculum materials need to provide additional guidance beyond the "how" of instruction. "Other forms of guidance are needed," she suggests, "to provide insight into the 'why.'" She further explains, "Knowing the 'why' is important given that teaching, by nature, requires adaptive expertise" (p. 213).

The findings from this study suggest several potential areas within the curriculum materials where educative curriculum features might have been beneficial to teachers. Within the lessons focused on revising and editing, for instance, the curriculum materials provide limited guidance around strategy instruction. The lesson plan states, "Lead students through a short lesson that focuses on a specific problem or weakness that you've observed in their writing (e.g., elaborating on reasons)." The goal behind this open-ended guidance was to have teachers adapt their instruction to meet their students' needs, but the curriculum materials do not include a rationale for this step in the lesson plan. Explicitly referencing the use of a strategy and providing a brief description of the research that supports the use of explicit strategy instruction (e.g., Graham & Sandmel, 2011) might encourage teachers to address this step in the lesson plan. Furthermore, providing a collection of sample mini-lessons focused on common challenges in third-graders' writing could assist teachers in meeting their students' needs.

When designing educative curriculum features, an important caveat to consider is teachers' limited time for instructional planning. According to Davis and Krajcik (2005), "Most teachers do not have time to read extensive curriculum materials," they explain, "no matter how useful the materials might be" (p. 9). Thus, careful consideration should be given to where and how to include educative features and the need to supplement their inclusion with other professional learning opportunities for teachers.

Other Curricular Revisions

In addition to suggesting a need for educative curriculum features within the unit, the findings from this study highlight other ways in which the curriculum could be revised to support students' writing development. As the students planned and drafted

their letters, for instance, the teachers struggled to support students in drawing from the information they learned about plastic pollution during the first half of the unit. In my conversations with Ms. Walker, she suggested a need to support students in developing a record of their learning. Although the unit plans encouraged teachers to involve students in creating a project wall to display artifacts (e.g., key terms, photographs, charts) from the unit, the teachers typically took the lead in selecting and posting the artifacts with little if any student involvement. Future enactments of the unit could involve students more deeply in co-constructing a record of learning. For example, teachers could support students in using digital tools to produce individual or collaborative representations of their learning that could also be used to communicate their opinions to their intended audiences. Research indicates that elementary school-aged students can be supported to produce digital, multimodal writing (Dalton et al., 2015; Fitzgerald, DellaVecchia, Palincsar, & Soloway, 2018), although more work needs to be done to explore how to scaffold students through the composition process.

In an effort to support teachers with providing feedback to their students throughout the writing process, the unit could also be revised to encourage teachers to use small groups to differentiate their instruction. As shared in the findings, the teachers' reliance on one-on-one conferences during the writing portion of the unit made it challenging for them to meet with all of their students and provide them with targeted support. Given research that indicates that effective teachers use small groups to support students' writing development (e.g., Gibson, 2008; Pressley et al., 2001), revisions to the unit could include specific ways to support small groups with similar learning needs. For instance, teachers might use sentence starters and/or a detailed opinion writing template

with a small group of students who struggle with the drafting process, and they might coach another small group to draw from their learning about the issue to provide additional evidence to support their claims.

Curriculum Mapping

In addition to informing possible revisions to the unit, the findings from this study also indicate a need to think more broadly about how to support teachers with curriculum mapping. Similar to other teachers within project-based research (e.g., Revelle, 2019), both teachers with this study expressed difficulty in finding instructional time for writing. Although they indicated that this difficulty was partly due to external pressure to focus on math and reading (i.e., the domains that are tested at the state level in third grade), they also recognized that being more strategic in their curriculum mapping could help them find time for writing and better meet their students' needs. As indicated, both teachers tried to teach separate writing units while they were teaching the civics and government unit, and they found that it was too challenging to engage students in two pieces of writing at the same time. Thus, they postponed the other writing units until after their students finished writing their letters.

In regard to curriculum mapping, Ms. Miller noted that teaching the "free choice" opinion writing unit prior to teaching the civics and government unit could have strengthened her students' persuasive letters and Ms. Walker conveyed that "it's probably a very rich experience" to have a curriculum that is more aligned across learning domains. As shared by Wright and Domke (2019) in their study of the role of language and literacy in K-5 science and social studies standards, teachers, administrators, policy makers, and curriculum developers need to abandon the idea that improving language and

literacy learning requires a reduction in time spent on science and social studies. Rather, the researchers argue, they need to think critically about how to support children's language and literacy development during content-area instruction. The findings from this study suggest that careful consideration of curriculum mapping across the school year could help support this goal.

Communication and Collaboration across Learning Domains

Lastly, the findings from the study suggest the importance of using consistent language and instructional approaches across learning domains. In planning the unit, we aligned the writing lessons with the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The ELA/Literacy Common Core State Standards use the term *opinion* to refer to a developing form of argument throughout its K–5 standards, whereas the C3 Framework uses the term *argument* throughout the K-12 grade bands. As noted by Wright and Domke (2019), the C3 Framework emphasizes that the disciplines that make up the social studies "stress the importance of arguments, and in particular, the necessity of constructing them in ways that make use of sources and data as evidence (NCSS, 2013, p. 57)."

The discrepancy across learning standards suggests a need to explore the instructional approaches that best support disciplinary literacy development in the early grades. This need is further revealed through an examination of the WWC Practice Guide. Under its recommendation to "help students understand the different purposes of writing," the guide identifies four purposes of writing: to describe, to narrate, to inform,

and to persuade/analyze (Graham et al., 2012, p. 20). In its explanation of the last

category, the guide states,

> to give an opinion in an attempt to convince the reader that this point of view is
>
> valid or to persuade the reader to take a specific action (writing to express an
>
> opinion or make an argument has a similar purpose); to analyze ideas in text, for
>
> example, by considering their veracity or comparing them to one another (Graham
>
> et al., 2012, p. 21).

This explanation further complicates which language and instructional approaches

teachers should use with their students. Across the Common Core State Standards, the C3

Framework, and the WWC Practice Guide, teachers can locate multiple terms, unclear

purposes regarding the types of writing, and inconsistent expectations with respect to

students' use of evidence. Recent research suggests that third-grade students have nascent

abilities in evaluating evidence and constructing arguments (Marino, 2020), but future

research could explore whether there are affordances to using a developing form of

argument (e.g., such as the Common Core State Standards' use of the terms *opinion*,

reasons and *support*) with elementary school-aged students. To best support teachers and

their students within interdisciplinary contexts, researchers and curriculum developers

should work toward more consistency around language regarding the different purposes

of writing and around expectations that are developmentally appropriate for elementary

school-aged students.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that are important to recognize. The first

is my potential influence on the teachers' instruction and their responses to interview

questions. Although I encouraged the teachers to enact the unit as they would if they were not participating in the study, my presence (and the presence of a video and audio recorder) may have influenced their teaching and decision making. Similarly, the fact that I conducted the interviews might have made the teachers more reluctant to speak negatively about their experiences with the unit. However, at the beginning of each interview I encouraged the teachers to be honest in their responses, and the findings suggest that they were willing to share about challenges with their experiences.

My role as a co-developer of the unit could also be considered a limitation of the study. Although I continually reflected on how my different identities influenced the data I collected and the interpretation process, my subjectivities undoubtedly shaped the research process. However, as previously noted, I made a strong effort to remain open to evidence that challenged my interpretations and to resist interpreting the data to match my experiences and expectations.

Another potential limitation of the study concerns Ms. Walker's involvement in the development of the curriculum. Although her enactment is useful in illuminating the experience of a teacher who was intimately involved with and familiar with the curriculum, the reality is that most teachers do not have the opportunity to design curricula that will be used across a district. Thus, her involvement introduces the need for additional research with teachers who were not involved in the development process.

The focus on teachers' use of evidence-based practices presents another limitation of the study. Although evidence-based practices can provide a useful "roadmap for teaching writing," Graham et al. (2016) acknowledge their limitations. According to these researchers, it is important to recognize that the roadmap "is like an old treasure map with

holes in it and smudges obscuring important details" (p. 222). One of the holes, they claim, is the paucity of research exploring writing instruction with second-language learners, which both teachers in this study engaged in doing. Other important areas of research not addressed by the WWC Practice Guide include the use of multimodal composing to develop students' literacy skills (e.g., Fitzgerald, DellaVecchia, Palincsar, & Soloway, 2018; Miller & McVee, 2012), the supportive role of dialogic interactions and debates (e.g., Ferretti & Lewis, 2016; Malloy, Tracy, Scales, Menickelli & Scales, 2020), and teachers' navigation of the broader political environment (e.g., students feeling scared about writing to President Trump) when engaging students with authentic audiences (e.g., Justice & Stanley, 2016).

It is also important to recognize that the study did not attempt to explore teachers' writing instruction outside of the context of a project-based unit. Future research could compare teachers' instruction of project-based and non-project-based writing instruction to gain a better understanding of the affordances and constraints of the different contexts. Lastly, the study did not measure students' writing development. To fully understand how to scaffold students' writing development within project-based contexts, future research needs to examine students' experiences more closely and evaluate how writing instruction impacts the development of students' writing skills.

Conclusion

Given the growing expectations around opinion/argument writing in the elementary grades and the increased interest in project-based learning as way to engage young students in more equitable learning experiences, developing a better understanding of how teachers can support students' writing development within project-based contexts

is important. This study offers a detailed picture of two teachers' enactment of writing

instruction within a project-based civics and government unit in diverse third-grade

classrooms. The findings reveal that the teachers were able to use multiple evidence-

based writing practices during their enactment of the unit. They also experienced several

challenges that demonstrate the difficulty of providing writing instruction that meets

students' varied learning needs. In response to this challenge, researchers, teachers,

curriculum developers, and policy makers need to collaborate across learning domains

and think critically about the particular resources and professional development

opportunities that can best support teachers in supporting their students' writing

development within project-based contexts.

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Chapter IV

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I review findings from each of the papers. I also draw some conclusions based on the dissertation as a whole and suggest some additional areas for future research that could support teachers in their use of project-based learning to foster the development of "knowledgeable, thinking, and active citizens" (NCSS, 2013, p. 5).

Creating a Community of Learners

Chapter II focuses on the question: How does a third-grade teacher create a community of learners during a project-based civics and government unit? Through my inductive analysis of observations and video recordings of classroom instruction, interviews with the teacher and focal students, and classroom artifacts, I illustrate the ways in which the teacher modeled care and responsiveness, fostered discussion and collaboration, elicited and supported students' participation, and encouraged consideration of different perspectives.

In regard to modeling care and responsiveness, Ms. Walker frequently communicated how much she valued her students, for example by crouching down beside them to work with them at their level. She also demonstrated many instances of being responsive to her students' physical, emotional, and learning needs. For instance, when one of her students felt like she was being excluded from her small group, Ms. Walker

took the time to listen to her concerns and then supported the group as they found a way to work on their poster together. In her effort to foster discussion and collaboration amongst her students, Ms. Walker emphasized the importance of "whole-body listening and learning" and used turn and talks and positive reinforcement to orient her students toward each other and to encourage them to support each other. She elicited students' ideas around how to work together effectively and often circulated around the classroom to support students in their partner and small group work. Within this context of collaboration, Ms. Walker supported participation from her students by asking questions of her students and encouraging a variety of voices to respond, using "warm calling" (Boucher, n. d.), lifting her students' ideas and experiences into class discussions, and encouraging "strong speaker voices." In addition to including all students' voices in classroom discussions, Ms. Walker welcomed and encouraged consideration of different perspectives on the public issue. Throughout her enactment of the unit, she encouraged her students to learn from each other and respect different ways of thinking about the issue.

Findings from my analysis of two focal students' experiences with the unit provide additional evidence of Ms. Walker's ability to create an inclusive community of learners within her classroom. The findings offer support for further examination of the relational dimensions of project-based approaches to civic education and have important implications for classroom teachers, researchers, and curriculum developers.

Enacting Evidence-based Writing Practices

In Chapter III, I ask: How do two third-grade teachers enact evidence-based writing practices during a project-based civics and government unit? My analysis of

observations and video recordings of classroom instruction, interviews with the teachers, and artifacts of instruction and student work reveals that the teachers used multiple evidence-based writing practices within their enactment of the unit. They both provided their students with daily time to write, they guided their students through a writing process, and they introduced strategies related to the specific components of the process. Furthermore, they expanded students' concept of audience, provided mentor texts for the students to emulate, and gave students an opportunity to use a word processor to publish their writing. In regard to creating an engaged community of writers, both teachers participated as members of the writing community, provided their students with writing choices, offered opportunities for students to give and receive feedback, and published students' writing beyond the classroom

The findings highlight how the teachers' particular classroom contexts informed their decision making around these practices. To guide her students' selection of an audience for their letters, for instance, Ms. Walker made the decision to narrow students' audience options to their state legislators. In an effort to support her students who struggled with writing, Ms. Miller made the decision to model the letter writing process using the same public issue her students were writing about. Informed by their knowledge and perceptions of their students, these decisions influenced the ways in which the teachers enacted the practices.

The findings also illustrate challenges that demonstrate the difficulty of providing writing instruction that meets students' varied learning needs. In addition to illuminating a need for greater consistency in language and instructional approaches across learning domains, the findings highlight the need for additional exploration of resources (e.g.,

educative curriculum supports) and professional development opportunities (e.g., work around curriculum mapping and strategy instruction) that can best support teachers' writing instruction within project-based contexts.

Instruction as Dynamic Interaction

In drawing from Cohen, Raudenbush, and Ball's (2003) conceptualization of instruction as dynamic interaction and focusing on the instruction within which the curriculum and evidence-based writing practices are enacted, the study offers insight into both opportunities and challenges that can emerge during project-based learning. As shown through the first paper, the study highlights the importance of exploring relations between teachers and their students and amongst the students. The study also provides evidence that supports the central role of teachers in shaping the enacted curriculum. As shown through both papers, the teachers' knowledge, experiences, and beliefs all influenced the ways in which they enacted the project-based unit. Ms. Walker's commitment to creating a community of learners, for instance, shaped the way in which she fostered her students' collaboration. Furthermore, both teachers' expectations of their students shaped the way in which they used evidence-based practices to support their students' writing development.

The central role of teachers in shaping instruction is echoed in recent project-based research conducted by Grossman, Pupik Dean, Kavanagh, and Hermann (2019). In their observation of expert PBL teachers, the researchers came to conclude that "teachers and teaching are the keys to transforming what happens for kids in schools" (Grossman et al., 2019, pp. 43–44). Given the importance of teachers in shaping instruction, the findings from this study suggest a need for professional learning opportunities that

provide teachers with space to engage deeply with curriculum resources and to think critically about how to support the diverse needs of their students. As shared by Cohen (1990) in his exploration of one teacher's instructional response to a new policy around teaching math, "…it is one thing to embrace a doctrine of instruction, and quite another to weave it into one's practice" (p. 314). According to Cohen, we need to appreciate how difficult it can be for teachers to shed their "old professional selves," and we need to provide learning opportunities that enable them to fully integrate their learning into their practice (p. 323).

As mentioned in Chapter I of this dissertation, I made a decision after starting data collection to shift my focus away from various factors that facilitated and constrained teachers' enactment of the unit (such as those found in Remillard's 2005 framework) so that I could focus on teachers' instruction. Although this decision inhibited my ability to speak to how particular characteristics of the teachers, the curriculum materials, and the environment influenced teachers' enactment, I believe the decision strengthened my ability to focus on the instruction within which the curriculum and the evidence-based writing practices were enacted and provide detailed descriptions of the opportunities and challenges within project-based learning.

Future Research

Given the study's focus on two teachers within the same school district, future research should include a broader range of teachers who bring varying experiences and beliefs to their enactment of the unit. Future research should also explore how teachers take up professional learning opportunities and how such opportunities influence their instruction. The field could also benefit from a design-based approach to research that

explores how revisions to the professional learning and to the curriculum (e.g., adding educative curriculum supports and/or more explicit strategy instruction) influence teachers' enactment of project-based units.

Future research should also add to the body of research focused on how teachers' use of project-based learning influences students' learning and development. In her revision to Cohen, Raudenbush, and Ball's (2003) conceptualization of instruction as dynamic interaction, Ball (2018) relocated students to the top of the instructional triangle. Describing this revision in her Presidential Address at the 2018 American Research Educational Association Annual Meeting, Ball shared, "The intention always was to talk about how those dynamics occur to affect students' experiences." With this shift in mind, future research questions could explore questions such as: how do the relational dimensions of instruction influence students' engagement in civic education and the way in which they become active citizens? And how does teachers' use of evidence-based writing practices within project-based instruction relate to their students' engagement with writing and/or their writing development? Relatedly, future research should attend more fully to students' experiences within integrated social studies and literacy project-based instruction. Although researchers have begun to document how students participate as active members of their communities (e.g., Payne et al., 2019; Rubin & Hayes, 2010), more work needs to be done to explore the ways in which youth of all ages "try out different ways of acting for and with communities" (Payne et al., 2019, p. 9).

Another important area for future research is attending more fully to the environmental factors that influence students' and teachers' experiences with project-based learning. In addition to relocating students' position within the instructional

triangle, Ball's (2018) revisions to the instructional triangle also expanded the environment around the classroom. As she shared in her Presidential Address, "It's not some tiny thing around the classroom. It's all of the soup, the thick and multivariate soup that all of us are living in and in which teaching and learning take place" (Ball, 2018). As shown through my findings, the "soup" in which this study occurred caused at least one third-grade student to feel scared about writing a letter to the President of the United States about plastic pollution in the Great Lakes. Engaging students with authentic purposes and audiences for their writing requires educators to attend vigilantly to the "porous" membrane (Ball, 2018) between the classroom and the environment, and future research should attend more fully to how to support teachers in navigating the process.

Lastly, future research should attend to an additional challenge identified in the literature on project-based social studies: how to support students in their transition from a participatory to a social justice orientation to civic action (e.g., Blevins et al., 2016). In distinguishing between participatory and social justice orientations, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) explain that participatory citizens act within established systems and community structures whereas justice-oriented citizens "question, debate, and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice over time" (p. 244). To support educators in helping students transition to a social justice orientation to civic action, Blevins et al. (2016) identify several strategies: inviting guest speakers with divergent perspectives; encouraging students to seek out multiple perspectives; providing questions that encourage students to consider an issue's underlying political, social, and economic forces; and fostering a space for critical conversations. Although the current study supported students in exploring multiple perspectives on a public issue, more work

needs to be done to identify developmentally appropriate ways to engage elementary school-aged students in justice-oriented work. Drawing on the work of the late activist and philosopher Grace Lee Boggs, Shalaby (2017) asserts the need for both children and adults to be "solutionaries" or "revolutionary problem solvers with audacious imagination" (p. 243). This imagination, she argues, requires all members of the community coming together to create a more just world.

Through its exploration of third-grade teachers' instruction in diverse classrooms, the current study contributes to our understanding of how to create learning environments that foster civic engagement and supports the assertion that experience should be an essential element of social studies education (Cramer & Toff, 2017; NCSS, 2013). It is not enough to impart students with factual knowledge about civic and political institutions and the processes, rules, and laws that govern society. Students need opportunities to engage in authentic and collaborative work that enables them to learn about and address meaningful public issues. As shown through this study, these opportunities can afford students the space to listen to and learn from each other and engage as "purposeful, informed, and reflective" citizens (NCSS, 2013, p. 62). Additional research should continue to explore how project-based learning can create more equitable learning experiences for underserved students and foster all students' abilities to participate fully in our country's democracy.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Curriculum Design Principles

The following principles guided the development of the district's third-grade social studies curriculum during the summer of 2017:

Inquiry-Oriented (Informed by the C3 Framework Inquiry Arc)
- Engages students with essential questions: Units are organized around central and supporting questions. The central question focuses on an enduring issue or concern that drives the thinking throughout the unit. For example, "What can be done to improve our local community?" Supporting questions help answer the central question in an inquiry. For example, "How is the local government organized?"
- Develops students' ability to apply concepts within and across social studies disciplines (Geography, History, Economics, and Civics and Government): For example, *within* geography students might use their knowledge of natural and human characteristics to develop maps of their communities. When applying concepts *across* social studies disciplines, students might explore how the natural and human characteristics of a community shaped its economic development.
- Guides students to evaluate sources and draw conclusions: Throughout the unit students will develop the literacy skills needed to examine data sources and answer central and supporting questions.
- Supports students in communicating conclusions and taking informed action: After drawing conclusions that address the unit's essential questions students seek to communicate their findings to an audience in an authentic context.

Project-Based
- Engages students in a purpose beyond "doing school": "Students work over an extended time period for a purpose beyond satisfying a school requirement – to build something, to create something, to respond to a question they have, to solve a real problem, or to address a real need" (Duke, 2014, p. 11). In the geography example, students might give the maps of their community to a local real estate agent to be distributed to people interested in moving to the area.
- Uses projects as the primary driver of learning: The knowledge learned and skills developed serve to meet the project's goal.

- Provides opportunities for student choice and collaboration: Students have some choice over tasks and/or texts, and they have opportunities to work in pairs and/or small groups.

Culturally Responsive
- Improves the representation of diversity with respect to ethnicity, culture, perspective and historical/global contribution: Marked by inclusive curriculum both in content and approaches to teaching this new curriculum represents a model for social studies where students are at the center of the learning process as they ask essential questions and lead one another in the work of acquiring knowledge. The following elements ensure culturally responsive teaching:
  o Students are exposed to text sets that aid in making content accessible to all students, build vocabulary knowledge, and represent multiple perspectives on a topic.
  o Embedded opportunities across the social studies curriculum allow students to bring their own cultural knowledge to the content and for multiple cultures and perspectives to be represented.
  o An emphasis on the facilitation of dialogue and debate on the part of teachers leading to a more inclusive environment for various points of view and opinions of students and others.

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Appendix B

Abstract of Civics and Government Unit

The following abstract was excerpted from the district's third-grade social studies curriculum:

In this unit, students will exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens by writing a persuasive letter that argues their position on a public issue relating to the state of [name of state]. Building upon their knowledge of local government, students will distinguish the roles of state government from local government and examine the ways in which the government of [name of state] works to fulfill its purposes. As they research their issue and identify various points of view, they will discuss why peoples' position may differ, and they will learn how to justify their own position with reasons. In determining who should receive their letter, students will explore key concepts such as representative government. In the process, they will learn about civic leaders who have made a difference in the state of [name of state]. Through this project, students will learn about the structure and functions of state government, how to communicate their position on a public issue with a reasoned argument, and how they can play an active role in making [name of state] an even *greater* place to live.

Appendix C

Civics and Government Project Overview

The following overview was excerpted from the district's third-grade social studies curriculum:

Central question: [Specific to public issue] (e.g., What can the state do to reduce plastic pollution in the Great Lakes?)

Session	Essential Questions	Student Objectives (Students will…)	Key Session Activities
1	What do we need to know in order to complete the project?	• Explore how local government differs from state government • Learn that [name of state] citizens have rights and responsibilities • Learn about a public issue in [name of state] • Become motivated to address the public issue • Identify what they need to know in order to complete the project	Prior to this session, students participate in an Interactive Read Aloud of the book *City Green* to help them understand how a group of citizens can work together to solve a local public issue. During the session, the class discusses the difference between local and state-level public issues, and the students learn about the public issue via a news source (article/video/letter) and the project. Students develop a list of what they Need to Know in order to complete the project.
2	How do citizens learn about public issues in our state?	• Discover how citizens learn about public issues in our state • Gain a deeper understanding of	Students engage in the See, Think, Wonder process as a class, closely examining an image related to the public issue. Then,

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		the public issue by analyzing visual sources of information	students complete a See, Think, Wonder packet as they participate in a gallery walk of images. At the end of the session, they share their findings with the class.
3	How do citizens learn about public issues in our state?	• Discover how citizens learn about public issues in our state • Gain a deeper understanding of the public issue by reading informational text • Identify the main idea and details in an article	After working through an article as a class, students work on their own (or in pairs or small groups) to read an additional article about the public issue. They identify the main idea and details within the article and share their findings with the class.
4	What are possible causes of the problem?	• Discover how citizens learn about public issues in our state • Learn about possible causes of the problem by reading informational text • Identify the main idea and details in an article	As they work in small groups to read articles focused on causes of the problem, students continue to develop their ability to identify the main idea and details within an informational text. At the end of the session, they share their findings with the class and complete a Quick Write about what they currently know about the public issue.
5	Why do we need state government? How can state government help us solve the pubic issue?	• Understand why people create governments • Learn about the different purposes of state government. • Make connections between the	After discussing reasons people form governments and the different purposes of state government, students work in small groups to explore how states have attempted to solve the public issue.

		purpose of state government and the public issue	They develop posters illustrating the purposes of government to which the solutions relate.
6	How is the government of [name of state] organized? Which branch(es) of the state government can help us solve the public issue?	• Describe the purpose of the [name of state] Constitution. • Learn about the powers of each of the three branches of government • Identify which branch(es) can help solve the public issue	Students learn about the State Constitution as a written plan of government and work in small groups to explore the three branches of State government. They create posters about the branches to share with their classmates, and they will discuss as a class which branch(es) can help them solve the public issue.
7	Who holds the power in state government?	• Learn that in a representative government, the power resides with the people.	Students work in small groups to research leaders in their State (Representatives, Senators, and State Departments relevant to the public issue). At the end of the session, they report their findings to the whole class and discuss which leader they should contact about the public issue.
8	What are the rights and responsibilities of citizens? How can citizens help solve the *public issue*?	• Learn about the rights guaranteed by the [name of state] Constitution and the responsibilities	Students explore the meaning of the words "right" and "responsibility" and read about citizens who have made a difference in the state of [name of state].

		that come with the rights • Learn about a variety of civic leaders who have made a difference in the state of [name of state]	Using a Venn Diagram, they compare and contrast the contributions made by two different citizens.
9	What are different points of view on the public issue?	• Learn about the core democratic values • Explore how the different values lead people to have different perspectives on the public issue	After reviewing the term public issue and learning about the issue of wind farms, students read different viewpoints on the issues. They identify how core democratic values (freedom, fairness, and the common good) lead to different perspectives on public issues, and they write a response to the prompt "I used to think…Now I think…"
Prior to Session 10, review students' "I used to think...Now I think" organizers and identify their points of view on the public issue. Organize students into groups who share similar points of view for the small group activity in this session. If needed, adapt Handout 10-B to meet different students' writing needs.			
10	What are key features of opinion letters?	• Identify the key features of letters and opinion pieces. • Identify a point of view on the public issue and brainstorm reasons supporting the opinion.	Students review a mentor text to identify the key features of letters and opinion pieces. They also identify their own point of view on the public issue and begin to develop a plan for their writing.
Students will need their audience's mailing address for Session 11. You can have them complete a search prior to the session, or you can give them the address during the session. If needed, you can adapt the opinion writing draft paper to meet different students' writing needs.			

11	What do opinion writers include in a letter's introduction?	• Draft an introduction to opinion letter that introduces the writer and the public issue, a clear point of view, and previews the reasons supporting the point of view.	Students review the key features of an opinion letter's introduction and use their planners to draft the introduction to their letters.
12	How do writers use linking words to connect an opinion with reasons?	• Use linking words and phrases to connect opinions with reasons. • Draft a body of the opinion letter that is appropriate to the task and purpose.	Student learn how to use linking words to connect their opinion with their reasons. They then use their planners to draft the body of their letters, providing support for each of their reasons.
13	What do opinion writers include in a letter's conclusion?	• Draft a conclusion to opinion letter.	Students review the key features of an opinion's letter's conclusion and use their planners to draft the conclusion to their letters.
If short on time, Session 14 can be combined with Session 15. Have students review their own work first and then provide feedback to a partner.			
14	How do writers revise letters?	• Revise draft of opinion letter	Students use the Opinion Writing Checklist to revise their letters.
15	How do writers provide feedback to each other?	• Provide feedback to a classmate on their opinion letter	Students work in pairs to provide each other with feedback on their writing.

16	How do writers edit their letters?	• Edit draft of opinion letter	Students use the Opinion Writing Checklist to edit their letters.
After Session 16, collect students' drafts and review them using Handout 14-A (Opinion Writing Checklist) and Handout 16-C (Teacher Feedback Form) prior to the next session.			
17	How do writers address feedback from multiple sources?	• Address feedback from multiple sources to improve their writing and complete their final copies.	Students make additional changes to their drafts and type the final copies of their letters.
18	How can we celebrate our work?	• Celebrate the completion of their project. • Reflect on their learning. • Explore other ways to address the public issue and/or other important public issues.	Students send their letters to the selected audience and reflect on their work. Then, they brainstorm other ways they could address the public issue or other public issues with which they could get involved.

Appendix D

Teacher Interview Protocols

Prior to each interview: Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed. As with any part of this study, you can withdraw your consent to participate at any time, and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I am just interested in your thoughts and experiences. Please be aware that I want you to be honest in these interviews, even if that means saying things you think I might not want to hear.

Note – some additional questions were added during the interview to clarify the teacher's responses or to elicit additional information.

Interview #1 – Prior to teaching the unit

Teaching experience
- How long have you been teaching?
- How long have you been teaching third grade?
- Have you taught other grades? If so, what other grades have you taught and for how long?

Teacher education and professional development
- Briefly describe your teacher education (What college or program did you attend? How long was your program? How would you describe the focus of the program? When did you complete the program(s)?)
- Have you ever engaged in professional development focused on project-based instruction? (Would you please describe it?)
- Have you ever engaged in professional development focused on social studies instruction? (Would you please describe it?)
- Have you ever engaged in professional development focused on integrating social studies and literacy instruction? (Would you please describe it?)
- What experiences, if any, outside of teaching have prepared you to teach civics and government?

Instructional approach
- Can you describe your approach to teaching social studies in previous school years?

- o Can you describe your approach to teaching civics and government in previous school years?
- Can you describe your approach to teaching literacy?
  - o What kind of writing have your students worked on so far this year?
- Have you ever used a project-based approach to instruction? If so, can you describe what it looked like?

Unit preparation
- How would you describe your classroom of students this year?
- When thinking about teaching this unit, what are your goals for your students? (What are your goals for your students in regard to civics and government? What are your goals for your students in regard to literacy? Do you have any other goals for your students?)
- How do you think your students will respond to the unit?
- Do you foresee any challenges to teaching the unit?
- Can you describe your approach to preparing to teach the unit?
  - o How much planning time do you have?

Focal students
- Can you tell me a little about each of the focal students you selected? (What led you to select them?)

Additional comments
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Interview #2 – Midway through the unit

Teacher's enactment of the unit
- Can you describe your experience teaching the civics and government unit up to this point?
- What has gone well so far?
- What has been challenging?

Students' learning opportunities
- How do you think your students have responded to the unit?

Focal student learning
- For each of the four focal students, ask the following question:
  - o How do you think s/he has responded to the unit?

Focusing on Lesson 9
- Can you walk me through your planning process. (In preparing to teach the lesson, what did you do? Is this pretty typical of how you've prepared for other lessons?)
- What goals did you have going into the lesson?

- How did the lesson inform your thinking about the rest of the unit?

Lesson Plans
- Are you finding that there things that you like or don't like about the format of the lesson plans?
- Can you talk about your approach to teaching the key terms?
- I'd like you to talk about the changes you made to the curriculum materials. Please know that I'm not suggesting that these changes were wrong; I'm just trying to understand what influenced your decision-making. (Share examples of changes)

Additional questions/comments
- I've heard you encourage your students to be "whole-body listeners" and "whole-body learners". Can you talk what those phrases mean to you?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Interview #3 – After completing the unit

Teacher's enactment of the unit
- Similar to the last interview, I'd like you to start by describing your experience teaching the civics and government unit.
- What did you view as successes, if any, in teaching the unit?
   - What factors do you think contributed to these successes?
- What challenges, if any, did you experience in teaching the unit?
   - What factors do you think contributed to these challenges?
- You mentioned that you taught a modified version of the unit last year. How did teaching the unit this year compare to your experience teaching it last year?

Students' learning opportunities
- How did students in your class respond to the unit?
- What effects, if any, did you think the unit had on your students' social studies learning, and how could you tell?
   - To what extent do you think the unit helped you address the social studies standards?
- What effects, if any, did you think the unit had on your students' literacy learning, and how could you tell?
   - To what extent do you think the unit helped you address the ELA standards?
- How will you evaluate your students' writing?
- To what extent do you think your students found the public issue to be meaningful and/or relevant to their lives?

Focal student learning
- For each of the four focal students, ask the following questions:

- How do you think s/he responded to the unit? What factors do you think supported her/his learning? What factors do you think challenged her/his learning?

Engaging with and using curriculum materials
- I'd like to talk more about the curriculum materials, which include everything in the unit binder such as the unit overview, the lesson plans, the texts for students, and the handouts.
  - Are there other things that you liked about the curriculum materials and/or the format of the lesson plans?
  - Are there things you disliked about the curriculum materials and/or the format of the lesson plans?
  - Are there (other) ways you think the materials can be improved?
- I'd like you to talk about the changes you made to the curriculum materials. Please know that I'm not suggesting that these changes were wrong; I'm just trying to understand what influenced your decision-making.
- What would you do differently if you were to teach the unit again?
  - What changes would you make to the lesson plans and/or the curriculum more broadly?

Teacher learning and professional development
- What advice would you give teachers who are considering using project-based learning in civics with their elementary school-aged students?
- What kind of professional development or professional learning experiences do you think would have been most helpful in supporting your teaching of the unit? Now that you have taught the unit twice, what professional development do you think would be more helpful at this point?
- Are you planning to teach the unit again next year? If so, do you think you'll focus on the same public issue or a different public issue?

Additional questions/comments
- I've noticed you making reference to your class as a learning community or community of learners. Can you talk about what these phrases mean to you?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix E

Student Interview Protocols

Prior to each interview: I would like to ask you some questions about yourself and your learning. I will record you so I can listen again later if I need to. This will help me learn about how children think about social studies. You may stop at any time. Would you like to do this activity with me? Do you have any questions about what we are going to do?

Interview #1 – Conducted after Lesson 5

Background information

- Tell me a little about yourself. Have you attended [name of school] since Kindergarten?
- What do you like to do for fun when you're not at school?
- What do you enjoy most about school? (What is interesting for you to learn about at school?)
- What do you find most challenging at school? (What is least interesting for you to learn about at school?)
- Do you prefer to do your work on your own, with a partner, or with a group? (Are there some types of work that you prefer to do on your own? Why?
- Is there anyone in particular in your class who you like to work with? Why do you like working with them?)

Social Studies/Civics and Government
- What do you think about when you hear the words social studies?
- Have you spent time on social studies in school? (If so, what have you learned about?)
- What have you enjoyed most about social studies?
- What have you found most challenging about social studies?

Literacy
- What do you enjoy most about reading?
- What kind of books/texts do you like to read?)
- What do you find challenging about reading?
- What do you do when you're reading something and you find that it's challenging to understand?)
- What do you enjoy most about writing?

- What do you find challenging about writing?

Artifact Reflection (using Exit Ticket from Session 5)
- I know you've been learning about plastic pollution in the Great Lakes during your social studies unit. Can you tell me what you've learned about the issue?
- What do you think has caused the problem?
- Tell me about solutions you've learned about that could address the problem of plastic pollution in the Great Lakes.
- Let's take a look at the poster you created during today's lesson. What did you learn through reading/viewing the article/video?
- What purposes of government were represented?
- What role did you play in creating this poster?
- Did you enjoy working in a group?
- Did you find anything about the activity to be challenging?
- Let's look at the writing you did here. What solution do you think seems the most promising for helping the state of [name of state] solve the plastic pollution issue? Why?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Interview #2 – Conducted after completing the unit

Social Studies/Civics and Government
- Tell me about your experience with the civics and government unit that you just finished.
  - What did you enjoy about the unit?
  - What did you not enjoy about the unit?
- What did you learn about social studies from this unit?
  - Did you learn anything about the state government? If so, what did you learn?
- What did you learn about opinion writing from this unit?
- What helped you learn in this unit? (There were a number of times during the unit when you worked with a partner or in a small group. Did you find that working with a partner or in a group helped you learn? Did you find it more helpful to work with a partner or to work with a small group?)
- What made it hard to learn in this unit?

Artifact Reflection (using exit ticket from session #5, "I used to think…Now I think" response from session #9 and letter to state official)
- I want us to take a look at few things you've worked on during the unit. Last time we talked, we looked at this exit ticket and talked about which solution you thought was most promising. Let's take a look at this response you wrote later in the unit (show student response to "I used to think…Now I think…). Can you tell me why your opinion changed/stayed the same?
- Now let's take a look at the letter you wrote.

- - - Why did you choose to write to _____?
  - What do you think ___ should do to help solve the problem of plastic pollution in the Great Lakes?
  - What reasons did you provide? How did you come up with these reasons?
  - Tell me about what you did to revise and/or edit your letter.
- Do you think your letter will help solve the problem? Why or why not?
- What are some different ways that someone might respond to the question (What can the state do to reduce plastic pollution in the Great Lakes?). Why do you think they might respond that way?

General Reflections:
- When you think about all that you did during this unit, what's something you're proud of?
- What's something you wish you did better?
- What is a question you still have?
- This unit focused on plastic pollution in the Great Lakes. What do you think is another important issue that Ms. D could focus on next year?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix F

Classroom Post-Observation Guide

Classroom: Ms. Walker   Lesson #: 2

Observation Date: February 26, 2019

Start Time: 9:26am   End Time: 10:18am   Length=52 min.

T = Teacher; S = Student; Ss = Students

Focal Students: Eliza   Marcy   Trey   Nathan

Coded excerpts are highlighted in yellow.

Session Objectives: Students will discover how citizens learn about public issues in our state; Students will gain a deeper understanding of the public issue by analyzing visual sources of information.

*The following excerpt from Lesson 2 starts 17 minutes into the lesson. The teacher used the first portion of the lesson to review their previous work and to engage students in a discussion about how they can learn about the public issue.

Transcript of the lesson (with a focus on the teacher and her interactions)	Initial Reflections and Questions:	Codes:
T: Okay, we have some other things we can look at, okay? Citizens learn about public issues through things like videos but also you can learn about an issue through images. Now I'm going to show you an image. I'm going to show you an image that is related to our specific public issue.	-T talks about how citizens learn about public issues	
T asks S to turn off light: Because I think we'll see the colors a little bit better with that light off. So before you say something, I want you to listen. Today, you're going to be looking at some	-T focuses on listening	Communicating expectations

images. Let's start by looking at this image and when you're looking at the image, we're being really thoughtful. We're going to do a See, Think, Wonder. That means that we're going to find out what we see, what we think, and then what we wonder when we look at the image. So the first thing I have to do is I have to look at the source. When I say the source I need to see where this image comes from. Especially in a time when there can be people who photoshop things and make up information and put it out for people to read. We need to look at the source to make sure it's a source that's trustworthy and that is honest. So we're going to look at the title, this says Lake Erie Garbage Patch. That's one of our Great Lakes, Lake Erie. **9:45 (19:00)** T: And let's look at the caption. T reads caption and web address: We can go back and see who took the picture and if it's a trustworthy website. That's why we look at the source. We always look at the caption when a caption goes with a picture because it helps us, well, <mark>how does a caption help us? D?</mark> D: It helps tell us like give information about what the picture is about. T: Yeah, so that's why we're going to look at the caption. So we see, we first look at the information that's written, okay? We did that. Now I'm going to look at this graphic organizer. You'll all be getting some graphic organizers. Now the graphic organizer also has a copy of this nice picture, but it's in black and white. And it says, I see, I think, I wonder, okay? So watch how I, A and J, watch how I see, think, and wonder about this image so you	-"We're being really thoughtful." -T defines what it means to source. -T gives context for the importance of sourcing. -T doesn't elaborate on trustworthiness. -T asks S to talk about why captions are important. -T makes it clear that she's modeling so that	 Asking questions

can do this work next, right? So I see a lot of plastic bottles in the water (T records her ideas on the graphic organizer) So that one is you just writing what you see. You ready, this is the fun part. Now that I see a lot of plastic bottles in the water, I'm going to write down what it makes me think. It makes me think that people aren't recycling their bottles. Okay, now because I see a lot of bottles, it makes me think that people aren't recycling, I wonder how we can get more people to recycle. So right now, you're going to turn and talk to a friend about something else you see, think, and wonder about the image. Most Ss talk with a partner. T crouches down to check in with some Ss; encourages others to talk with each other Ss are excited, talking loudly R talks to another S about getting deposits back: I wonder, like, why do they even litter? T: Make your way back to your carpet square. I heard some really interesting things that we're seeing, thinking and wondering. We're going to have Nathan share his see, think, wonder information. We're going to add it to here but don't worry, you're going to have a chance to share your ideas, too. T hands microphone to Nathan. T: Okay, Nathan, what do you see in this image? N: A duck **9:50 (24:00)** T: N, what do you think when you see the duck?	the Ss can do the work on their own. -"this is the fun part" -T engages Ss in guided practice -Ss seem to be engaged with this work -T heard some "interesting things" -T asks N to share after talking with him during turn and talk.	 Using turn and talks Using turn ant talks; Working at students' level Lifting students' ideas Encouraging "strong speaker voices"

N: It's going to eat the trash T: And what does that make you wonder? N: If it's going to die T: You wonder if it's going to die. Okay, that is exactly how we look at an image, and we don't just look at it and then it means nothing to us. Marcy, it's a way a for us to look at an image and it can help us with our learning. Okay, it's making us think about the issue. We're going to be doing more see, think, wonders right now.	-T often inserts one S's name to get/focus their attention.	

Appendix G

Memo from February 27, 2019

I just finished transcribing Ms. Walker's first two lessons and a phrase stood out to me: "This is still a listening time." During my limited time in Ms. Walker's class, I've already noticed how deliberate she is in listening to her students, getting them to listen carefully to her, and encouraging them to listen to each other.

She started the first lesson by saying, "I'm looking for you to be a whole-body listener and participate in your own learning today. You're going to be a better learner if you're in charge of learning what we're talking about, okay?" And then before showing the students a video about plastic pollution (39:00), she said, "I'm going to be asking you to one, be listening to why this is a public issue for [name of state]. And two, be thinking about how you can explain that in your own words. Both of those things have you listening, which means your voice and sounds are off."

These first two lessons leave me wondering what being a "whole-body listener" means to Ms. Walker and to her students and whether I'll continue to hear that phrase in her teaching.

Appendix H

Table 1: Categories and Codes

Category	Code		Description	Example
Modeling care and responsiveness	Valuing students		Greeting students with warmth, checking in on how they are doing, and telling students that she appreciates their presence and that she will miss them next year	"I'm so glad you're here today. I missed you."
	Working at students' level		Crouching down next to students; expressing an interest in listening to students' ideas and supporting them with their work	(Lesson 8, photograph 2)
	Responding to students' needs	Responding to physical needs	Providing students with food when they are hungry; Allowing students to take a break if they aren't feeling well	"I'll make sure you get some food, okay?"

Modeling care and responsiveness	Responding to students' needs	Responding to emotional needs	Eliciting students' thoughts and feelings; assisting their re-engagement with their work	"I bet they could use some of your artistic stylings on their poster."
		Responding to learning needs	Adapting instruction to meet students' varied needs	". . . sometimes I have to make things be small group when they're whole group or vice versa depending on what I think will work for them."
Fostering discussion and collaboration	Communicating expectations		Encouraging "whole-body listening and learning"	"We're waiting for you to show us that you're ready to listen."
	Orienting students toward each other		Encouraging students to add onto other students' comments	"I can tell that you're listening to your classmates when you respond like that to each other."
	Using turn and talks		Asking students to turn to a partner to share their ideas; Playing an active role during turn and talks by scanning the rug, listening in on conversations, and encouraging students to communicate clearly.	"Listen carefully to Naasir."

	Facilitating whole-class discussions	Providing students with opportunities to share their ideas with each other and support each other	"The kids have true discussions when they are driving the ship."
	Encouraging collaboration during partner and small-group work	Communicating the importance of working together; Eliciting students' ideas about how to collaborate effectively; Checking in with students during small group work to encourage them to listen to each other and to help them work through challenges	"Are you listening to all ideas? Do you all feel like you're being heard by your group?"
Eliciting and supporting students' participation	Asking questions	Asking students questions about the content of the lesson and the learning tasks	"What questions do you have so far looking at this and thinking about what we're going to be doing?"
	Encouraging a wide range of students to respond	Eliciting responses from students who have not yet had the opportunity to share	"I've heard a lot from Crystal and I love to hear from you. I'm wondering if somebody else can share this time?"
	Warm calling	Alerting students that she will be asking them to provide a response; Providing students with time after a question during which they can	"Get ready to answer soon, Marcy, okay? I'm going to come to you."

		generate their response	
	Lifting students' ideas and experiences	Drawing on what she hears during turn and talks or small group work to bring new voices and/or ideas into the whole-class discussions	"I heard some really interesting things as I was walking around. Marcy, can you share with us what you said in answer to the question?"
	Encouraging "strong speaker voices"	Asking students to speak up; Passing them a microphone to use during whole group discussions	"I'm going to have you use the microphone, Kiana, because you're working on your strong speaking voice. You have a really nice idea to share."
Encouraging consideration of different perspectives	Highlighting different perspectives	Encouraging students with varying perspectives to share their ideas with the class	"Benjamin has a different perspective I'd like him to share."
	Respecting different perspectives	Encouraging students to listen and learn from different ways of thinking about the issue	"So we can learn from each other and we respect each other. . .when somebody is responding in a way that is different from us."

Appendix I

Recommendations from What Works Clearinghouse's Educator's Practice Guide:
Teaching elementary school students to be effective writers

1. Provide daily time for students to write (Minimal evidence)
2. Teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes (Strong evidence)
    a. Teach students the writing process.
        i. Teach students strategies for the various components of the writing process.
        ii. Writing strategies should be taught explicitly and directly through a gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student
    b. Teach students to write for a variety of purposes.
        i. Help students understand the different purposes of writing.
            1. Students should understand the purpose of each genre so that they can select the genre best suited to their writing task.
            2. Expand students' concept of audience.
            3. Teach students to emulate the features of good writing.
            4. Teach students techniques for writing effectively for different purposes.
3. Teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing (Moderate evidence)
    a. Teach very young writers how to hold a pencil correctly and form letters fluently and efficiently
    b. Teach students to spell words correctly
    c. Teach students to construct sentences for fluency, meaning, and style.
    d. Teach students to type fluently and to use a word processor to compose.
4. Create an engaged community of writers (Minimal evidence)
    a. Teachers should participate as members of the community by writing and sharing their writing
    b. Give students writing choices
    c. Encourage students to collaborate as writers
    d. Provide students with opportunities to give and receive feedback throughout the writing process.
    e. Publish students' writing and extend the community beyond the classroom.

From: Graham, S., Bollinger, A., Booth Olson, C., D'Aoust, C., MacArthur, C., McCutchen, D., & Olinghouse, N. (2012*). *Teaching elementary school students to be effective writers: A practice guide* (NCEE 2012- 4058). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/17 (*The version revised in 2018 was consulted. However, the authors of the Practice Guide suggest continued use of the 2012 copyright date.)

Appendix J

Classroom Post-Observation Guide

Classroom: Ms. Miller   Lesson #: 13

Observation Date: February 7, 2019

Start Time: 9:25   End Time: 10:10   Length=45min.

T = Teacher; S = Student; Ss = Students

<mark>Coded excerpts are highlighted in yellow</mark> – Recommendations from the WWC Practice Guide are listed in right-hand column the first time they are noted on a page of notes or the first time they are noted after another recommendation is listed.

Session Objectives: Students will learn how to draft a conclusion to their letters.

*The following excerpt from Lesson 13 starts about a minute into the lesson.

Running notes on the lesson (main dialogue and activities of the lesson) – mark 5-minute intervals:	Reflections/Questions:	Codes (WWC Recommendations)
9:26 (1:00) T: <mark>So today, I actually want to jump and look at the conclusion. Okay, so I want to finish my 3rd paragraph and then I want to look at the conclusion.</mark> I don't think I'll be able to write in yellow because it's really hard to read yellow from here. And then I also want to remind you and show you, because I don't think I've shown you the opinion one yet, a rubric for you to use to help you make sure you have all the parts of your letter. For when it comes time for the grade	 -T draws Ss' attention to their writing grade; rubric is to make sure they have all the parts	 4a. Participate as a member of the community

(makes quotation marks with fingers around "the grade"). Because this is social studies and we are sending these but this is also writing and so you need to be		
thinking in terms of your score, your writing grade, how am I doing at learning the structure for opinion writing to draft your letter, okay? Are you guys ready? Ss: Ready. T: If you would carefully get in your social studies spots and look at the board (points to chart paper). Ss switch to social studies spots on the rug; T asks S to bring her poster T: So I'm switching up my yellow color to a pink color. So when we started our letter, we started with dear blank. I still haven't figured out if I want to write to [State Senator's name] yet or [State Representative's name] yet. So I left it blank. T rereads introduction of letter, holds up fingers as she reads through each of the three reasons: Paragraph one.	-T hasn't decided on audience yet; How does this influence her ability to tailor her letter to her audience? -T reviews her writing and points out its features	2b2. Expand students' concept of audience 5. Participate as a member of the community

T reads first line of 2nd paragraph: So this is me using kind of a lead to get in there. T reads the rest of the 2nd paragraph: So I told you why and I kind of gave you an explanation. My second one was microplastics. T corrects something in her 2nd paragraph. T moves chart paper to white board. One S facing away from the chart paper T: So now we're onto our 3rd paragraph which is the plastic doesn't decompose for hundreds of years. Remember it says for up to 450 years? T writes and says aloud: The final reason… T: So this is the way I'm transitioning. Finally, the final reason. T writes and says aloud: we should ban plastic bags because they take 450 years to decompose. S: Why don't we just throw all the plastic in the world to Uranus? And then, and then… T: Excuse you, excuse you, we're done. T: What is, how else, what else should I say in this statement? S: They don't decompose but they make um they make the Great Lakes not as safe because…	 -T thinks aloud as she writes; attends to transition word -I wonder what made this student think of this? - T dismisses the idea quickly. -T asks the students for their ideas	4a. Participate as a member of the community

T: Okay, so if it's taking this long to decompose… **9:30 (5:00)** ==T writes and says aloud: We may use bags because they are cheap, and easy to get, but…== ==T: I want to say something to the effect of we use a bag for 20 minutes to carry our groceries home and then it goes in the garbage and takes 450 years to decompose. And that's a problem.== ==T rereads beginning of sentence== ==T writes and reads aloud: If we teach people to bring reusable bags to the stores we will have a lot less waste.== T: Is there anything else I want to add to that right now? ==If you look at the front board, this was that example of the soda tax (moves chart paper so Ss can see the mentor letter on the white board). I want you to look at the conclusion. That's this last one.==	-T thinks aloud as she writes. -T directs Ss attention to the mentor letter.	 2bi3. Teach students to emulate the features of good writing.

Appendix K

Table 2: Excerpt from Ms. Miller's Enactment Calendar

Lesson	Date (Length)	Lesson Activities
Interactive Read Aloud – *City Green*	Day 1 1.8.19 (26 min)	• Teacher introduced students to central question • Teacher engaged students in an interactive read aloud of *City Green*
Lesson 1 – Project Launch: Introduction to the public issue Supporting question: What do we need to know in order to complete the project?	Day 1 1.8.19 (13 min)	• Students watched launch video • Teacher elicited students' initial ideas about drawbacks of plastic and recorded them on a t-chart • Teacher shared plastic items with students and elicited and recorded their ideas about the benefits of plastic
	Day 2 1.9.19 (14 min)	• Teacher provided overview of final project • Teacher elicited Need to Knows from students (first in pairs) and recorded them on anchor chart
Lesson 2 – Exploration of the public issue Supporting question: How do citizens learn about public issues in our state?	Day 2 1.9.19 (30 min)	• Students watched PBS video about plastic pollution in the oceans • Teacher elicited additional Need to Knows • Teacher modeled See, Think, Wonder process with an image • Students engaged in a gallery walk of three images and completed See, Think, Wonder packet • Teacher engaged students in a discussion about what they learned from the images

Appendix L

Table 3: Excerpt from Ms. Walker's Enactment Calendar

Interactive Read Aloud – *City Green*	Day 1 2.25.19 (59 min)	• Teacher engaged students in an interactive read aloud of *City Green* • Teacher shared plastic items with students and elicited students' initial ideas about drawbacks of plastic and recorded them on a t-chart • Students watched launch video • Teacher modeled how to develop a Need to Know questions • Teacher shared central question of the unit • Students wrote Need to Knows on sticky notes and posted them on a chart
Lesson 1 – Project Launch: Introduction to the public issue Supporting question: What do we need to know in order to complete the project?		
Lesson 2 – Exploration of the public issue Supporting question: How do citizens learn about public issues in our state?	Day 2 2.26.19 (52 min)	• Teacher reviewed central question and introduced supporting question • Students watched PBS video about plastic pollution in the oceans • Teacher modeled See, Think, Wonder process with an image • Students engaged in a turn and talk to practice See, Think, Wonder process • Students engaged in a gallery walk of three images and completed See, Think, Wonder packet • Teacher engaged students in a discussion about what they learned from the images • Teacher reviewed vocabulary and introduced students to the project wall

Appendix M

Opinion Writing Planner

Name:_____   Date:_____

Handout 10-B
Opinion Writing Planner

Point of View/Opinion: _____

Related Core Democratic Value: _____

Reason 1	**Reason 2`**	**Reason 3**
Support	**Support**	**Support**

Appendix N

Table 4: Students' Opinions and Selected Audiences

Ms. Walker's Students' Opinions	Selected Audiences	Number of Students*	Ms. Miller's Students' Opinions	Selected Audiences	Number of Students*
Make a law about plastic pollution (e.g., "I believe that you should make a law to ban plastic in the Great Lakes.")	State Senator	3	Ban or charge for plastic bags (e.g., "I believe we should ban plastic bags at grocery stores.")	President Trump	5
	State Rep.	1		State Senator	2
				State Rep.	2
Clean up the Lakes (e.g., "I think we should make a law to make machines to take plastic out the Great Lakes.")	State Senator	3	Ban plastic (e.g., "I believe we should ban plastic that is not reusable.")	President Trump	1
				State Senator	1
				Local Property Manager	1
Require recycling bins (e.g., "I believe [name of state] should make a law requiring recycling bins on the beaches.")	State Rep.	2	Ban plastic straws (e.g., "I believe we should ban plastic straws.")	President Trump	1
	State Senator	1		State Senator	1
Ban plastic (e.g., "I think the government should ban plastic forever.")	State Senator	1	Ban fishing line ("I believe we should ban fishing lines.")	State Senator	1
	State Rep.	1			
Recycle fishing line (e.g., "I believe that [name of	State Senator	1	Lower use of plastic	President Trump	1

state] should make a law requiring people to recycle fishing line.")	State Rep.	1	("I think we should lower the use of plastic.")		
Raise awareness (e.g., "I believe that we should put up signs to not throw plastic in the Great lakes.")	State Senator	1	Multiple solutions ("One of my opinions is that plastic straws should be banned for good. My second opinion is that we should ban plastic bags. . .")	State Senator	1
Reuse plastic ("I believe people need to reuse plastic as much as possible.")	State Senator	1			
Ban Styrofoam ("I think you should ban Styrofoam forever.")	State Rep.	1			
Climate change ("My opinion is climate change leads to rising water level.")	State Rep.	1			

*As noted, several of the families did not provide consent for me to use their children's classwork as part of the study.

Appendix O

Example of a Final Draft from Ms. Walker's Classroom

April 12, 2019

Senator [Name]
PO Box [Number]
[City, State, Zip Code)

Dear Senator [Name],

I am a third grade student in Broadway Elementary school in [State]. Did you know that there is plastic in the Great Lakes. I believe that you should make a law to ban plastic in the Great Lakes.

My first reason is that plastic makes people sick. And if people drink the Great Lakes water they can get sick.

My second reason is that the plastic can make animals injured. And if fish eat the plastic they can get injured.

My last reason is that if there is to much trash in the Great Lakes people will not visit [State]. And if people see a lot of trash in the Great Lakes they might think it's disgusting.

In conclusion this why we should ban plastic in the Great Lakes. I hope you make the right decision. Thank you for reading this.

Sincerely,

Yasmin

Appendix P

Example of a Final Draft from Ms. Miller's Classroom*

President Trump   February 11, 2019
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington D.C.

Dear President Trump,

I am a third grade student at Riverside Elementary School in [State]. I believe we should ban plastic bags at grocery stores. Plastic bags are harmful to our Great Lakes because they harm animals, they break down into microplastics, and they don't decompose for 450 years. It's more than four lifetimes!!

Imagine you're a turtle swimming In Lake Michigan. You see a plastic bag but think it's food you can eat. This is a common problem of plastic pollution in the Great Lakes. If we ban plastic bags, it will help reduce plastic pollution in the Great Lakes.

Microplastics is miniature plastic. Microplastics have been found polluting the Great Lakes. If we throw away plastic bags they turn into microplastics. The fish eat the microplastics and we eat the fish eating microplastic so it is getting our food chain.

My final reason we should ban plastic bags is they don't decompose for 450 years. You may use plastic bags because they're cheap and sturdy But that's what makes it so bad for the environment.

In conclusion, I think you should ban plastic bags for the environment, animals, and humans benefit. Thank you for taking the time to consider my opinion.

Sincerely,

Leah

*The text in blue matches the text from Ms. Miller's sample letter.