

A Dissertation

entitled

A Qualitative Study of Social Studies Teachers Educators'

Use and Understanding of Civic Competence

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Curriculum and Instruction

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Social studies education has traditionally aimed to foster productive citizens. However, recent societal polarizations have added complexity to this objective (Levy et al., 2023). Amid these challenges, understanding remains limited regarding how teacher preparation programs are adapting their social studies methods curriculum. Grounded in Thornton's (1991) curricular-instructional gatekeeping and Avery's (2003b) implications for civic education in social studies teacher education, this dissertation addressed three research questions: (1) How do social studies teacher educators understand civic competence?, (2) How do social studies teacher educators' approach and incorporate civic competence in their teacher preparation curriculum?, and (3) How do social studies teacher educators see the future of social studies teacher preparation? This qualitative study explored the choices and perspectives of seven Ohio-based social studies teacher educators. Participants were interviewed about their understanding of civic competence, its inclusion in their methods curriculum, and their vision social studies' future. In addition, relevant course materials and methods course syllabi were shared by the participants. Data,

including interview responses and shared materials were analyzed using codebooks based on the NCSS (2018) definition of civic competence and Avery's (2003b) implications. Findings revealed that the teacher educators largely align with the NCSS (2018) civic competence definition, emphasizing political knowledge. When controlling the curricular-instructional gate, these teacher educators incorporated civic competence primarily through instructional modeling and facilitating discussions on civic and controversial issues. Absent, whether intentionally or not, were ideas pertaining to global citizenship, diversity, equity, inclusion, and informed action. When discussing the future of social studies methods, concerns about the lack of inclusion of global civic education and the impact of state legislative decisions were mentioned. Further research should delve into the observation of civic instructional strategies in social studies methods and how teacher educators are incorporating themes of diversity, equity, inclusion, and global citizenship within their methods courses. Consequently, stakeholders in the educational community should advocate for enriched professional development for social studies teacher educators to deepen their understanding of civic principles, but also expand their repertoire of curricular approaches. In turn, this can have a lasting impact on further impacting future generations of teachers and students.

This dissertation is dedicated to:

Mary Goodenow

You were my mother first, but also my favorite history teacher. May I always carry your legacy of a love for learning and education. Please continue to watch over me and guide me from heaven.

My former, current, and future K-12 students and preservice teachers.

I started on this doctoral journey because I wanted to create more outstanding teachers in the world. I vow to continue this legacy and always strive for better in education.

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## **Table of Contents**

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables	viii
I. Introduction	1
A. The Problem	1
B. The Purpose	3
C. Research Questions	3
D. Significance of this Research	4
E. Key Terms	4
II. Review of Literature	6
A. Scope and Sequence	6
B. Citizenship, Civic Education, and Social Studies in the Historical Context	6
C. Civic and Social Studies Education Since 2002	9
D. Theoretical Framework: Curricular-Instructional Gatekeeping	12
E. Implications for Civic Teachers and Social Studies Teacher Educators	14
III. Methodology	21
A. Research Design	21
B. Data Collection and Reduction	25
C. Data Analysis	32
D. Overview of the Participants	35
E. Participant Profiles	37

F. Limitations	58
IV. Findings and Claims	60
A. Familiar with Civic Competence Definition	61
B. Civic Competence Understanding is on a Continuum	63
C. Activities and Assignments Addressing Civic Competence Were Used	67
D. Social Studies Teacher Educators Report that They Often Design Their Civic Lessons to Match the Perceived Needs of Their Students	86
E. Social Studies Teacher Educators Report Value in Lesson Modeling as an Instructional Technique with Emphasis on Facilitating Discussions on Controversial Issues	88
F. Social Studies Teacher Educators Acknowledge the Impact of Societal Issues, Along with Potential Legislative Changes, on Their Social Studies Methods	89
G. Social Studies Teacher Educators Acknowledge the Importance of Including National and Global Citizenship, but Recognize the Need to Improve	92
V. Conclusion	95
A. Ambitious Teaching While Controlling the Curricular Gate	96
B. Understanding Civic Competence	97
C. Civic Competence Curriculum Choices in Social Studies Methods	98
D. Future of Social Studies Methods	100
E. Informed Action and the Curricular Gate	102
F. Further Implications and Recommendations	105



G. Final Thoughts	109
References	111
Appendix	128
A. IRB protocol	128
B. Initial Request Participation Letter	130
C. Interview Questions	131

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Civic Competence Definition Codebook	28
Table 2: Implications for Civic Teachers and Teacher Educators Codebook	30
Table 3: Participant Demographics	36
Table 4: Preservice Teachers Need Extensive Training in Facilitating Discussions on Civic and Controversial Issues	68
Table 5: Assignments and projects should align with how today's youth think about political, social, and community issues	70
Table 6: Methods instructors should help beginning teachers understand that the development of civic identity is a dynamic process that takes place in a social and cultural context	73
Table 7: Preservice teachers should analyze civic texts to understand how to adapt them to their students to foster civic virtues	77
Table 8: Teacher Educators should help preservice teachers become familiar with basic methods and instructional techniques that help students make connections between and among concepts	80
Table 9: Teacher Educators should integrate local, national, and global perspectives into a methods course	84

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

From the recognition of our founding documents that civic understanding is essential for participation in a democratic society to the Committee of Seven at the turn of the century that emphasized community civics, a focus on forming well-educated, productive citizens has always been a part of a societal norm. (Butler, 1899; Engle, 1970; NEA, 1894). Over the last century, social studies education has taken up the call to include civic education in their curricular umbrella making civics a staple and fundamental aspect of social studies education (Rubin & Justice, 2005; Shaver, 1979). This includes the aim of preparing well-educated and productive citizens. While the inclusion of civics in social studies education has not changed, what has changed is the critical need to expand the reach of civic education to meet the needs of today's current society.

### **The Problem**

The world we live in is politically vastly different than the era of one or two generations ago. Polarizing issues on civic understanding and areas that used to be considered taboo to discuss in open conversation are now at the center of mainstream conversations and often take place on social media platforms (Pace, 2021b; Payne, 2017; Pollock et al., 2022). Discussions surrounding the rights of citizens, citizenship activism, and strong viewpoints towards government entities on both sides of the proverbial aisle are now accepted as the norm. A decisive environment has formed where mutual understanding of viewpoints is harder to reach, and individuals are increasingly inclined to take sides and assert that their rights as citizens have been violated. This questioning of

democratic values has subsequently placed a deliberate spotlight on social studies education to attend to this divide and educate today's citizens about their civic duties and roles within society.

In response to the escalating political and social tensions in our current society, it has become imperative for social studies teachers to confront this divide and educate their students about their rights, responsibilities, and roles as citizens. This entails empowering students to develop their own perspectives, foster informed action, and strive to improve their society (Reuben, 2005). As these political and social tensions increase, social studies teachers in area schools are increasingly tasked with the responsibility of equipping students with the knowledge and political awareness necessary to become active and engaged citizens in our society (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Levinson, 2011; Miller-Lane et al., 2007). Although the National Council of Social Studies has made significant strides to support social studies teachers in this area through the implementation of standards focused on inquiry within the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework (NCSS, 2013a), there remains a pressing need to prepare future teachers to address the current political, social, racial, and global conflicts in today's society (Pace, 2021b). The call to address this challenge falls upon teacher preparation to foster a high level of civic knowledge that is needed today. As Payne (2017) asserts, "Just as P-12 students need to learn the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be engaged and critical democrats, their teachers also need to be prepared...to enact democratic education" (p. 102).

How teacher educators are doing that is not as clear as the need as "a huge void exists in the educational research literature about what is happening in teacher education

classes” (Pace, 2021a, p. xv) What needs further investigation is specifically how social studies teacher educators understand civic competence and what instructional choices they are making within their social studies methods course to include the tenets of civic competence (Crocco & Livingston, 2017; Cuenca, 2017; Lucas & Milligan, 2019; Neel & Palmeri, 2017).

### **The Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how social studies teacher educators understand civic competence as well as how they are incorporating civic competence into their teacher preparation curriculum. It also aimed to explore how social studies teacher educators perceive the future of social studies methods in this uncertain time. Through this research, I provided insight and documentation of how civic competence is being addressed within the teacher education field. In doing so, I scratched the surface in answering the call of social studies educators to "empirically explore the most effective ways for social studies teacher preparation programs to deploy the knowledge, skills, and dispositions" (NCSS, 2018, p. 9) around civic competence.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How do social studies teacher educators’ understand civic competence?
2. How do social studies teacher educators' approach and incorporate civic competence in their teacher preparation curriculum?
3. How do social studies teacher educators see the future of social studies teacher preparation?

## **Significance of this Research**

The existing body of research on civic education predominately focuses on its implementation in K-12 classrooms, with less attention on preservice teachers, and even a smaller portion on teacher educators themselves (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; Crocco & Livingston, 2017). This study specifically directed focus on the social studies teacher educator. The perspectives and insights shared by the teacher educators in this study provided valuable insights into their viewpoints and decision-making processes regarding civic competence which has not been fully explored. By documenting their understanding of civic competence and their curricular and instructional decisions, this research sheds light on a loosely unexplored area of empirical research, opening the door for further exploration.

## **Key Terms**

- **C3 Framework:** College, Career and Civic Life for social studies state standards (NCSS, 2013a).
- **Civic Competence:** “Fostering of political knowledge, a self-interested investment in political engagement, and a disposition towards a more inclusive, just, and equitable society” (NCSS, 2018, p. 29).
- **Ambitious Teaching:** “(1) know their subject matter well and see within it the potential to enrich their students’ lives; (2) know their students well, which includes the kinds of lives their students lead, how these youngsters think about and perceive the world, and that they are far more capable than they and most others believe them to be; and (3) know how to create the necessary space for themselves and their students in environments in which others (e.g.,

administrators, other teachers) may not appreciate their efforts” (Grant & Gradwell, 2010, p. 2, as cited in NCSS 2018).

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Scope and Sequence**

This literature review is situated within the broader research fields of civic education, social studies education, and teacher education. Firstly, it will delve into the historical background of civic education, highlighting key elements that are still prevalent in the instruction of civic competence today. Secondly, this review will provide a detailed overview of the obstacles and changes related to civics in the field of social studies education over the past two decades. The review will then introduce the theoretical framework for this study focusing on curricular-instructional gatekeeping (Thornton, 1991). Finally, the review will specifically draw on Avery (2003b) implications for social studies teacher educators in civic education providing a framework to categorize and clarify different curricular approaches. Both Thornton (1991) and Avery (2003b) will serve as a lens for examining the findings of this study.

#### **Citizenship, Civic Education, and Social Studies in the Historical Context**

Beginning with the establishment of the Constitution as the national government, a focus on ensuring civic competence was deemed essential. Our founding fathers recognized that while the educated, white, male landowners possessed the necessary civic understanding to participate in the democratic society of the day, they also recognized that they needed to reform the school curriculum to ensure its democratic vitality through the education of future citizens (Reuben, 2005).

Thomas Jefferson was one of the major contributors for ensuring that citizenship education was a necessary part to any public or private education. Grammar school, like



the high schools of today, and colleges were designed to prepare the future leaders of the democracy. To further prepare citizens prior to grammar school, he proposed “common schools” where a minimum intellectual level could be established for all citizens.

Recognizing moral values and using those values to be a “literate, ethical, and patriotic” citizen was the focus in these early years (Fuhrman & Lazerson, 2005, p. xxiv). While Jefferson believed that everyone could participate in the democracy, although only according to their pocketbooks and family connections, their roles of preserved capacity of civic understanding varied.

In the post-civil war period, for the first time in history the enrollment of students in public education surpassed private academies (Hertzberg, 1981). High schools became more prevalent in not only urban centers, but suburban neighborhoods as well. A fraction of the individuals who started high school finished and even a smaller number continued in their collegiate pursuits. Those not pursuing a college degree after high school or those who did not complete high school were slated for the work force. Due to the influx of enrollment and future enrollment within the high schools and universities, the educational authorities recognized that a shift in curriculum was required if the status quo in civic understanding was to be maintained.

In 1884, the National Council of the National Education Association (NEA) formed the Committee of Ten with President Charles Eliot from Harvard, to oversee this controversial problem of creating some version of uniformity between collegiate bound and workforce bound students. While the report did not offer a direct solution, the committee did declare that “every subject which is taught at all in a secondary school should be taught in the same way and to the same extent to every pupil so long as he

pursues it, no matter what the probable destination of the pupil may be, or at what point his education is to cease” (NEA, 1894, p. 17). This level of uniformity was translated in root memorization and standardization of end of course exams and college entrance exams in American History and Government. Reminiscence of these standardized measures are still evident in today’s social studies curriculum and teacher preparation competences.

After the Committee of Ten laid the groundwork for restructuring history and civic instruction within social studies, the American Historical Association (AHA) convened a committee of seven social studies educators who were tasked with addressing the issues of scope and sequence of social studies content. A history course was recommended for each year of high school as history was a lens to “prepare boys and girls for the duties of daily life and intelligent citizenship” (McLaughlin et al., 1899, p. 122). Through their discussion they proposed major components of particular courses of a “junior cycle” of courses in American History, European History, Geography, and community civics as well as a “senior cycle” of courses in European History, American History, and Problems of Democracy course (Evans, 2004). Significance outcomes of the committee’s conclusion include the Problems of Democracy, which was one of the first occurrences where the focus of the course was on current societal issues and the incorporation of “source study” as an integration of primary sources into History curriculum (McLaughlin et al., 1899). Both outcomes laid the foundation for a deeper focus on civic instruction in the future.

## **Civic and Social Studies Education Since 2002**

In the history of the United States, civic education and social studies education have always been intertwined. Over the last two decades, this has not changed. This practice, of integrating citizenship in a social studies classroom, is common and expected (Avery & Simmons, 2000; Barr et al., 1977; Shaver, 1996; Thornton, 2005). However, public policies over the last decade have impacted the curricular directions of social studies education (Reuben, 2005). Below is an overview of significant changes in social studies education over the last twenty years.

With the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, social studies and civic education began a sharp decline. The passage of this measure required schools to conduct assessments in math, reading/language arts and science only (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Through this implementation of NCLB, a clear message was sent concerning the importance of civic education. Math, reading, and science were more important in the overall development of the child (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003). The United States Secretary of Education at the time, Rod Paige, defended NCLB decision stating that “without those core learning abilities [in the other subjects], American children cannot adequately learn about the great history of our nation” (Paige, 2003, p. 59). The reality quickly became clear. If a subject did not have a standardized test attached to its outcomes, it held less importance within the K-12 education classroom (Fuhrman & Lazerson, 2005). Within the decade after NCLB was enacted, NCSS blamed the decline of civic learning to the rapid increase of technology, the decrease of instructional time in K-12 classrooms due to testing, and the growing achievement gap between whites and low-income students (NCSS, 2013b).

By 2010, a greater need to focus on literacy and mathematics became apparent and the Common Core was released. This time, the field of social studies was not left out of the focus as a small portion of standards for social studies, although with a language arts focus, was introduced. With Common Core, social studies teachers were tasked with still teaching their social studies content standards while also supporting their language arts colleagues and ultimately integrating the two contents (Kenna & Russell III, 2014). Though the Common Core and its social studies standards were adopted into many state standards and curriculums, social studies and civic understanding remained an afterthought in both the number of standards and instructional time in the K-12 classroom.

NCLB and Common Core brought social studies education to a critical juncture, where it had to choose between maintaining the status quo of rote memorization or transitioning to a more progressive approach that incorporated diverse viewpoints, beliefs, and ideas (Journell, 2011). The National Council of Social Studies (NCSS) responded to this need to change with the release of The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework. This framework was developed to provide guidance for state boards of education and social studies teachers to prepare their students to be active, informed, and justice-oriented citizens (Cuenca, 2017). These standards, designed to align with each state's social studies standards, seek to equip students not only for college or career life but also for a well-informed civic life. By incorporating elements such as application, inquiry, evaluation, and informed action into curricular standards, the C3 Framework elevated the academic areas of history, civics, economics, and government (NCSS, 2013a; New et al., 2021).

Soon after the C3 Framework was adopted into the NCSS National Curriculum Standards and by many state boards of education, it was only a matter of time before the spotlight turned towards teacher education programs to adjust and evaluate their curricular practices. In 2018, the National Standards for the Preparation of Social Studies Teachers was revised to complement the C3 Framework and meet this need. The argument was made that if “we operated under the assumption that if we wanted social studies students to be active, informed, and justice-oriented citizens, teachers must be prepared to also exhibit these traits” (Cuenca, 2017, p. 371).

While the tenants of the C3 framework now represent the “prevailing pedagogical model” (Hlavacik & Krutka, 2021, p. 418) in the social studies education field, the next logical step is to prepare our future social studies teachers in this inquiry approach. In 2018, the National Standards for the Preparation of Social Studies Teachers was launched by NCSS. Each of the anchor competences in the C3 Framework appear within the new standards providing a central focus on civic competence (NCSS, 2018). The vision of this document was to create a "disciplinary inquiry driven classroom, where students practice the habits of civic life" (p.10). The incorporation of these standards provided additional depth and importance to fostering civic competence within future teachers.

Further cementing the C3 Framework into teacher preparation institutions was the adoption of these standards by accreditation boards like the Higher Education Council of Accreditation of Teacher Preparation (CAEP). Institutions are now required to document their civic competence integration within their social studies teacher preparation programs. With the adoption of these standards, it has become imperative to investigate

precisely how social studies teacher educators are understanding civic competence and how they are meeting the curricular aims put forth by CAEP and NCSS.

### **Theoretical Framework: Curricular-Instructional Gatekeeping**

This dissertation study focuses on understanding how teacher educators perceive and make curricular decisions in a social studies methods class related to civic competence. To guide this investigation, the theoretical framework of “gatekeeping” will be employed. The theorization of gatekeeping traces back to the works of Lewin (1947) and the initial identification of the gatekeeping concept which was later expanded on by White (1950) with the gatekeeping metaphor. Stephen Thornton (1989) further developed “gatekeeping” and introduced the role of the “curricular instructional gatekeeper” to the social studies education field.

Gatekeeping refers to “the decisions teachers make about curriculum and instruction and the criteria they use to make those decisions” (Thornton, 2005, p. 1). Gatekeepers “make the day-to-day decisions about the subject matter and experiences to which students have access and the nature of that subject matter and those experiences” (Thornton, 1991, p. 237). These decisions regarding what to teach and what not to teach are not made alone. Additional factors such as administration viewpoints, academic standards, curriculum policies, political factors, or student influences can play a role in curricular decision making (Grant, 1996; Hung, 2018; Misco & Tseng, 2018).

It is the teacher’s duty to account for these influences and navigate the learning of their students. Thornton outlines that teachers need to go through several steps when making curricular decisions. First, they critically examine their curricular aims or purposes which can be influenced by their past experiences, institutional demands, or

societal influences. Second, they determine the specific subject matter they will focus on and examine which instructional strategies will best fit their objectives. “Unless materials are expected to teach themselves, teachers must bring purpose to the selection and use of materials” (Thornton, 2005, p. 102). Lastly, they consider their students and how they might design or adjust their curriculum to meet the perceived needs of their students. (Thornton, 1991, 2001a). Solid gatekeeping within the education context reflects upon the purpose behind the decision to teach or not teach something and its relevance on behalf of the student. The curricular-instructional gatekeeper is responsible for not only “how far you open the instructional gate, and for whom you open the gate, it will also determine what the classroom experience looks like” (Hawley & Crowe, 2016, p. 439). Although one curricular decision within the classroom might be small, that one decision can influence and alter the reality and view of the world (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). In the end, it is the teacher who ends up deciding what is taught and how it is taught; those decisions should be made with care (Adler, 2008; Kaka & Hollstein, 2023).

Within the social studies methods course, teacher educators are also curricular-instructional gatekeepers who play an integral role in the content, methods, and outcomes of their social studies methods course. It is through the teacher educator’s curricular gate that prescribed standards, instructional methods, and educational outcomes for their methods course are determined. One of the aims of NCSS (2018) within the National Standards for the Preparation of Social Studies Teachers is to “cultivate the abilities of teacher candidates to plan ambitious learning sequences that draw upon social studies knowledge and literacies to support the civic competence of all learners” (p. 15). This study investigated this aim through Thornton’s lens; when social studies teacher

educators were asked about their understanding of civic competence, they were asked to explain the instructional methods used to address civic competence.

### **Implications for Social Studies Teacher Educators in Civic Education**

When I began my search to investigate how social studies teacher educators approached civic education in their methods courses, research was limited (Crocco & Livingston, 2017; Gallagher, 2017; Peterson et al., 2015). However, Avery (2003a) and Avery (2003b) outlined suggestions for social studies teacher educators on how to integrate civic education into social studies methods and I found this to be a clear overview. As civic education, social studies methods, and social studies teacher educators were the focus of my study, I decided to use her six implications, addressed similarly in two different publications, as my framework to formulate my thinking about civic competence in teacher education and to assist in the categorization and coding of my findings. Listed below are Avery (2003b) six implications for teacher educators for integrating civic curriculum into their social studies methods classroom. Below this list, I will address each one providing context and empirical research that explains each implication in more detail.

#### ***Preservice teachers need extensive training in on facilitating discussions on civic and controversial issues***

It is not a new notion that teacher educators should be preparing preservice teachers to facilitate difficult conversations in their classrooms. Philpott et al. (2011) investigated preservice teacher's perceptions about teaching controversial issues. They concluded that participants did not feel adequately prepared to teach controversial issues in both their student teaching classroom and their future classroom. Additionally, the



study stated that while controversial issues can be included or integrated into the curriculum, “teachers face uncertainty on how to best teach the content” (p. 42).

Tannebaum (2015) also asserted that social studies teaching candidates often leave teacher preparation programs with an understanding of social justice issues and the importance of democracy integration in the classroom, but a lack of understanding on how to implement this knowledge in their classroom. If we want our future social studies educators to hold critical discussions about controversial issues in their classroom, we also need to model it within our teacher education classroom (Avery, 2004).

Hess (2009) is one of the prolific researchers addressing controversial issues or as she names it “controversial public issues.” It is through her research (Hess, 2001, 2002, 2008, 2009; Hess, 2018), that teacher educators can first facilitate the conversations in their own classroom and secondly support their preservice teachers doing the same in their future classrooms. Likewise, through engagement in controversial issues, there is an increase in “civic participation, critical thinking skills, interpersonal skills, content understanding, and political activity” (Misco, 2014, p. 48). It is through these open discussions pertaining to controversial issues, that teacher educators will be able to begin address civic competence where it will impact the future of social studies education on a larger scale (Hess & Posselt, 2002).

***Assignments and projects should align with how today's youth think about political, social, and community issues***

To meet this assertion, teacher educators need to design assessments where their preservice teachers are exploring who their students are and what is important to them. The first step in this process is for the preservice teacher to get to know their students.

Teacher educators can foster this connection by assigning their students to conduct interviews (Avery, 2003b), create a classroom case study (Florio-Ruane, 1999; Hawkins, 2007), or taking detailed notes during a classroom observation. (Kohn, 2006). While “get to know your students” is a common, but important assertion made in teacher education, doing it well can significantly expand the understanding of the preservice teacher about their environment. This in turn impacts their lessons and curricular choices that they make utilizing their new knowledge as a basis for their understanding.

Where teacher educators can play an active role in this process beyond assigning a project exploring their classroom, is to assist in debriefing dialogue about their experiences in a reflection or in the methods course. Payne (2017) explored this issue within her elementary methods course when two preservice teachers were asked to enact curriculum focusing on democratic values in a diverse field experience. While the two teacher candidates were exposed to a rich environment of democratic learning opportunities, the backgrounds and preconceived notions of the two candidates hindered them from fully absorbing everything in their experience. Her assertion that more guidance was needed on the part of the teacher educator to help them deconstruct their experiences is a reminder for other teacher educators when deciding what projects to use in their methods course.

Going one step further, McDonald et al. (2013) and Zeichner et al. (2015) advocate for community-based placements where preservice teachers can interact with their students outside of the classroom and within their community. Collectively they found that through these placements, preservice teachers developed a deeper understanding of diversity, how the context of their students impacted their lessons, and

how they view the community as a whole. These tenants of diversity and understanding the perspectives of their students can increase the civic understanding of the preservice teacher.

***Methods instructors should help beginning teachers understand that the development of civic identity is a dynamic process that takes place in a social and cultural context***

When preservice teachers begin their teacher education program, they may not have a deep understanding of other environments apart from the ones they were educated in (Lortie, 1975). Avery (2003b) implores social studies teacher educators to remember this within their curricular decisions as they strive to include civic identity. It has been documented that there are connections between student's socioeconomic status and their ethnic and racial identity to their civic understanding (Castro & Knowles, 2017; Hahn, 2003; Obenchain et al., 2016). Teachers conduct inquiry assignments that are designed so that the preservice teacher inquiries about the lives of their students and then make comparisons across contexts can help them come to this realization. Scholars have concluded that service-learning programs are an effective way for preservice teachers be immersed in an experience that is different than their own (Blevins & LeCompte, 2015; Boyle-Baise et al., 2006; Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008; LeCompte et al., 2020).

***Preservice teachers should analyze civic texts to understand how to adapt them to their students to foster civic virtues***

The social studies textbook plays a dominant role in shaping the civic disposition and understanding of today's youth (Keith, 1991). This dominance, however, plays it safe in addressing and promoting civic understanding as topics are drawn back to the bare minimum (Levinson, 2011). Avery and Simmons (2000) did a textbook analysis

examining the key concepts of democracy, national identity, and diversity of members of society. While democracy and national identity were strong, a focus on the diversity of members in society was small at best. Preservice teachers need to recognize that while the textbook does preach a democratic agenda, this agenda is not always inclusive to all Americans.

A curricular model that has grown in popularity in the field of social studies is the Inquiry Design Model or IDM (Martell, 2020). This curriculum model utilizes primary and secondary sources in conjunction with essential questions challenge students to consider all perspectives and ideas as they explore a topic (Grant et al., 2017). Where the IDM model fits well into addressing civic competence is where it encourages students to take what the student have learned and apply it to their everyday lives. “Taking informed action in the civic arena means that students have thought through a set of issues, assessed the options for the action, and then decided to pursue one or more courses of action in an attempt to address a relevant issue” (p. 28). The IDM method is a fruitful example that teacher educators to use within their teacher education classroom as well as their preservice teachers to use within their future classrooms to encourage civic understanding and action.

***Teacher Educators should help preservice teachers become familiar with basic methods and instructional techniques that help students make connections between and among concepts***

Creating a toolbox of instructional techniques is a common for any social studies methods instructional course. Avery (2003a) takes a more intentional approach concerning civic education and civic understanding. It is assumed that majority of

preservice teachers understand what “freedom of speech” means and that it is found in the first amendment. Where this concept can become fuzzier is when freedom of speech is examined in different contexts from different backgrounds and from the media.

Teacher educators need to expose preservice teachers to instructional techniques that can help them deconstruct an issue and view it from multiple perspectives (Torney-Purta, 1991; Zhang et al., 2012). In doing so, the preservice teacher becomes more aware of their instructional position and can more diligently anticipate the conversations that they will have in their student teaching placement. Further, through making connections between content and their everyday lives, the preservice teachers and subsequently their students become more civically engaged with the historical narrative (Patterson & Nelson, 2010).

***Teacher Educators should integrate local, national, and global perspectives into a methods course***

A focus on global education aligns well with the last part of the civic competence definition to develop a “disposition towards a more inclusive, just, and equitable society” (NCSS, 2018, p. 29). When individuals are exposed to a global perspective, they begin to think about contexts that are different than their own. Through service learning, individuals are able to engage with individuals that are different from themselves in environments where they have little or no frame of reference (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008). It is through experiences like this that teacher educators can support their preservice teachers outside the classroom to develop their own civic competence and civic understanding.

While our public school system does not turn away low-income families from a civic education, large disparities between socioeconomic status and racial divide still exist. Infusing civic education into multicultural and diverse population is a way to confront this reality. Macedo (2005) and Taylor and Trepanier-Street (2007) did just that when they facilitated service-learning opportunities for the preservice teachers in diverse neighborhoods. For teacher educators, having preservice teachers participate in service-learning opportunities where they can invest in the civic development of others can, in turn, foster their own civic understanding and development.

Inside the preservice teacher education classroom, Avery (2003b) suggested that the teacher educators make an intentional decision to choose local or international issues within their instructional plans. By demonstrating a global perspective, this can introduce the preservice teachers to a concept that they may not be familiar with as well as provide an example of what effective civic instruction focusing on a global perspective might look like.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

This study explored how social studies teacher educators understand civic competence and their approaches to the incorporation of civic competence in their teacher preparation curriculum. It also explored how social studies teacher educators viewed the future of social studies preparation pertaining to civic competence. This chapter will review the research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures that were used in this study. Next, the seven participants will be introduced. A participant profile will be presented detailing an overview of each participant including their background in social studies education, a summary of their understanding of civic competence, a summary of how they are incorporating civic instruction in their methods class, and their preserved perspective of the future of social studies methods. An overview of the limitations of this study will conclude this chapter. Framing these research efforts, were the following research questions:

1. How do social studies teacher educators' understand civic competence?
2. How do social studies teacher educators' approach and incorporate civic competence in their teacher preparation curriculum?
3. How do social studies teacher educators see the future of social studies teacher preparation?

### **Research Design**

In this study, I collected data through semi-structured interviews and gathered instructional lessons and materials with a civic focus from the participants. To gain insight into teacher educators' understanding and their curricular choices, a descriptive,

qualitative study design was utilized. This type of design is utilized when the focus is on a specific issue and aims to provide insight from multiple perspectives (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Creswell et al., 2007). As described by Hancock and Algozzine (2017), “descriptive designs illustrate and explain key features of a phenomenon within its context” (p. 39). This design was well-suited for this study as it investigated crucial curricular aspects related to the central phenomenon of civic competence within social studies teacher preparation programs.

### ***Participants***

The population for this study consisted of social studies teacher educators with full-time, continuing appointments across colleges and universities in Ohio. This population included lecturers, instructors, and tenured track, or tenured professors. Adjunct and part-time instructors were not used in this study as they are not usually tasked with developing and writing curricular modules or assignments for institutions of higher education. Additionally, individuals that hold full-time continuous appointments within a college of education are more likely to be the ones submitting reports to the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) for accreditation. Since some of the aims set forth by NCSS for accreditation were the focus of this study and the individuals are directly responsible for enacting these standards, others who do not meet these requirements were excluded.

In this study, I limited the research sample to CAEP accredited institutions in Ohio. This is due to their longevity in following CAEP accreditation protocols as Ohio was also the first state to sign a partnership agreement with CAEP as their official accreditation body for teacher preparation. In addition, there are a high number of teacher



preparation programs within the state. CAEP has accredited 43 undergraduate social studies teacher education programs in Ohio under the guidelines of NCSS (CAEP, 2023). With this sample, comparisons and generalizations across teacher education programs within this study were more easily obtained.

### ***Recruitment and Selection***

Convenience sampling was initially used to gain a master email list of the Higher Education Special Interest Group (SIG) which is a higher education special committee within the Ohio Council for the Social Studies (OCSS). Any instructor at a college or university in Ohio with continuous employment in social studies teacher education can register to be a member of SIG. As it is voluntary to sign up for this group, these individuals have already shown a deeper commitment to advancing social studies teacher education (Palinkas et al., 2015). Their participation in SIG increased their willingness to participate in this research study. Furthermore, only individuals who served as methods instructors for middle childhood and adolescent and young adult social studies majors at either the bachelor or master level would be considered for this study. Elementary social studies teacher educators were excluded from the sample as preparing elementary social studies teachers was beyond the scope of this study.

Recruitment began with an introduction email to all middle childhood and adolescent and young adult SIG teacher educators utilizing the SIG list serve. This email introduced the purpose and research focus of this study and the research questions. Participants were also informed that if they did participate, course syllabi and class activities or assessments would be requested for this study. The IRB protocols and procedures were also outlined in the email and the informed consent form was attached. Finally, my

contact information was included so participants could ask further questions before participating.

An initial inquiry email was sent in the Fall of 2022 and then a follow-up email one week later to the same recipients to increase participation to six to eight participants. Once individuals agreed to participate, each individual was verified as a social studies instructor on their institutional website and cross-checked with the institution listed under CAEP accredited. Purposeful sampling was also used to ensure that the participants span the five Ohio regions outlined by OCSS (Northwest, Northeast, Central, Southwest, and Southeast). Purposeful sampling was used further to ensure that the participants represented both public and private institutions of various sizes. This targeted sampling technique allowed this study to obtain different perspectives while remaining focused on the purpose of this study (Richards & Morse, 2012). Pinpointing these subsections of the population also increases the transferability of the research findings as they could be applied in different states that receive accreditation through CAEP.

After the initial email and follow-up email, five participants responded and agreed to participate in the study. The last two participants were gained through snowball sampling through my contacts at OCSS and further direct asks off the SIG email list serve. The participant goal was met with seven social studies teacher educators in Ohio. The participants were from varying size institutions and institutional designs, covered the five regions of Ohio outlined by OCSS, and were all at CAEP accredited institutions. Details of the participants are presented in table three in chapter four. The specific OCSS region each participant was from was not shared to increase their confidentiality.

### ***Instruments***

A key component of the data collection in this study was the facilitation of a semi-structured interview with each participant. This approach allowed for specific areas related to the topic to be explored while also allowing space for the participants and the interviewer to fully provide further details outside the scope of the specific interview question (Galletta, 2013; Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Interview questions were developed based on a review of literature focused on civic education as well as the definition of civic competence provided by NCSS (2018).

The interviews focused on three research questions concerning how the participants understand civic competence, their curricular approach to civic competence in their teacher education classroom, as well as their beliefs about the future of social studies methods. Before conducting the first interview, the semi-structured interview questions were reviewed by a scholar in the social studies teacher education field and a teacher education researcher that was not a participant in this study. Clarification areas were discussed and adjustments to the interview protocol were made. The credibility of the research questions was addressed to ensure that the interview questions aligned with the research questions and that the outcome of the interviews led to a clear analysis within the larger study. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix C

### **Data Collection and Data Reduction**

After confirming the participant's commitment to this study through email, a date and time for the interview was set. Interviews were conducted between October 2022 and December 2022 on the WebEx meeting platform through the University of Toledo.

WebEx served as a secure platform and allowed for easy, secure session recording. At the onset of each interview, space was provided for the participants to ask further questions, and verbal consent to participate was obtained at this time.

At the end of the interview, a digital copy of the course syllabi and any lesson materials or assessments that were discussed were requested. These artifacts were attached to an email by the participants and then downloaded into a password-protected folder within the University of Toledo OneDrive platform. The gathering and viewing of the artifacts allowed me to gain a further frame of reference and documentation for their understanding beyond the interview and improve triangularization (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

The advice of Seidman (2019) was followed, and all interviews were conducted before moving on to the transcript creation and data reduction phase. This procedure minimized imposing generative assumptions that were gained from previous interviewees and applying those assumptions to future interviews. After all interviews were completed, transcriptions were generated using the WebEx recordings and then checked to ensure data accuracy and to help begin the data reduction process. The original recording, transcription, and artifacts shared within the interview were kept on a secure drive that was password protected.

### ***Development of Data Codebooks***

To guide the analysis process, two data codebooks were created before conducting the interviews for this dissertation study. The deductive coding approach was used, which involves identifying and establishing predefined codes, categories, themes, or concepts that are likely to appear in the data based on the research focus and questions

(Saldaña, 2021). These codebooks served as a valuable tool to systematically examine the data and explore specific aspects of civic competence understanding and curriculum throughout the analysis stage.

The first table focused on the NCSS (2018) definition of civic competence which addressed research question number one. The definition consists of three parts: fostering political knowledge, self-investment in political engagement, and disposition towards a more inclusive, just, and equitable society. The table served as a guide to break down the teacher educators' understanding of civic competence during the interview. Key ideas in each part of the definition were identified and listed. This "top-down" or deductive approach involved using provisional codes that were created beforehand (Miles et al., 2014). This table was developed through an extensive review of the relevant literature in the social studies field providing a framework to anticipate and analyze the participants' responses consistently (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

The second set of tables focused on the six implications for social studies teacher educators outlined by Avery (2003b) and aligned with research question two. Each implication was viewed individually, and possible area of focus was listed for each after an extensive literature search. Using a deductive coding approach, this table helped categorize and organize the data with the recommendations put forth by Avery (2003b). This in turn allowed for a systematic analysis of the participants' curricular and instructional choices related to civic competence.

**Table 1***Civic Competence Definition Codebook*

Area of Focus	What is it	Descriptive Behaviors
Fostering Political Knowledge	<p>Knowledge of American democracy</p> <p>Current understanding of political issues</p> <p>Knowledge of community and background</p> <p>How government functions, and the acquisition of behaviors that allow citizens to participate in government (Youniss et al., 2002, p. 124).</p> <p>In a general way; the expectation is that citizens be knowledgeable about the world in which they live and informed about the social forces in which their lives are enmeshed (Parker &amp; Jarolimek, 1984).</p>	<p>Demonstrate knowledge of social studies disciplines in concepts, facts, and tools</p> <p>Knowledge of basic freedoms</p> <p>Areas of knowledge: civics, economics, geography, history, and social/behavioral sciences</p> <p>Content knowledge tests</p>
Self-Investment in Political Engagement	<p>A desire to investigate diverse, problematic, and controversial issues (Miller-Lane et al., 2007).</p> <p>Personal connection to one's life (Kahne &amp; Middaugh, 2008)</p> <p>Adding a political voice to protest or boycott (Levine, 2007).</p> <p>Voting and encouraging others to do so</p> <p>"A citizen is one who actively takes responsibility for the shaping of the institution" (Soltan, 1999, p. 19)</p>	<p>Participating in community problem solving</p> <p>"Citizens must actively participate and take on leadership positions within established systems and community structures" (Westheimer, 2015, p. 39).</p>

Area of Focus	What is it	Descriptive Behaviors
Disposition Towards a More Inclusive, Just, and Equitable Society	<p>A desire and strive to challenge the society for the betterment of all and a belief that change is possible through actions (Levinson, 2011).</p> <p>“Competent Citizens have moral and civic virtues such as concern for the rights and welfare of others, social responsibility, tolerance and respect, and belief in the capacity to make a difference” (Levinson, 2011, p. 317).</p> <p>“Citizens must question and change established systems and structures when they reproduce patterns of injustice over time” (Westheimer, 2015, p. 39).</p> <p>For “a citizen...loyalty is expressed in efforts to improve and reform, to make our institutions the best they can be” (Soltan, 1999, p. 18).</p>	<p>When the individual is informed and strives to inform others how to create a more just and equitable society (Westheimer, 2015).</p> <p>Teach ways that systemic change can happen</p> <p>Ambitious Teaching (NCSS, 2018).</p>

**Table 2***Implications for Social Studies Teacher Educators in Civic Education*

Implications	Areas of focus	What does it look like
Preservice teachers need extensive training in facilitating discussions on civic and controversial issues	Identifying and facilitating discussions involving controversial issues and decisive concepts	Modeling how to facilitate discussions on controversial issues Facilitating activities that assist preservice teachers in gathering evidence from opposing sides. Teaching the framework of a discussion Experiencing discussions on controversial issues in methods classroom
Assignments and projects should align with how today's youth think about political, social, and community issues	Lessons should help preservice teachers understand how young people think about social and political concepts and issues	Teacher Educator's assignments have preservice teachers getting to know their students focusing on how they understand political, social and community issues.
Understanding the development of civic identity for their students is different depending on the context of where the students live.	Preservice teachers understand how civic identity is developed and that it is different depending on the context where the student lives.	Assignment helps preservice teachers explore a student's civic understanding/what they believe. The assignment uses service-learning placements/field placements to understand the civic identity of the students the preservice teachers are working with.



Implications	Areas of focus	What does it look like
Preservice teachers should analyze civic texts to understand how to adapt them to their students to foster civic virtues.	Analyzing civic text (Primary sources, court cases, or government documents) and understanding civic virtues (freedoms, role, responsibilities, duties) How analyzing civic texts help to foster civic virtues and understanding	Modeling to preservice teachers on how to analyze civic text Assignments should focus on preservice teachers' exploration into civic texts. Assessments related to the C3 Framework exploring civic texts and civic understanding
Teacher Educators should help preservice teachers become familiar with instructional techniques that help students make connections between and among concepts	Modeling and exploration of instructional techniques to help engage students and make connections	Teaching different instructional techniques to help students make connections Modeling instructional techniques that allow for connections across concepts Assignments help preservice teachers explore different instructional techniques related to civics.
Teacher Educators should integrate local, national, and global perspectives into a methods course	Integrating local, national, and global perspectives into assignments and lessons in the methods classroom	Lessons integrate local, national, or global perspectives on key issues Assignments as preservice teachers to reflect with a local, national, or global lens Lessons are modeled on how to integrate the international perspective

## **Data Analysis**

### ***Interview Transcriptions***

During the data analysis, several steps were employed to gain insight from the interviews and artifacts of the participants. Beginning with the interview data, the first step entailed listening to the recorded interviews and verifying the accuracy of their transcriptions. Once verified, these transcriptions were then uploaded to a qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti, that facilitates nuanced evaluation across diverse data types (Paulus et al., 2017). Concurrently, predetermined codes, which centered around civic competence and the six areas of implications for teacher educators, were uploaded into Atlas.ti.

Utilizing Atlas.ti code search feature, these codes were initially assigned to the interview transcription. This automated coding was supplemented by a meticulous manual review, during which I rectified any inaccuracies and made requisite adjustments. As I delved deeper into the transcripts, I noted instances where participants expanded upon or modified the definition of civic competence, making these areas for further analysis.

Adopting structural coding model, which emphasizes coding data in relation to specific research questions, I organized the codes accordingly (Saldaña, 2021). One coding segment focused on the teacher educators' understanding of civic competence while another zeroed in on their curricular choices. In probing the third research question, which sought to explore how teacher educators see the future of social studies methods, I applied inductive codes to the transcriptions. Throughout this analysis, common and re-

emerging themes were always noted. These common themes centered around the current state of social studies methods as well as their hope for the future.

### ***Course materials and course syllabi analysis***

At the conclusion of the interview, any course materials that were discussed as well as the methods course syllabus was requested. These documents were emailed to the researcher by the participant. The curricular artifacts that were word documents as well as course syllabi were also uploaded to Atlas.ti, and the same codes were applied to these documents. Curricular artifacts of PowerPoint presentations were formatted into a word document and then uploaded into Atlas.ti. As these documents were produced independently from this research study and selected by the teacher educator, they serve as a valuable resource confirming the insights gained from the interview (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

After uploading these documents, the second codebook, detailing the six curricular choices for civic education, was applied to each document. Activities were categorized in one of the six areas or placed in a miscellaneous category, which was reexamined after coding all artifacts. In analysis of the course syllabus, similar process was employed, noting the specific activities related to civic education and determining into which of the six areas each activity fit. When a syllabus referenced scholarly articles or readings without explanation, the researcher further examined these references before categorizing them within one of the six areas. Saturation was achieved at this juncture, as no new information emerged from subsequent data and all course documents had been analyzed and coded.

### ***Triangulation and Trustworthiness***

Upon completing the initial coding process, I undertook a meticulous review of the transcripts and associated documents, ensuring a thorough coverage and rectifying any discrepancies or errors. Commonalities were then identified between the interview, the documents provided, and the course syllabus. For example, the researcher would note if a participant mentioned using civic texts to compare primary sources in their interview, and evidence was provided in a lesson PowerPoint, and this activity was listed in the course syllabus. Such comparisons were initially documented manually.

Following the data codebook of Avery (2003b) implications for teacher educators, these notations were reformatted into six distinct tables. These tables spotlighted the cited activities and incorporated direct quotes from the participants adding context to the activities. As noted by Bloomberg and Volpe (2018), direct quotations “play an important role in grounding complex analyses in the participants’ own accounts” (p. 251). These quotations lend voice and depth to the teacher educators’ documents. While triangulation-consistency across the interview, course documents, and course syllabus-was not evident for every activity, any overlap was highlighted in parentheses with each chart next to the activity’s description. This method further triangulated the data by providing more clarity of the participant’s curricular choices as it was examined in different forms of data (Flick, 2004). As the charts are also visual aids, areas that were not present in the study or in the documents are easily identifiable.

To bolster inter-rater reliability, a peer review was conducted. A colleague skilled in social studies instruction and research assessed interview snippets and activity categorizations to validate the accuracy of coding. Discussions and clarifications were

made and refined during the process, increasing the credibility of the claims (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2016; McAlister et al., 2017)

### ***Establishing Participant Profiles***

Participant profiles were created, incorporating background and a summary of the data on the three research questions. These profiles provided a human element to the data, enhanced readability, and offered a structured overview of the participants and research questions before developing claims (Miles et al., 2014). Referring to the research questions, each code was examined individually across all seven participants. This process helped to identify common themes and areas of exceptions, narrowing down the complexity of the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). By reviewing the profiles, recurring themes, and areas of missed opportunities were identified. These findings were synthesized and formed the basis for the seven claims presented in chapter four of this study.

### **Overview of the Participants**

The participants for this study consist of social studies teacher educators with full-time, continuing appointments across colleges and universities in Ohio. All participants have earned their doctoral degrees in education-related fields. Participants were gathered through the Higher Education Special Interest Group (SIG) which is a governing entity within the OCSS. Each participant responded to my email request and agreed to participate in the study. I accepted all requests to participate and then used target sampling to increase my sample so that I could have participants from each of the OCSS regions as well as a mixture of large, medium, small, private, and public institutions.

Once all the participants were selected, they each were given a pseudonym for confidentiality. To further protect their anonymity, I did not notate which OCSS region they were a part of as there may only be one type of institution in that region. The seven participants breakdown does cover each of the five-region laid out by OCSS. Specific regions are not noted to further protect participant confidentiality.

**Table 3**

*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Sex	Public/Private	Size of Institution <sup>a</sup>	Years of Experience <sup>b</sup>
Caroline	Female	Private	Small	25
William	Male	Public	Large	11
Scott	Male	Public	Large	6
Thomas	Male	Private	Medium	4
Jessica	Female	Private	Small	10
Ellen	Female	Private	Medium	2
Amber	Female	Public	Large	7

*Note:* Data of type of institution and size of institution was generated from “Size & Setting Classification,” by Carnegie Classification of Institution of Higher Education, 2020 <https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/carnegie-classification/classification-methodology/size-setting-classification/> and from “Use the Data,” by Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2021 <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>

<sup>a</sup> Using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and the Carnegie Classification of Institution of Higher Education Size and Setting Classification. Size includes undergraduate and graduate full-time students enrolled in the Fall of 2021. Very Small: Less than 999; Small: 1,000-2,999; Medium: 3,000-9,999; Large: 10,000-above.

<sup>b</sup> Years teaching social studies methods at a higher education institution.

Interviews with all seven participants took place over a two-month period from October 2022-December 2022 and were recorded on WebEx platform. The IRB informed consent form was reviewed prior to the interview and each participant gave verbal consent to participate in this study. Instructional materials were either shared through email ahead of time or directly after the interview. Specific assignments related to civic competence that was discussed in the interview were directly requested from the participant. Below is a summary of the participant's understanding of civic competence, an overview of how they are incorporating civic instruction in their methods class, and their preserved perspective of the future of social studies methods. The participants are presented in no particular order.

### **Participant Profiles**

#### ***Caroline***

##### **Educational Background.**

Caroline began her teaching career as a high school social studies teacher in a large, urban, Ohio school district. She asserted that she fell in love with curriculum development while creating interdisciplinary thematic units for her social studies courses as well as at-risk freshmen. Following her passion, Caroline left teaching to pursue her doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction at a university in Pennsylvania. "I started realizing how much I enjoyed curriculum development, and I had some questions and concerns about social justice, and they really wanted to explore those issues more deeply" (transcript, 27-35). In her professional career, Caroline designed a variety of new courses, such as Social Studies Inquiry and Issues-Based Instruction, in addition to her instruction

of social studies methods. Her curriculum design extended across all licensure areas and educational degree levels over her 25 years spread out over three different institutions.

### **Unpacking Civic Competence.**

After sharing NCSS's definition of civic competence, Caroline asserts that civic competence and preparing students for citizenship has always been the goal of social studies education and that this is not something new. What is new, according to Caroline, is that there is more of a push for teacher educators and preservice teachers to develop "more of an understanding of the need for social justice and political action as part of our civic duties and responsibilities but being a civically minded citizen has always been there" (transcript, 491-497).

### **Civic Competence with Social Studies Preservice Teachers.**

Caroline's course syllabus reflects focus topics and readings that build a broader knowledge base of what it means to be a citizen. Larson and Keiper (2011) social studies methods text, as well as Westheimer and Kahne (2004), are utilized for this. During our interview, she expanded on one of her opening weeks' activities where she pushes her students at "the undergraduate level to really understand what citizenship means in a variety of definitions...And not everyone is a real believer in politically active citizen or social justice conscious citizen...but the challenge is to consider for themselves how citizenship is defined differently and what that means to different people and what they personally believe citizenship should be and how they might help their learners have a broader understanding of citizenship" (transcript, 449-471). She does this through a case study about Rosa Park. Her preservice teachers gather background knowledge about Rosa Parks that they may not have previously known, and then Caroline challenges the



students to make inferences about Rosa Parks and why she made the decisions she did. “I end that lesson by asking my students, was Rosa Parks a good citizen? If so, why? She broke the law. Are we teaching our students that good citizens are always following the law?” (transcript, 583-581). Materials for this activity were shared for this study.

### **The Future of Civic Competence in Social Studies Teacher Preparation.**

Caroline’s hopes for her preservice teachers after participating in these and other course activities, Caroline has a “personal desire that they really will understand that there is a broader conceptualization of citizenship besides ‘I was born in this country’ or ‘I vote and I pick up my trash.’ I hope that they understand there’s more to an understanding of citizenship than that and that we have rights as citizens in this country that not everybody else has” (transcript, 797-813). As a final reflection, Caroline affirms that out of all of the areas of civic competence, she believes she could grow the most in global citizenship. “I’m doing a good job on political civic competence and understanding ourselves as citizens of our state and our nation, our local community and emphasizing that (transcript, 888-896). We need to recognize that our citizenship goes beyond political borders and that we are a little narrow-minded in thinking that we’re just citizens of the United States or Ohio” (transcript, 821-827). Caroline concluded that it is her hope that future preservice teachers grow in this area.

When asked about the future of social studies methods, Caroline shared those instructional approaches to inquiry and controversial concepts (previously recognized as decisive concepts), are really not new in the social studies field and are just the current push and trend in social studies education. She cites the 1619 project, Harold Rugg’s 1930 textbooks, and the works of James Banks as some of her evidence for this claim and

posits that these trends will continue. An area that she does see constantly changing in teacher preparation is the application of technology. She explains that 15 years ago, she was encouraging her students to use the CD-ROM Oregon Trail and now “we’re looking at different kinds of online simulations whether that’s lemonade stands for our use of economics or kids citizen or iCivics for example, all having some more sophisticated online simulation” (transcript, 287-299). She asserts that the field of Social Studies teacher preparation needs to stay current with their knowledge of these technologies to better train future teachers.

### ***William***

#### **Educational Background.**

William, a former high school Social Studies teacher for ten years, shared in our interview that he found his way into higher education when he hit a proverbial wall in the classroom. As he put it, he did not want to be an administrator and wanted to reach more students and have a greater influence on forming new future teachers. While obtaining his Ph.D., he worked closely with [Name]<sup>1</sup> who is a leader in the social studies field known for encouraging discussions on controversial issues. According to William, working with [Name] “opened his eyes to the possibilities of having social studies through more of a civic focus” (transcript, 28).

After his Ph.D. completion, William took a position at a public university in New Hampshire where he was tasked with redesigning the scope and sequence for NCATE (now CAEP) a small social studies teacher preparation program. William reported that he hoped that his preservice teachers not only learned about their students and how to teach but also about the community in which they were teaching. He admits that it was a

“daunting administrative beast getting them into compliance but also having the freedom and liberty to explore and design a program that really had my signature on it” (transcript, 30-32). Evidence of diverse field experiences in the surrounding communities over the four semesters is apparent in the course descriptions obtained through the university course catalog.

### **Unpacking Civic Competence.**

William reiterated the importance of being civically engaged when asked about his thoughts on the NCSS definition. “I think it covers the “eduspeak” the discourse of education. It breaks down the knowledge, the skills, and the dispositions. And the aim in terms of the dispositions for an inclusive and just society is well in line with the historical purposes of social studies... But one of the things that they don't say that is vital to civic competence is engagement. And there is a participatory aspect of it that exists and it takes practice (transcript, 191).”

William defined civic competences as, “not a singular thing. It takes civic knowledge and civic skills, and civic dispositions, [but] it also takes civic efficacy and all of those moves towards engagement, because if you are efficacious and not knowledgeable, you can't engage...without engagement, we're missing a critical opportunity in citizen development” (transcript, 191). His curricular design decisions described here are evident in his course descriptions and syllabi.

### **Civic Competence with Social Studies Preservice Teachers.**

William moved to Ohio acquiring a full-time social studies faculty position that was focused heavily on teaching graduate students. He was tasked with only teaching the Spring junior methods course which, William claimed in our interview, did not match his

passion for creating a course centered around civic efficacy and service learning. In place of a traditional field placement of classroom observation, William designed a service-learning component to run in conjunction with junior methods in the spring. “They’ve learned more history from the people in [local town] and [local town] than they did in a semester-long history course (transcript, 80).

Of the three aspects of civic competence outlined by NCSS, William expresses the importance of engagement in the community. “It’s not just a Deweyan or Freirean vision of community...without [community] it’s a checklist of skills, knowledge, and dispositions....there has to be a place for engagement” (transcript, 210). William shared two examples during the interview that he believed showcased how community engagement with a civic focus can take place in teacher preparation.

William reports that he divided his preservice teachers into teams and paired them with an established local community organization. Each team was asked to research and experience the local organization, plan a project where local high school juniors could participate within the local organization, facilitate that service project with the high school students, and create follow-up activities for the high school students when they return to the classroom. William claimed that the project served approximately 25 different organizations and 150-170 high school juniors, including his student teachers, at the program's height. William’s rationale for this was to “try to get them to think beyond the textbook, beyond the classroom to what assets exist in the community to change their frames on deficit thinking” (transcript, 98). This idea of cultivating civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions in the community was supported in his course syllabus as one of the course objectives. Reflection on the field experiences was also mentioned.

William's curricular design approach in both activities was focused on "finding your identity...finding what kind of teacher do you want to be? What do you feel comfortable with, and what resonates with you? And not this, the apprenticeship of observation stuff or the novice teacher trope of 'I teach how I learn,' but to extend beyond that and begin thinking outside of your own self and with the populations that you have...they are going to teach some of the time, but they're going to be citizens all of the time" (transcript, 164).

### **The Future of Civic Competence in Social Studies Teacher Preparation.**

William's hope for his preservice teachers is that he wants "them to be well informed. I want them to know how to research, how to do inquiry, how to advocate, how to engage how to communicate across intercultural and interpersonal differences and likeness. (transcript, 164). His concern is about the politicization of the social studies classroom. Specifically, he mentions Ohio legislation House Bill 322, House Bill 327, and Senate Bill 616 as well as the gained momentum of the Hillsdale 1776 curriculum and American Birthright curriculum and his preserved treat to how he prepares his students. Due to these bills, "I've decided to take it head-on. I teach the controversy just like [Name]... and have done some Socratic seminars with those bills. I've shown them the curricular examples from a variety of different sources, and we've done a little critical analysis of what is communicated through those documents" (transcript, 160).

He challenged other teacher educators to remember and consider "who is a citizen, who is in and who is out, and the exclusions that are happening... they're antithetical to the education of all of the inclusive education" (transcript, 164). William

expanded that his hope for teacher education is that CUFA and NCSS can continue to enact their civic rights and stand up for the freedom of voice.

*Scott*

### **Educational Background.**

Scott earned his master's in teaching through a five-year masters and licensure program. After graduation, he taught a variety of social studies courses for grades 7-12 for 12 years. During this time, he had seven different student teachers from the local university. Through his student teachers, the university professors started to hear about his unique approach to utilizing simulations in his classroom. When a full-time teaching position became open at the university, his former student teachers reached out to him encouraging him to apply. He was rewarded the position and after two years, Scott began and completed his doctorate degree at the same university and continued to teach social studies methods throughout his doctoral program.

Scott has the unique opportunity to instruct social studies preservice teachers in both Middle Childhood and Adolescence and Young Adult licensures over their four years of study. Scott shares the duties of social studies methods with another full-time professor, and they switch on and off each semester with both licensure areas. Scott continued with "I would argue [civic competence and civic instruction] is in all the courses that I teach" (transcript, 28-30).

### **Unpacking Civic Competence.**

Scott sees civic competence in two parts. "You have the content... so how does the government work? What do comparative politics look like?...How does American democracy work? But there's also the skills involved in civic competence, which is self-

awareness...social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making” (transcript, 236-245). Scott provided this definition without prompting, but when told the NCSS’s definition, he affirmed that he agrees with it and adds that NCSS emphasizes efficacy a little more than his definition. Scott’s understanding of civic competence was also found within course material that he shared on a slide introducing himself. “Why am I here? I am here to elevate the public civil discourse by empowering young citizens to engage within it” (Scott’s course artifact).

### **Civic Competence with Social Studies Preservice Teachers.**

Scott’s views on civic competence are reflected in his curricular decisions and also in the curricular direction of his institution and co-professor. In reviewing the syllabi from Scott’s four courses, all of the courses reflect the tenants of the C3 Framework including inquiry, decision-making, social-emotional learning, evaluating sources, and informed action in their objectives and activities. In addition to the C3, each course examines trends in social studies education related to civic, social, and emotional competencies as well as topics surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A common thread throughout Scott’s courses is preservice teachers continue to reflect upon the purpose of social studies of fostering future citizens and how are they part of the solution that fulfills this purpose. During freshmen year, preservice teachers closely examine different definitions of citizenship, NCSS statements and strands of social studies, and the C3 Framework to help them answer “what is the purpose of social studies.” In sophomore block, Scott utilizes “open-source meeting” model where preservice teachers form groups and investigate an issue that is most impacting their current students. The preservice teachers then each take a role in researching what they,

as preservice teachers, can do about it. The preservice teachers then share their knowledge with the class and together everyone offers additional solutions and techniques that may be used in the classroom to address this issue. Scott explains that the student-driven topics differ each year, and they can be controversial in nature. Scott concluded that this activity allows students to develop their own citizenship through “efficacy and the ability to work with other people, do some research, and solve common problems” (transcript, 923-926).

In junior methods, “I don’t let them plan any content, any lesson until they consider why we’re teaching this lesson in terms of civic competence. What’s the importance? How does it relate to civic skills? And they’ve got to identify dimensions of the C3 inquiry arc in their planning” (transcript, 300-305). This is reflected in Scott’s curricular outline in his course syllabi and through one of the course objectives where “methods students will use content standards, media/source literacy and appropriate methods, to create lesson objectives, learning experiences, assessments and learning segments that is culturally responsive to 4-9<sup>th</sup> grade students and develops their civic and social and emotional competencies” (Scott’s artifacts).

To fulfill this vision and this objective, Scott’s students utilize Mursion simulation software that is designed for preservice teachers to practice conducting difficult conversations with student avatars. “The immersion avatars have a system of responses that are controversial responses which...gives them practice and planning for civic conversations for civic discourse to make appropriate decisions” (transcript, 338-342). One of the avatars might say, ““We’re talking about slavery and racism, then why does that matter? I got white and black kids in school now which means these problems are



solved.’ Then Mursion students start to argue with each other, and I ask my preservice teachers to facilitate their conversations” (transcript, 352-358). Mursion simulation is used in both junior and senior methods courses. A final assignment for seniors to circles back to where they started their freshmen year. Students are asked to reflect upon, “how are they adding value to their community which is a short presentation on their action to add what was their significant contribution to their field placement or their placement community” (transcript, 381-385).

### **The Future of Civic Competence in Social Studies Teacher Preparation.**

Pertaining to his students, Scott shared his perspective that currently, “there is a lot more trepidation, anxiety with my students now in terms of teaching contemporary issues or potentially divisive issues....they hear critical race theory or culturally responsive pedagogy and those terms are politically charged... so they have a tendency to avoid those topics... because they’re not quite sure what’s legal, what’s acceptable, what’s ethical and what’s not” (transcript, 151-161). He hoped “that I can remove the fear from teaching social studies in a way that will empower students to have hard conversations” (transcript, 231-232).

Looking at the future of social studies instruction, Scott shares that “lots of faculty are considering how to prepare their students to address curriculum changes, or at least proposed curriculum changes” (transcript, 172-174) that may come out with the current legislation in Columbus. While “lots of faculty are a little bit intimidated, I think students are intimidated. But I also see a cadre of students that are kind of hardened and they don’t really care as much to tiptoe around controversial topics. They want to embrace it and they don’t want to be silenced” (transcript, 182-187).

*Thomas*

### **Educational Background.**

Thomas took an unconventional route to become a Social Studies Teacher Educator. His bachelor's degree was in communications with a journalism focus but always had a call to be a social studies teacher. He took content courses part-time and graduated with his master's in curriculum and instruction with a focus on social studies and urban education. After graduation, he took the opportunity to move to Columbia, South America and taught at an international middle school. The school was designed to run like schools in America with an American curriculum and children of American diplomats and business leaders as his students. He taught there for four years before returning to America to earn his doctorate in communications and instructional technology.

After his completion, he moved back to Columbia and taught Social Studies at the high school level for an additional two years. Thomas made the final transition back to Ohio in 2019 to take a tenure-track faculty position in educational technology and as an instructor for the undergraduate and graduate social studies methods courses. A unique aspect of his social studies methods is that the course is an asynchronous online course since, according to Thomas, students were spread out so far with their placements that it was too hard for them to get to campus on time regularly. This course was already running online before Thomas stepped into the position.

### **Unpacking Civic Competence.**

Thomas confirmed that he agreed with it and felt it was a good definition when asked how he understood the NCSS definition of civic competence. As the conversation

progressed, he expanded his views, particularly on NCSS's call to create a more inclusive, equitable, and just society. Thomas asserted that part of being a good citizen is to recognize the inequities of others learning to be open to the opinion of others. "Our schools... are still very homogenized in population... many of my students went to the same school with the same kids that all looked just like them which is fine, but they don't have the opportunity or experience to interact with people who are different than them...so the challenge for them is to be able to recognize that multiple perspectives can exist in one learning environment" (transcript, 1025-1067). Thomas continued that it is the teacher's responsibility to facilitate an environment where a level of respect is established, facts are shared, and feelings about a particular view are set aside for the sake of understanding. "When we are preparing our students, especially at the older levels, middle grades, high school, to be citizens and to recognize things like inequities and how does that tie into what's going on?" (transcript, 1967-1973).

### **Civic Competence with Social Studies Preservice Teachers.**

Thomas relayed a passion for including global perspectives of citizenship, though he admits that it is not entirely prevalent in his course and is reflective upon that point. "I really only found a couple of things that loosely reference civic engagement, but this helped me realize that next time I teach this course, I'm going to make sure I include a week or more specific activities related to civics" (transcript, 1518-1526).

Thomas does reference one activity that challenges students to look at multiple perspectives as they visit three different historical sites of their choosing. Thomas shared a common outcome of this activity, "the comment that I almost always get is, 'I didn't realize how much historical value there was in Ohio.' The events, the monuments, the

museums in Ohio, they don't grasp that element, especially the local connection to history, which to me is really important from a civics perspective and just a citizenship perspective, is understanding what's what, and what has occurred in your own state" (transcript, 1672-1688). Reflected in the overview of the assignment, when students attend each site, they are asked to compare, contrast, and critique the venue in the history presented the historical accuracy, and how this site could be visited with their future students.

### **The Future of Civic Competence in Social Studies Teacher Preparation.**

When asked about the future of social studies methods, Thomas shared his worries about the field. "Here, social studies has kind of turned into like a social justice crusade in some places and in other countries, that just doesn't exist. It's like 'here is the history, here are the facts, here what it is.' We are not trying to interpret it through a lens 250 years later as to what was morally just. I am worried about social studies methods teaching and social studies teaching in general that in lieu of critical conversations, the perspective of history is being erased or modified. That content is not presented from a factual standpoint, but rather from an opinion standpoint and how we feel about things today" (transcript, 737-753). Thomas reaffirms that it is the Teacher Educator and classroom teacher's responsibility to guide students to have tough conversations where rights are not infringed upon, but honest conversations can be had.

### ***Jessica***

#### **Educational Background.**

Jessica is a former high school Social Studies teacher with 14 years of experience teaching World History, sociology, and American History. Jessica did enjoy hosting

methods as well as student teachers in her classroom but initially did not aspire to enter higher education. That was until she witnessed her husband's higher education experiences and was exposed to a program where professors in training from a variety of fields, who want to focus on teaching instead of research are paired up with small, liberal arts colleges to learn how to teach. Jessica enrolled in this program and because Jessica had classroom experience, she was able to help her aspiring teaching-professor classmates. After graduating with her Ph.D., she secured a position teaching Social Studies methods for all licensures K-12 at a private liberal arts college. She has been there for the last 10 years.

### **Unpacking Civic Competence.**

When Jessica first reflected on her understanding of civic competence, she critiqued the NCSS definition. "How can you be self-interested and have a socially just society? That does not go together" (transcript, 448-450). She continued, "I don't funnel [civic competence] into the political or even the civic government realm" (transcript, 484-485). Instead, Jessica shared that she takes more of an inclusive approach. "Yeah, I teach social studies methods, but to me, it's the relationships that connect to civics. I think that it is integration into how we connect and build relationships with our students and how we want them to build and connect relationships with their students and to understand who their students are as citizens" (transcript, 529-534). She added, that "[civic competence] is about understanding our place in the world in relation to everything else in the world and our responsibility within that" (transcript, 773-774). The focus on relationships and how relationships foster civics continued throughout the interview.

### **Civic Competence with Social Studies Preservice Teachers.**

Jessica admits that she approaches her methods course differently every time as even though there is a core, “it’s really informed by what I feel like they need, what I hear from them what they need, and what their cooperating teachers field that they need” (transcript, 263-266). Due to this, Jessica shared that it was hard to pull out specific civic activities as they change every year. “I have a general outline,...but it changes depending on what’s going on in the world and what I hear when I go out to the field. I then see the gaps in the field, and I feel obligated to talk about them and try to fill them in” (transcript, 220-227).

Jessica shared her methods course syllabi with me, but it’s important to note that the course outline was found on blackboard modules. She dedicated two weeks in her fall methods course to civic understanding with different readings entitled, *Redesigning Civic Education for the Digital Age*, *How to Make Civics Learning Stick*, and *The Civic Educator-How to teach government in fun ways: 6 ways to bring civics alive*. Jessica asks her students to participate in an icivics website exploration activity, explore media literacy, and use a critical eye to discern which primary sources and civics texts to use in their lessons. While it was not mentioned in the interview, her course outline reflects the global perspective of citizenship within her course through activities entitled, *We the People for Global Goals* that aligns with Sustainable development goals from the United Nations.

### **The Future of Civic Competence in Social Studies Teacher Preparation.**

Reflecting on her first year compared to her most recent year in teacher education, Jessica admits that preservice students have “way more anxiety... way more internal

pressure. Not having tools to handle that” (transcript, 175-176). Because of this, Jessica shared that in her last 10 years she has “become much more about the relationships...the support of that social-emotional aspect...taking care of them....this has always been a part of who I am, but not it’s a part of how I teach and how I model. I am very explicit about it with my students about how important it is for them in their classroom as well” (transcript, 185-204).

Pertaining to the future of social studies, Jessica is concerned because “it just keeps getting bigger. There is just always more and more to address” (transcript, 351-352). She is referring to sustainability education, financial literacy, integrating the C3 standards, and what teachers can and cannot teach within this statement. “[The field of social studies] is overwhelming with everything they are asking us to do and we, us at the university and in the classroom, cannot take in any more information. There is not enough time.” Jessica does include a few activities and modules pertaining to these topics, and it is found in her course outline.

### ***Ellen***

#### **Educational Background.**

Ellen is a former elementary and middle childhood teacher who taught for eight years, and three of those years were as a 7<sup>th</sup>-grade social studies teacher. When her children were born, she took a break from teaching for five years before she was offered a graduate assistantship at her local university. After her assistantship, different roles were open to her such as field placement coordinator, field supervisor, and adjunct instructor. After finishing her Ph.D., she transitioned into her current role as field placement coordinator for all education majors, academic advisor to all first-year

students, and instructor of Introduction to Education and both semesters of junior methods for social studies education K-12. She decided to pursue teacher education as she felt like she could make the biggest impact on changing the school system better by training teachers differently. Ellen sees her skills as an asset to the middle childhood and adolescence and young adult majors as “high school trends are the slowest to change... and I feel like if I could bring that skill set [of adapting instruction] and teach it to those high school teachers, imagine how engaging high school would be for our students” (transcript, 68-72).

### **Unpacking Civic Competence.**

While Ellen initially agreed with NCSS's definition of civic competence, she then retracted her statement and wanted to infuse the word ‘democracy’ as more of a primary focus. “I would say the first one would be knowledge of democracy, and then the second one would be knowledge of how we fit into democracy as in how it affects our daily lives and... how we can use our place in democracy to create a more equitable society” (transcript, 495-508). She shared that she made these changes as “I feel like the word ‘political’ or ‘politics’ right now is a bit of a lightning rod [where] people are just going to either shut down or gear up for an argument” (transcript, 522-528) and “when I hear self-investment I think... you are in it for you (transcript, 442-224). Out of the three areas of NCSS definition, Ellen believes she most identifies with a disposition towards a more inclusive, just, equitable society as “we are all in this together... trying to create civic-minded students” (transcript, 446-447).



### **Civic Competence with Social Studies Preservice Teachers.**

Ellen's instructional approach is student-driven where she still has an outline of standards but implements a self-learning module (SLM) approach to her instruction of these objectives. She asserts that this approach allows her students to direct their learning based on their needs. "I change my teaching depending on their own needs and the needs of the class....I do ask them, what is it that you are concerned about in this course? What is it that you're concerned about being a social studies teacher? What makes you nervous? What do you feel like you don't know yet" (transcript, 173-179)? Using this list, Ellen chooses an academic standard and then develops a unit around their worry and academic standard. She models for her students all aspects of the unit from pre-test to activities to summative assessment while encouraging the students to reflect upon her teaching along the way. At the conclusion of this unit, her students create and share similar units so that by the end of the course, all students have additional resources that fit into a teaching portfolio.

Ellen did not share any specific lesson activities directly related to civic instruction or understanding, but her students do address how to "advocate a supported opinion on complex topics and critique challenging messages" according to her course syllabi. When asked about why she chose this approach of a self-learning module to address civic instruction Ellen shared that "[this approach] is just part of a good education. You gotta meet your kids where they are at and even if they are preservice teachers, you have to meet them where they are at...and if you don't then we're not creating good citizens" (transcript, 829-830).

### **The Future of Civic Competence in Social Studies Teacher Preparation.**

When reflecting on the future of social studies education, Ellen made a stark claim that “social studies teachers probably should come back and take methods every five years....When I go into social studies classes, and I go into a lot of them... I see a lot of lectures...[students] are reading the book and answering questions and memorizing dates, and that is not what social studies is.” She continues further asserting that majority of elementary schools and many middle schools have made the change to being student-centered, but high schools, in general, are still behind this curve. When asked if, through her instruction with her preservice teachers, the tide will eventually turn, she remains skeptical.

#### ***Amber***

### **Educational Background.**

Amber taught K-12 and in higher education throughout the United States. She also taught middle and high school social studies for six years. Amber taught in a Utah middle school while earning her master’s degree in teaching from a West Coast university. She then taught high school in Virginia. Amber continued her education at a large East Coast university by pursuing her doctorate and followed that with a postdoc at a large East Coast Southern university. She taught social studies methods at both East Coast universities prior to moving to Ohio. Currently, Amber teaches the methods courses for a Master’s in Education and licensure program at an Ohio university.

### **Unpacking Civic Competence.**

Amber agreed with this definition by NCSS adding “that it’s teaching people to think and teaching them the skills of thinking” (transcript, 166-167). Amber mentioned

understanding and knowledge are needed to create a more inclusive and just society as “the more that you read, the more you interact with other cultures, the more accepting you are” (transcript, 185-188).

### **Civic Competence with Social Studies Preservice Teachers.**

Amber uses a variety of resources to encourage civic discussions, civic text exploration, and foster a civic foundation. She uses Larry Sabato’s, *A more perfect Constitution: Why the Constitution Must be Revised: Ideas to Inspire a new generation* as a framework to teach her students how to discuss something in their classroom. “Often we just say, ‘we’ll have a discussion’ ... but if you haven’t taught them how to discuss anything, you are not actually doing it” (transcript, 215-218). Amber expands that this text allows for open questions (e.g., the term limit of judges) which allows the students to experience a discussion in a Socratic seminar format and learn how to facilitate this type of discussion. Her preservice teachers also read passages from Diana Hess’ *The political classroom*, to explore the discussion of political issues in the classroom. Amber also utilizes Michigan University’s approach of *Read, Inquire, Write* when approaching civic texts. She shared that one of her students this past semester utilized this same approach in her 8th-grade social studies classroom. Finally, Amber integrates the pedagogical technique of concept attainment to assist her students in developing their own definitions of civics.

When asked what Amber hopes her students learn from her discussion activities, she shares the following: “It is hard. It takes a long time that you can’t just come in and say like ‘look! I have this really cool thing that I learned or ‘This is an awesome article that we’re going to read and discuss.’ You have to break it down. You have to start the

first-day students walk in. You have to say ‘This is a classroom in which we’re going to discuss’” (transcript, 290-295). Amber also wanted to be clear that all ages can have civic discussions, though it might look different in a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>-grade classroom over an 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. It’s getting the people who want to teach, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> or even 6<sup>th</sup> to say, ‘yes, this still applies to me’ and getting the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers to admit that they still have to teach how to do it” (transcript, 324-328).

### **The Future of Civic Competence in Social Studies Teacher Preparation.**

Amber mentioned that we may not know right now the future of social studies teacher preparation, but the legislative bills that are being introduced at the state level will have an impact at both the college level and in K-12. She also shared concerns about the growing teacher shortage stating, “we’re going to have to make things faster, more efficient because we need teachers” (transcript, 134-136). She concluded that both entities, teacher preparation and K-12, will have to change and adapt in some way.

### **Limitations**

A limitation of this study is that the participants self-reported their instructional methods and decided which curriculum materials they wanted to share. How the activity was presented to their preservice teachers as well as the perceived outcome of the activity was all through the perceptions of the social studies teacher educator. The observation of the teacher educators and the examination of expected outcomes was beyond the scope of this study but could have provided another method to triangulate the data and offer a more holistic view of the social studies teacher educator’s practices.

Another limitation of this study is related to the interview protocol and subsequent follow-up questions. Participants were interviewed from October 2022 until December

2022, resulting in varying interview intervals. As the interviews progressed, participants shared evidence of utilizing AI for discussions on civics and controversial issues, current legislative initiatives, and global civics education. However, since these findings were unexpected, follow-up questions on these topics as well as informed action were not always posed, and not all the participants had the opportunity to provide insight into these areas. This limitation implies that the depth of exploration and participant input regarding these topics might be incomplete.

Seven Ohio social studies teacher educators participated in this study, only their voices and viewpoints were explored in this study. These individuals willingly participated to be interviewed about their civic instruction and the assumption can be made that they were more willing to participate as they already have a disposition towards civic instruction in social studies methods. According to CAEP (2023), forty-eight institutions of higher education in Ohio are accredited, making the participation ratio by an institution around 14%, but this still covers a small cross-section of the social studies teacher educators in Ohio as some institutions have more than one professional in the role.

## Chapter Four

### Findings and Claims

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how social studies teacher educators understand civic competence as well as how they are incorporating civic competence into their teacher preparation curriculum and instructional practices. This study was framed by the following research questions:

1. How do social studies teacher educators' understand civic competence?
2. How do social studies teacher educators' approach and incorporate civic competence in their teacher preparation curriculum?
3. How do social studies teacher educators see the future of social studies teacher preparation?

In this chapter, I will provide a summary of key claims that emerged from the interviews and artifacts that were provided. These claims will reference Avery (2003b) implications for civic instruction for social studies teacher educators.

In addressing the purpose of this study of exploring how social studies teacher educators understand civic competence as well as how they are incorporating civic competence into their teacher preparation curriculum and instructional practices, seven claims were developed relating to the three research questions. Addressing research question one, *How do social studies teacher educators understand civic competence?* the participants were familiar with the NCSS definition while falling on a continuum in their understanding with primarily focusing on fostering political knowledge. Pertaining to research question two, *How do social studies teacher educators' approach and incorporate civic competence in their teacher preparation curriculum?* The participants

employed activities and assignments addressing civic competence. They reported that they often designed civic lessons to meet the perceived needs of their students. They also reported value in lesson modeling specifically in the area of facilitating discussions on civic and controversial issues. Examining research question three, *How do social studies teacher educators see the future of social studies methods?* The participants acknowledged the impact of societal issues, along with potential legislative changes, on their current and future instruction of civics in social studies methods. They also admitted that more needs to be done to include global citizenship within social studies methods courses. Below is an overview of each of these claims.

### **Familiar with Civic Competence Definition**

During the interview, participants were presented the NCSS definition of civic competence and asked to explain their understanding of this definition. All participants agreed with the definition and were able to expand upon it in their own words.

William, Caroline, Jessica, Amber, and Scott all grounded their understanding of the definition first with strong knowledge, and then a social awareness of society. William asserts that civic competence is “not a singular thing. It takes civic knowledge and civic skills, and civic dispositions, [but] it also takes civic efficacy and all of those moves towards engagement, because if you are efficacious and not knowledgeable, you can’t engage...without engagement, we’re missing a critical opportunity in citizen development” (transcript, 191). Caroline points out that NCSS has included civic competence as a goal for many years, but now there is a greater focus on the broader parts of civics namely, NCSS “are including issues of equality and social justice” (transcript, 396-398) into the conversation. For Jessica, “I don’t funnel it into the

political or even civic government realm. Civic competence to me is historic, it is part of history, it is part of economics, it is part of geography, I mean it is part of all of it (transcript, 484-488). She continues to explain her perception of the second layer that civic competence is also “about understanding our place in the world in relation to everything else in the world and our responsibility within that” (transcript, 773-774). Scott also asserts that a central component to civic competence is understanding how American democracy works, “but there’s also the skills involved in civic competence which is self-awareness...social awareness, relationship skills, and decision making” (transcript, 241-246). Amber mentioned understanding and knowledge are needed to create a more inclusive and just society as “the more that you read, the more you interact with other cultures, the more accepting you are” (transcript, 185-188). Together, these five participants highlight their understanding of civic competence by building upon their knowledge of historical, political, and economic events and then expanding with a commitment to creating a more just and inclusive society.

Ellen and Thomas also agreed with the NCSS definition, but both of them added a unique layer to their understanding. Ellen suggested placing “democracy” at the center of it to match her understanding. “Instead of [the word] political, I think I would use the word democracy... the knowledge of democracy (transcript, 490). The second one would be knowledge about how we fit into democracy meaning knowledge of our place in democracy and how it affects our daily lives (transcript, 496-498)... The knowledge of our place in a democracy to use our place to create a more equitable society” (transcript, 505-508). Thomas’ additional perspective was influenced by his international experience. In his perception, civic competence is a very American concept as “it does



not really exist in a lot of other places” (transcript, 1126-1128). Thomas expands on this by sharing that in Columbia, there is an engrained national pride for their country and an innate drive to help the citizens of their country. Being a *good citizen* is not necessarily taught, but it is etched into their culture. This additional perspective demonstrates that Thomas has a broader understanding of civic competence beyond the United States which adds an additional perspective to this study.

### **Civic Competence Understanding is on a Continuum**

In their explanations of their understanding of the definition, each participant prioritizes different areas of civic competence. This resulted in a continuum of understanding of civic competence among the social studies teacher educators in this study. Below is an overview of where each participant falls along the continuum.

Caroline’s understanding appears to be rooted in *fostering political content knowledge*. She articulated that her first step in promoting civics is for her students to “really understand what citizenship means in a variety of definitions....[This is] the first time they really consider that citizenship is more than just following the law” (transcript, 452-460). Caroline likes to challenge her students to think about what it means to be a citizen and that they can all be at different stages. “Not everybody’s a real believer in the politically active citizen or social justice conscious citizen as [citizenship] is defined differently and what that means to different people and what they personally believe citizenship should be and how they might help their learners have a broader understanding of citizenship” (transcript, 460-472). To Caroline, this instruction of citizenship has always been a focus of NCSS, but now its “a little bit more about

inclusively, instead of being so much about interdisciplinary content knowledge” (transcript, 396-398).

Both Scott and William focus on the importance of content knowledge and civic skills. Scott highlights content knowledge and the skills needed for civic understanding. “Civic competence has two pieces. You have the content...so how does the government work? But there’s also the skills involved in civic competence, which is self-awareness that equates to social and emotional competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making” (transcript, 237-246). William also splits civic competence into two areas focusing on civic knowledge and civic engagement. “Civic competence it’s not a singular thing. It takes civic knowledge and civic skills and civic dispositions. It also takes civic efficacy. And all of those are more towards engagement because if you’re not efficacious or not knowledgeable, you can’t engage. So it takes all of those to engage....without engagement, we’re missing a critical opportunity in citizen development” (transcript, 192). I categorized both Scott and William as *fostering political knowledge* and a *self-interested investment in political engagement* due to their responses. I did notate that William has stronger ties to civic engagement as the majority of his interview was focused on engaging the community as a way to foster civics. Scott was similar as he did mention the importance of engagement in his understanding. However, more of his emphasis remained on creating a strong understanding of civics first.

Thomas echoes Caroline’s sentiments that individuals can see citizenship differently and because of that, students should be allowed to explore their thinking. “A teacher should never be discussing their political affiliation or their political beliefs with

students because that leads to inequitable situations... because now you have ostracized certain amounts of people. But you have to also recognize that everyone in the world, all your students, are going to view that your content is through a different lens” (transcript, 1002-1014). He continues that by allowing discussions of varying viewpoints, “you will have more civic-minded citizens... because we are taking in multiple perspectives, not just in the classroom, but also in society and culture in general” (transcript, 1112-1118). It is for this reason that Thomas mostly remained in *fostering political knowledge*.

Thomas added a unique perspective to his understanding of civic competence as he taught in Columbia for six years. “I wish they all would go [abroad] to sign a two-year contract and go somewhere for a couple of years because they would learn so much about teaching, about culture, about citizenship in other places” (transcript, 1210-1216).

Thomas explains his understanding of this by comparing the United States and Columbia’s approaches to citizenship. “Here in the states, everything is about race and gender and identity and personal identity, which is fine, but in Columbia that stuff doesn’t exist...Of course, there’s personal identity, but their identity first was being a Columbian, not a male or female or white, black, Muslim, Christian... you know you were a Columbian first and that was reflected in the curriculum” (transcript, 788-804).

Due to this international lens and understanding of civics, I also placed Thomas in having a leaning towards *a disposition toward a more inclusive, just equitable society*.

I placed Jessica under *a disposition towards a more inclusive, just, and equitable society* as she understands civic competence through the lens of Levinson (2011) by focusing on the concern, rights, and welfare of others. “Yeah, I teach social studies methods, but to me, it’s the relationships that connect to civics. I think that it is

integration into how we connect and build relationships with our students and how we want them to build and connect relationships with their students and to understand who their students are as citizens” (transcript, 529-534). She added, that “[civic competence] is about understanding our place in the world in relation to everything else in the world and our responsibility within that” (transcript, 773-774). The focus on relationships and how relationships foster civics continued throughout the interview.

Ellen emphasized the importance of the historical perspective and how, through a strong historical base, individuals can have a better grasp of their place in a democratic society. “I think that it is important to understand from the historical perspective...leading up to today, why we have this type of democracy and why we want to have this type of democracy and then why is it important for us to engage in this kind of democracy?” (transcript, 484-489). She continues that first we should focus on knowledge of democracy first, and how we fit into democracy second. Her emphasis throughout the interview on the historical past and focus on understanding democracy identifies her with strong ties to *fostering political knowledge*.

Amber compared her understanding of civic competence to Sam Wineburg and his notion that we are not just teaching history for the sake of teaching history, but that we are teaching citizens skills of questioning, investigating, and evaluating that help form better citizens. “We so often just focus on things like primary sources, but there’s so much more that goes on in a civically competent mind that is being taught through history classes which they primary teach” (transcript, 169-172). Amber reiterates that through knowledge, and the acquisition of skills to understand that knowledge, we can begin to become a more inclusive and just society. “The more you know, the more you

read, the more you interact with other cultures, and the more accepting you are" (transcript, 186-188). I placed Amber in the area of *fostering political knowledge* due to Amber's emphasis on knowledge and obtaining this knowledge first.

### **Activities and Assignments Addressing Civic Competence Were Used**

As part of this study, the teacher-educator participants were asked to share and explain any activities or assignments related to civic competence or civic instruction that they use in their social studies methods course. Through this collection, many activities and assignments were discussed and shared. I utilized the previously produced codebook in chapter three to categorize each of these activities and assignments using Avery (2003b) implications for social studies teacher educators in civic education as an outline. In the table below, I listed activities or assignment that the teacher educator used with their preservice teachers. Additionally, I included direct quotes from teacher educators in support of this implication in their methods classroom. Finally, I notated where the evidence was gathered within parentheses.

**Table 4***Preservice Teachers Need Extensive Training in Facilitating Discussions on Civic and Controversial Issues*

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Caroline	-	-
William	Socratic Seminars: Structure conversations about local and national legislature bills that will impact their teaching (Course materials and Interview)	“I’ve decided to take it head on and teach the controversy, just like Diana Hess would do. We’ve done some Socratic seminars with those bills. I’ve shown them the curricular examples from a variety of different sources, and we’ve done a little critical analysis of what is communicated through those documents” (Transcript line 161).
Scott	Mursion Simulation: Using an AI generated classroom preservice teachers will facilitate a controversial discussion. Mursion students will make a racially insensitive comment or question that is offensive to another, and an argument will ensue. The preservice teacher will be asked to respond to these comments as if they were the teacher (Course materials and Interview)	“[after participating in Mursion Simulation] they all come to the realization that it wasn’t nearly as bad as they thought it was going to be and that they have their frameworks to work their way through these controversial conversations. And they feel more prepared to have conversations with their students and with their peers about real civic topics like racism or economic decisions and global warming” (Transcript lines 419-425)  “In the junior course, we talk a lot about having classroom discussions and how to have classroom discussions. How to structure classroom discussions in a way that you account for controversy as you can’t account for different perspectives. How to have debates. And they use a lot of those in their lesson plans” (Transcript lines 313-318).

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Thomas	-	-
Jessica	Table Talks: Structured conversations in small table groups pertaining to controversies they are witnessing in the classroom (Course syllabus and Interview)	“A lot of these[critical] discussions happen on a smaller “table talks” I call them... there’s definitely good discussions on a small scale that happen all the time...they’ll record what they talked about and come up with a final statement and they’ll share it with the class” (Transcript lines 708-713)
Ellen	Debates: Have the preservice teachers pick a topic. Set the ground rules for a debate with even participants on each side. Have the debate. After the debate, lead a reflection on when well, what did not go well, and how they would approach this in their classroom (Course materials and Interview)	“The students had a debate and after the debate we stopped and broke down...what went well, what didn’t? What would you differently in your class?” (Transcript lines 194-197)
Amber	Use excerpts from ‘The Political Classroom’ by Diana Hess: Read the text, discuss what is satire and the role of satire in the classroom, and how to use it. Then run a Socratic seminar with the text as a debrief (Interview)	“We have to teach students to discuss. So often we just say like ‘then we’ll have this discussion.’ Well, if you haven’t taught them how to discuss anything, then they’re not actually doing anything. So, I use that as a framework to teach with and for discussion” (Transcript lines, 216-222).

*Note.* Areas notated with a dash (-) means that the instructional approach was not reported on by the teacher educator or mentioned within the course syllabus.

**Table 5**

*Assignments and projects should align with how today's youth think about political, social, and community issues*

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Caroline	Create an election ballot: Preservice teachers create an election ballot for upcoming local, state, and national elections. They learn how to analyze good and bad information sites and how to differentiate between candidates. They also learn about different civic terms associated with elections. (Course materials)	-
William	-	“Yeah, there is a lot of value and expertise in our communities in a variety of different fields and one of the things that we try to do when I first get the group thinking about the service learning project is developing a sense of place” (Transcript line 81)



Participant	Activity	Evidence
Scott	Open-Source Meetings: Facilitate an open-source meeting surrounding contemporary topics that can be researched and that the preservice teachers are experiencing in the classroom. A large list of topics is generated, and categories are formed. Everyone then researches a topic and comes with their findings to the next class. The individual then shares with other students in their category. The preservice teachers then travel to other categories choosing topics that they believe can help them in the field the most (Course materials and Interview)	<p>“We talk about finding content angles for your content so how to approach World War I from student values....then who are your students, where are their values, and who cares about this content? Why is it important?” (Transcript lines 590-601)</p> <p>“Yep. [An open source meeting] gives them a lot of freedom. It's less work for me. It's not me lecturing. And it gives them an opportunity. So the thing that I always do at the end is ask them to raise your hand if you learn something, raise your hand. Raise your hand if you taught something, raise your hand. Raise your hand if you learned. And talk more. As a ratio, if you learn more than you do in normal session, they raise your hand. Raise your hand if you talk more than you do to normal session and all of them raise your hand and then you ask them how much work did I do as the teacher? And they're like, give us markers? Yeah, that's about it. I gave you a slide that told you the rules of the game, and I gave you markers and space, and that was about it” (Transcript lines 934-950).</p>
Thomas	-	<p>“Getting them engaged with students who have different perspectives and come from different backgrounds like I think that’s part of our responsibility as educators, whether that is in the methods classroom or the traditional K12 classroom” (Transcript lines 2041-2049).</p>

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Jessica	-	“I want [my preservice teachers] always thinking about... the reflective process... ‘Where are my students? What do my students need? What am I doing to get them there?’”(Transcript lines 725-731)
Ellen	Openly discuss issues from the field: Creating space in the curriculum to allow preservice teachers time to discuss, process, and problem-solve issues that they are seeing in their field placement (Interview)	“Yeah, because you know what happens, Beth, what ends up happening is that I'm not. I'm no longer doing all the work when you're Co-creating, guess what? I am I clinical class. They're doing. all of the work, you know, I'm. I'm teaching things about trauma, their students, and being citizens. But then they're coming in and teaching about the theory. And the different educational theories because they said that that was something that they felt they needed more on and are applying them” (Transcript lines 235-242).
Amber	-	-

*Note.* Areas notated with a dash (-) means that the instructional approach was not reported on by the teacher educator or mentioned within the course syllabus.

**Table 6**

*Methods instructors should help beginning teachers understand that the development of civic identity is a dynamic process that takes place in a social and cultural context.*

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Caroline	What kind of citizen are you?: Signs with the words “Legal Citizen, Minimal Citizen, Active Citizen, and Transformative Citizen” are placed in three corners of the room. The preservice teachers work in groups to define each and discuss evidence for their definition. They then move to which one of the signs they feel they match the most. (From Bruce Larson’s instructional strategies for middle school and high school social studies. It was adapted by Caroline) (Course materials and Interview).	<p>“I’ve always been really committed to helping students understand what citizenship means. It’s not just voting. It’s not just being a good person. It’s not just following the law” (Transcript lines 428-434).</p> <p>“I do have the personal desire that they really will understand that there is a broader conceptualization of citizenship besides. I was born in this country, or I vote and I pick up my trash. You know, I hope that they understand there’s more to an understanding of citizenship than that and that we have rights as citizens and we may have obligations and opportunities as citizens in this country that not everybody else has” (Transcript lines, 798-814).</p>

Participant	Activity	Evidence
William	Service Learning: Preservice teachers collaborated with local high school students and business owners to design a service-learning project in hopes to develop civic efficacy in the preservice teachers and civic understanding in the high school students (Course Syllabus and Interview).	<p>“Students will be able to assess pedagogical approaches to cultivate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions in schools and communities. They’re going to teach some of the time, but they’re going to be citizens all the time” (Transcript line 165).</p> <p>“Let’s take a look at both of these curricular examples and let’s explore what the differences are. Here are two different approaches to teaching, let’s interrogate this. Let’s trouble this, let’s consider our subject activities and to me, that’s what... methods are about... It’s also finding your identity. You know, what kind of teacher do you want to be? What do you feel comfortable with, what resonates with you and not this, apprenticeship of observation stuff, or the novice teacher trope of I teach how I learn, but to extend beyond that and begin thinking outside of your own self and with the population you have” (Transcript line 165).</p>

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Scott	<p>What is the purpose of social studies? Why do we teach it? (Course Syllabus and Interview)</p> <p>Exploration into “what is civics?” (Course materials and Interview)</p>	<p>“Everything in terms of unit planning and lesson planning stems from that value for civic preparation, which is integral. It's the first box of their lesson plans. The rationale, so who are your students, where they value, and who cares about this content? Why is it important?” (Transcript lines 596-601)</p> <p>“I think the junior block works really well developmentally to prepare them with foundations for exploring their own civic competence. As well as approaching social studies education in a way that is aligned with the EdTPA and begins to teach for civic competence” (Transcript lines 769-773).</p>
Thomas		-
Jessica		-
Ellen	<p>Develop Own Definition of Social Studies:</p> <p>At the beginning of the semester, have the preservice teachers develop their own definition of social studies including what it means to them, their class, their community, and their students. (Course Syllabus and Interview)</p>	<p>One of the first things we do is we come up with a combined definition .... We say what are “our” social studies? And then, why do we need social studies? And we make posters of those things. And we leave those up on the wall all the time, you know, through the semester... um... And one of those things is always comes out, you know what our social studies and, why our society is important. Always comes out to be a good citizen, you know, and we do talk about that. So it is, it's one. Branch... But to me it's like the branch that holds everything together (Transcript lines 704-715).</p>

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Amber	What is civics? (Course materials and interview)	“Context is crucial. There are a lot of conversations happened at [East Coast School] that are not happening here [Current Institution] and maybe we should be, but we are not in the south...they’re just not happening here... you know, we are in Ohio, and we are fine. Doesn’t mean that we do not have to prepare our preservice teachers to do that” (Transcript 381-403).

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**Table 7**

*Preservice teachers should analyze civic texts to understand how to adapt them to their students to foster civic virtues*

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Caroline	-	-
William	Analyze Primary Source Texts: Examine opposing viewpoints on historical texts and apply concepts that were debated to present-day understanding (Course Materials)  Digitizing Primary Sources: Preservice teachers helped local organizations digitize historical documents (Course Syllabus)	There is a lot of value and expertise in our communities in a variety of different fields and one of the things that we try to do when I first get the group thinking about the service learning project is developing a sense of place. We have a lot of students that come from all over, and some barely get off campus. So it is nice for me to help facilitate those connections to a variety of different folks in our community and to learn from the folks in our community... They helped digitize archives for museums up in those communities and have learned a great deal about the value of primary sources in developing historical thinking. So, yeah, these are just in my view, indispensable opportunities and if we're not creating them, they're likely not going to get them” (Transcript line 81).
Scott	Introduce and teach the C3 Framework to analyze civic texts: Utilize the Inquiry Design Model curriculum to facilitate lessons with your preservice teachers in C3. Have them create their own IDM unit (Course materials)	

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Thomas	-	“You can have any opinion you want and that’s fine, but you also need to demonstrate that you have arrived at this place because of these pieces of evidence that you have looked at, analyzed, and said, OK, here’s where I am thinking. When you do that, I think you have more civic-minded citizens, more civic-minded students because we are taking in multiple perspectives as well, not just in the classroom, but in society and culture in general” (Transcript 1106-1118).
Jessica	Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) Presentation: Invite a speaker from SHEG to show the preservice teachers how to select resources and facilitate ‘Reading Like a Historian’ activities (Course Syllabus)	“So collecting resources and knowing what’s out there that they can use, being critical about whether they’re good resources or not, that’s another thing that we do that helps them to think about what they are going to be doing in their own classroom” (Transcript 744-749)
Ellen	Providing an overview of the C3 Framework including how to identify accurate sources (Course syllabus)	-



Participant	Activity	Evidence
Amber	Utilize Chauncey Monte-Sano's Read, Write, and Inquire Model: Focuses on students learning how to write an argument and aligns with C3 Framework. Provide the preservice teachers with primary sources and assist them in making a claim (Read/Write). Preservice teachers then read and critique each other's work using sources (Read/Inquire) Preservice teachers then write an argument responding to the interpretation of others (Write/Inquire). Preservice teachers then discuss how they can adapt this to their classes. (Course materials and Interview)	You can't just come in and say like, look, I have this really cool thing that I learned, or this is an awesome article that we're going to read and discuss. You have to break it down. You have to start the first day students walk in. You have to say this is a classroom in which we're going to discuss because so much of their education is funneled through a teacher that they don't know how to talk to each other. So you have to teach them how to talk to each other. Even if they're seniors in high school, they have not been taught how to have. A high level discussion based off of a shared text (Transcript lines, 291-302).

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**Table 8**

*Teacher Educators should help preservice teachers become familiar with basic methods and instructional techniques that help students make connections between and among concepts*

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Caroline	Case Study: Preservice teachers read an autobiography and background information about Rosa Parks. Students are also provided information about what is a citizen. Preservice teachers are asked if Rosa Parks was a good citizen, after all, she broke the law (Course materials and Interview).	“I do a little case study about Rosa Parks and reading a little excerpt from her autobiography and I just, you know, I ask my students as pre service teachers, just like I did back when I was a high school teacher. What do you already know about Rosa Parks? You know, tell me about this lady” Transcript lines, 558-568).
William	Service-Learning exposes students to different aspects of civics in the community to help them make connections of local government with their students (Course materials and Interview)	“We take a critical perspective of service learning, and that’s social justice orientation has us look at, the root cause, the identity, about what the day is supposed to be about. Like, why do these organizations even need to be here, and for what reason? And analyze power structures” (Transcript line, 117).

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Scott	Deepening Student Learning through Civil Discourse: Why and How What is Good Discourse? (Course Syllabus)	“But the toughest part for inquiry-based instruction is to try to figure out is what's a good question that's going to unite your students values and the states values and prepare your students for civic competence? And it's not really until mid-semester that it really clicks. And I've gotten better at it as I've gone along trying ne angles and how to get students to isolate a slice of content instead of teaching all the things, but once they figure out how to approach a little piece of content, for the purpose of social studies and civic competence, I think it gives them a lot more freedom to give students space for discussion and thinking and to motivate their students as they lesson plan. To motivate their students to dig into social studies sources and grapple with heavy questions” (Transcript lines 655-673).
Thomas	Utilized course readings from Chapin, J. R (2015). A practical guide to middle and secondary social studies (4 <sup>th</sup> Ed). Boston, MA: Person (Course Syllabus).	-

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Jessica	Course Readings: Redesigning Civic Education for the Digital Age, How to Make Civics Learning Stick, and The civic educator-How to teach government in fun ways, 6 ways to bring civics alive (Course Syllabus).	“We were discussing financial literacy the other day and a student asked how this relates to world history. So we just talked about it from a broader sense and how to talk about it and work it into conversations you are able to still link it in. You can talk about World War II and you know the war at home and the struggles that people had and the decisions they had to make. And then you relate those decisions about whether I buy this or that. It is a skill and very hard to teach, but you have to make connections” (Transcript 395-407)
Ellen	Unpack a standard/Teaching Portfolio: Choose a difficult standard and walk the preservice teachers through how to unpack it. Write the objectives, create and experience the lesson components with your preservice teachers, and create a corresponding summative assessment. Preservice teachers then repeat the process with their own standards and share their lessons with their classmates (Course materials and Interview).	<p>“Teachers right now in the field are really tired and the really good teaching that I am used to seeing, I do not see much of it....I know what good teaching looks like and I want to show my students that... and I am going to teach a 30-minute lesson and then after the lesson, we’re going to discuss what methods I used to teach that lesson” (Transcript, 568-580)</p> <p>“I’m hoping that they’re (preservice teachers) gonna walk away with an entire portfolio of resources. Some really good lesson plans, seeing good teaching... understand the “why.” Why did I do it that way?” (Transcript, 613-620).</p>

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Amber	Model Concept Development Technique with “What is Civics?”: In groups, preservice teachers are given qualities of civics on slips of paper and are asked to categorize them into similar qualities. Students then view other groups and adjust or commit to their categories of civics. Students then synthesize a definition of civics using their slips (Course materials).	-

*Note.* Areas notated with a dash (-) means that the instructional approach was not reported on by the teacher educator or mentioned within the course syllabus.

**Table 9**

*Teacher Educators should integrate local, national, and global perspectives into a methods course*

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Caroline	-	“We need to recognize that our citizenship goes beyond political borders and that we are a little narrow-minded in thinking that we’re citizens of the United States, the State of Ohio, the city of [redacted], the county of [redacted], and we are also citizens of the world and we have some applications to our environment, to different cultures” (Transcript lines 822-832).
William	Service Learning: Students learn about the surrounding neighborhoods through service-learning projects with local businesses. This allows them to have a boarder understanding of the local community around them (Course syllabus).	-
Scott	Informed Action Project: At the end of the semester, students have to create a short presentation of an action they did during methods to make an impact within their field placement classroom and community (Course materials).	-

Participant	Activity	Evidence
Thomas	Ohio History Site Exploration: Preservice teachers are required to visit three historical sites in Ohio throughout one semester. While visiting these sites, students use their training from class to answer, ‘How does this reflect history? What is the narrative of this location? How do they present it in terms of historical value and historical accuracy? How is the event described? Is it inclusive? How could a visit to this historical site be integrated into my classroom?’ (Course materials).	“They had no idea that local tidbit, there’s a little plaque down there...They had no idea that that occurred here in Ohio. That is the type of thing I think is important to get our students to recognize as well” (Transcript lines 1703-1713).
Jessica	-	-
Ellen	-	-
Amber	-	-

*Note.* Areas notated with a dash (-) means that the instructional approach was not reported on by the teacher educator or mentioned within the course syllabus.

## **Social Studies Teacher Educators Report that They Often Design Their Civic Lessons to Match the Perceived Needs of Their Students**

Each of the participants reported in some manner that they made their curricular decisions based on what they perceive that the students need related to civic competence. As William asserts, “They’re going to teach some of the time, but they’re going to be citizens all the time and that is my civic focus. I want them to be well informed” (transcript, 165). A specific example of this is when Caroline perceives that her students do not vote or know enough about local politics, so she creates an election activity where her preservice teachers learn how to find credible sources and document what the different candidates believe. Thomas wants his students to appreciate the historical identity of the communities where they are teaching so he assigns a historical site exploration assignment. Scott wants his students to strive to make their community better with informed action, so he assigns a final reflection helping them recognize how they influenced their methods community. Wanting her students to be more informed about communities, cultures, and the world, Amber integrates inquiry and civic discussions into her methods class. Referring to this hope for her students, “You would hope with becoming more informed, you learn more, and the more you read, the more you interact with other cultures, the more accepting you are” (transcript, 184-188).

Making curricular decisions based on the perceived student need can go beyond the methods classroom to the administrative level with the goal of eliminating a course requirement. At the time of this interview in the fall of 2022, William was advocating intensely with his administration to not have his spring junior block methods course include a field placement. His rationale for this is supported by his success from the



previous year where “they have learned more history from the people in [local town] and [local town] than they did in a semester-long history course” (transcript, 81). He added that a service-learning field project carries more weight as “how do you go from being a non-participant observer to somebody who is going to manage a classroom or somebody who is going to design some kind of interesting and rigorous activity or assessment?” (transcript, 153) William concludes that integrating service learning, “showcases what the possibilities are, but it’s also finding your identity... what kind of teacher you want to be? What do you feel comfortable with?...it begins the thinking of outside your own self and with the population that you have” (transcript, 165).

While Amber, William, Thomas, and Caroline formulate and adjust their curriculum based upon the perceived needs of their students, Ellen and Jessica take a student-driven approach and willingly invite the students to have an active role in what they learn, how they learn it, and how they are assessed. They both begin their methods course by gauging what area their students are most concerned about. They ask open-ended questions like, what are you most concerned about in the upcoming course, what are you most concerned about before going into the field, and what area do you still feel uncertain about your teaching? “Sometimes I’ll even create a lesson or focus on something based on something I saw in the field. Just to expand on it, you know, what a student did and the impact it had on the students in the classroom they were in and then we’ll go with it from there” (transcript, 309-313). Ellen expounds that as she develops the course with her students, she can walk them through the process of what she is doing in real-time instead of only creating the lesson or the assessment behind closed doors.

## **Social Studies Teacher Educators Report Value in Lesson Modeling as an Instructional Technique with Emphasis on Facilitating Discussions on Controversial Issues**

Six of the seven teacher educators interviewed discussed and provided artifacts pertaining to modeling or “talking through” a lesson for their students. Ellen explains her choice of using modeling in her classroom by explaining it in the following way, “I know what good teaching looks like, and I want to show my students that...I am going to create the lesson plan and I am going to teach a 30-minute lesson, and after that, we are going to discuss what methods I used to teach that lesson” (transcript, 568-580). She asserts that her rationale for this decision is focused on her preservice teachers and their civic understanding “I’ve learned that social studies teachers in high school are not necessarily there to create good citizens” (transcript, 717-718).

Amber, William, Jessica, Caroline, and Scott use modeling to show how their preservice teachers can have constructive discussions in their classrooms. As Amber explains it, “So often we just say things like ‘then we’ll have this discussion.’ Well, if you haven’t taught them how to discuss anything, then they’re not actually doing anything. So, I use that as a framework to teach with and for discussion” (transcript, 216-222). Scott uses a similar philosophy when simulating an open-source meeting on contemporary social issues. By facilitating lessons in this manner, Scott serves three purposes: he exposes the students to contemporary social issues that they may be unfamiliar with, he allows students to play the role of the student and explore deeper into an area of interest, and he models and debriefs what this instructional technique looks like from the teacher perspective.

The use of specific lessons in modeling how to analyze definitions related to civics was utilized by many of the participants in this study. A specific example of this is how Caroline has her students define what citizenship is and then challenges them to apply their new understanding to Rosa Park asking if she matches the definition of citizen. She explains, “Not everybody’s a real believer in the politically active citizen...but I like to include in my teaching at every level...that challenges them to consider for themselves how citizenship is defined differently and what that means to different people and what they personally believe citizenship should be and how they might help their learners have a broader understanding of citizenship” (transcript, 456-472). Additional words used in this similar format were civics (Amber), citizenship (Scott), community (William), and democracy (Ellen).

Thomas was the one teacher educator who did not report using modeling within his preservice teacher education classroom. This could be in part due to his teaching of social studies methods asynchronously online. He recognizes the benefits of in-person methods and shared that he would appreciate a hybrid course if given a choice.

### **Social Studies Teacher Educators Acknowledge the Impact of Societal Issues, Along with Potential Legislative Changes, on Their Social Studies Methods**

When participants were asked if they noticed a change in their instructional approach from their first year to now as well as what they thought about the future of social studies methods, a variety of areas were mentioned. Many of the teacher educators reported that social issues as well as potential legislative changes are impacting and will continue to impact civic instruction in social studies methods. These societal issues include critical race theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, gun violence, and what is

acceptable to teach. Legislative issues surround the possible passage of Ohio House Bills that would impact K-12 education, and by default, the teacher educators who prepare future social studies teachers.

Reflecting upon their first years of teaching methods to now, William, Scott, and Thomas noted how preservice teachers are entering a field that looks vastly different. As Scott explains, “I think there is a lot more trepidation and anxiety with my students in terms of teaching contemporary issues or potentially divisive issues. Probably due to...well... I’m not probably they say because of recent politics, because they hear about critical race theory and culturally responsive pedagogy, and those terms are politically charged, and they are not quite sure what those things are. So often they’ll avoid, they’ll have a tendency to avoid those topics that may bridge into critical race theory, because they’re not quite sure what’s legal, what’s acceptable, what’s ethical, and what not” (transcript, 152-162). William continues that “they are coming from environments where there are limited mental health services. The gun violence and the school shootings, poor health, inequalities lots of other structural inequality issues” (transcript, 175), and because of this, it is hard to teach the normal pedagogical and methods techniques that we are used to in addition to preparing them for the additional societal demands.

To combat this, William and Thomas recognize many of their preservice teachers retreat for stability seeking jobs near their hometowns as “they just don’t want to go outside their box” (transcript, 175). Thomas provides, “I want to move back to [rural] county and want to teach in this building in Room 6 right next to Mrs. Johnson whom I had in 4<sup>th</sup> grade...they don’t have the desire, that intrinsic motivation to have a border national or global understanding of social studies. Many struggles in diverse

environments” (transcript, 1162-1184). Jessica offers some rationale for this by sharing that teacher educators and preservice teachers “cannot handle one more thing” (transcript, 827) and that they go to their hometown as at least a few things are familiar as they have to navigate so many other societal and political things that are not.

State legislatures across the United States are forming committees and placing bills up for discussion related to the curriculum regulation and choices of social studies educators. William, Scott, and Amber mention current Ohio legislation bills specifically Ohio House Bill 103, 327, 322, and 616 in the interview and how the passage of these bills would have a direct impact on K-12 social studies education which, by association, impacts teacher preparation. I am concerned “about the politicization and the culture wars that are having an effect on schools” with the passage of any of these bills (transcript, 161). While Thomas did not reference the bills, he referenced the possible polarization related to these curricular choices. “We’re trying to reframe everything from 2022, of what we consider to be moral in 2022. But in the year 2222, two hundred years from now, there are things that are going on in society today that will be looked like, ‘I can’t believe people did that’...I am concerned with social studies moving forward and having real, honest conversations without being afraid of offending someone in some way” (transcript, 870-890).

Instead of ignoring these bills, both Scott and William take a hands-on approach and discuss these bills within their preservice teacher classroom. “I teach the controversy, just like Diana Hess would do... We have done some Socratic seminars with those bills. I’ve shown them the curricular examples from a variety of different sources, and we’ve done a little critical analysis of what is communicated through those

documents” (transcript, 161). Scott adds his rationale for this civically motivated decision, “The reason you would add legislation specifically and assess it in methods course I think would be to encourage...civic action with your students” (transcript, 1138-1142). When asked about this further and if he felt that all social studies teacher preparation programs should include information about upcoming legislative bills, he waived in his conviction on what is best. “I wonder should it be (legislative bills)? Or is it something that we really should let our in-service teachers just kind of leave alone or are preservice teachers really kind of left alone for now? I do not have the answer” (transcript, 113-116). Amber remains optimistic in her outlook on these bills sharing that “I think right now in Ohio, there’s been enough pushback that we haven’t really felt the sting as much as other states.” (transcript, 139-141).

### **Social Studies Teacher Educators Acknowledge the Importance of Including National and Global Citizenship, but Recognize the Need to Improve**

Three of the teacher educators (Caroline, William, and Thomas) in this study specifically shared that they believe in adding a global perspective to social studies methods and would like to do more to do more in this area. While all three of them asserted the urgency to include global citizenship, none of their civic instructional lessons aligned with their philosophy. This will be further unpacked in the next chapter.

Caroline asserted that her preservice teachers need to continually emphasize that our citizenship goes beyond the political borders of our city, county, state, or country. To not do so, in Caroline’s opinion, is a little narrow-minded and we, as teacher educators, need to rectify this. She was honest in her self-evaluation when she shared, “I’m not sure that I do as much justice to that notion that I could...they need to understand....political

civic competence, understanding ourselves as citizens of our state and our nation, our local community and emphasizing that...but I don't even think I'm leading them to the path of global citizenship" (transcript, 882-893).

William believes an area where teacher educators can do more in terms of global education in civics is a look at indigenous citizenship, liberation civics, abolition civics, and postcolonial or Neo-Athenian perspectives. He asserts that "citizenship is defined as who is in and who is out. And who is privileged and who is not" (transcript, 265). To combat this, he challenges teacher educators and civic instructors to "do better" and be more inclusive in their curricular choices. "We have to have those deeper conversations about 'whose voice' and 'whose civics' and 'what engagement looks like across those different contexts'" (transcript, 265). He concluded his thoughts by emphasizing that it is not the preservice teacher's responsibility for addressing these issues, but rather it is the responsibility of the ones creating the curriculum and the ones who are placed in a position of power to disseminate it.

A surprising find related to national and global citizenship came from Thomas. He taught social studies abroad in Columbia and is a firm believer that all preservice teachers should go and explore a different country for two years before teaching in the United States. Thomas believes that this experience would help preservice teachers learn much about teaching, culture, and citizenship in other places. Despite this philosophy and his teaching experience, he does not include a global perspective in his methods course. He admits that he does mention it in his responses on their online discussion boards but does not have any target lessons towards civic competence. "I really only found a couple of things that loosely reference civic engagement, but this [study] helped me realize that

next time I teach this course, I'm going to make sure I include a week or more specific activities related to civics" (transcript, 1518-1526).



## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion**

This study investigated the civic competence understanding of social studies teacher educators as well as their curricular and instructional decisions pertaining to civics within the preservice teacher education classroom. In this study, I was guided by three research questions:

1. How do social studies teacher educators' understand civic competence?
2. How do social studies teacher educators' approach and incorporate civic competence in their teacher preparation curriculum?
3. How do social studies teacher educators see the future of social studies teacher preparation?

The population focus of this study was social studies teacher educators with full-time continuing appointments across colleges and universities in Ohio. Seven participants were selected through convenience sampling and proceeded with participation in this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted focusing on the teacher educator's understanding of civic competence and their instructional practices in social studies methods courses. After each interview, I requested a digital copy of the course syllabi and any lesson materials or assessments that were discussed.

After an analysis of interview transcripts, shared lesson materials, and course syllabi several key claims emerged from this study. Social studies teacher educators understand the NCSS definition and vision for civic competence, with a primary focus on fostering political knowledge throughout their interviews. They also utilize various activities and assignments placing significant value on lesson modeling when facilitating

discussions on controversial issues. In reflecting upon the future of social studies methods, teacher educators recognize the impact of societal issues and legislative changes on civics instruction and suggest incorporating national and global citizenship and civic technology advances into their courses. These findings will be explored further in comparison with NCSS's vision for civic competence and through curricular-instructional gatekeeping (Thornton, 1991).

### **Ambitious Teaching While Controlling the Curricular Gate**

When NCSS (2018) put forth the National Standards for the Preparation of Social Studies Teachers they did so with a vision of cultivating ambitious social studies teaching. An ambitious social studies teacher has deep knowledge of their subject matter, knows their students, has a deep understanding of their students' lives including their abilities and perceptions of the world, and knows how to create a space for their students to enact social change (Grant & Gradwell, 2010; NCSS, 2018).

NCSS has high aspirations for this vision in both K-12 and in teacher education. While it is not an easy challenge, NCSS has set the groundwork for teacher educators to follow in their National Standards for the Preparation of Social Studies Teachers. These standards place inquiry, civic competence, and the C3 Framework at their core providing an aim for teacher educators and preservice teachers alike to strive for. It is then the responsibility of the teacher educator, serving as the curricular-instructional gatekeeper, to also understand these aims, understand their preservice teachers, and decide what are the most important aspects of civic competence to include and determine what is the best method to present the information to their preservice teachers who will, in turn, present to their future students (Lampert et al., 2013; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

In line with the aspirational goal of civic competence, as cited in NCSS (2018) by Grant (2005) “ambitious teaching represents no endpoint, but rather a journey in which teachers face and negotiate challenges and conditions along the way” (p. 129). In the context of this study, the teacher educators demonstrated elements of ambitious teaching in their methods courses by actively seeking and incorporating curriculum ideas that addressed specific needs of their students. This included showcasing instructional methods through modeling and how to facilitate discussions including controversial issues, which both aimed to enhance civic understanding. However, other areas, such as the inclusion of a global perspective or integration of informed action, could have deepened the civic understanding of their preservice teachers. Below is an overview of these areas highlighted and not included by the social studies teacher educators.

### **Understanding Civic Competence**

In addressing research question, *how do social studies teacher educators understand civic competence*, each participant was well acquainted with the NCSS definition of civic competence and could elaborate on it using their own ideas. While some of their understanding might have some variation from NCSS, like Caroline’s addition of the word “democracy”, each participant affirmed the NCSS definition of civic competence and beliefs that civic education is important within the social studies context. Throughout the interview, the teacher educators referenced all three aspects of civic competence but referenced *fostering political knowledge* the most.

This high emphasis in foster political knowledge could be explained by the background of the participant as content knowledge can be influenced by teacher educators’ background as a student in teacher preparation or a social studies teacher

(Lortie, 1975), their personal beliefs (Williams et al., 2012), or their interactions and collaboration with family members, friends, and colleagues at their institution or educational field (Ritter, 2007). While all participants referenced aspects of *self-interested investment in political engagement* and *a disposition to a more inclusive, just, and equitable society* within their understanding of civic competence, it is possible that they were not as familiar or confident in those areas.

### **Civic Competence Curriculum Choices in Social Studies Methods**

Research consistently highlights the importance of exposing preservice teachers to different instructional methods (Boyle-Baise, 2003; Hostetler et al., 2018; Ritter, 2010). In line with this focus, the teacher educators delivered by sharing a total of twenty-one instructional lessons focused on civic competence. A noteworthy finding of this study is that each of the teacher educators shared their intention behind these lessons, which was to increase the civic understanding of their preservice teachers. This means that each teacher educator made the conscious curricular decision to include civics in their methods course. Within the gatekeeper lens, curricular decisions require background knowledge and experience and are not made without an aim, or broad purpose, behind the decision (Thornton, 2005). It is then, reasonable to assume, that the curricular lessons pertaining to civic understanding were a result of the teacher educators' aim to cultivate active citizens in their students which is a great place to start.

### ***The Use of Modeling in Civic Instruction***

A main instructional strategy that emerged included modeling civic lessons. Rather than being a mere “show-and-tell” of different instructional strategies (Myers, 2004), the modeling lessons provided a unique insight into the nature of pedagogical

reasoning and how teaching practices are developed (Loughran, 2006; Loughran et al., 2016). The teacher educators shared that they would “think aloud” about their approach before the lesson, add pauses to explain their instructional thought within the lesson, and allow time for reflection upon what was observed. Research has documented the benefits of modeling including that it helps preservice teachers formulate connections between and among the concepts being taught, add additional instructional techniques to their toolbox, and put themselves in the learner role which assists in gaining a broader understanding. (Crocco & Livingston, 2017; Feiman-Nemser, 2008). In the previous chapter, various modeling techniques were shared in detail. However, the specific focus on modeling the facilitation of discussions on civic and controversial issues deserves further attention due to the social and political complexities of our present time.

### ***Discussions on Civics and Controversial Issues***

In line with the growing prominence of discussions on decisive concepts (Pace, 2022), it is not surprising that five out of the seven teacher educators in this study included facilitating discussions on civic and controversial issues in their curriculum. The ability to facilitate classroom discussions on controversial issues is widely regarded as a crucial component of civic education (Hahn, 2003; Hess, 2009; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Pace, 2021a). As Misco (2011) explains, “When students broach difficult issues and work towards their resolution...that flow from conflict... have opportunities for social change beyond local communities” (p. 7)

Applying the gatekeeping lens, the teacher educators who included the instruction on how to facilitate civic and controversial discussion continue to follow the same procedure. First, the teacher educators develop their content knowledge on the topics

including multiple perspectives, then they provide models of how to facilitate the discussions by giving opportunities for the preservice teachers to also try these techniques on their own (Hess & Zola, 2012). The teacher educators then, made a conscience decision relevant to the needs of their students, to include discussions as part of their curriculum. The beliefs outlined below by educational researchers could suggest some of the motivating factors behind the teacher educator's decision to include this instructional method. Including discussions on controversial issues can increase political engagement (Maurissen et al., 2018), foster critical thinking skills (Kraatz et al., 2022), play an integral role in cultivating informed citizens (Harwood & Hahn, 1990), and develop an individual's broader view of the world (Avery et al., 2013).

The teacher educators in this study made deliberate efforts to increase civic understanding among their preservice teachers through their curricular decisions and explanation of instructional techniques. This study documents the intentional focus on civic education in teacher education and its possibilities to contribute to the broader societal goal of civic competence.

### **Future of Social Studies Methods**

When I asked the teacher educators how they saw the future of social studies methods two areas of concern were mentioned: the lack of a global perspective in social studies methods and possible Ohio legislative initiatives.

### ***Global Civic Competence***

The findings of this study indicated that three social studies teacher educators (Caroline, William, and Thomas) referenced the importance of including national and global citizenship in their social studies methods course, but did not provide the

instructional materials to match their beliefs. Rapoport (2013) provides a possible rationale for this as sometimes it is easier for educators to talk about incorporating a global perspective in general than explaining specific teaching activities that are constructed for global citizenship. Although I did not directly inquire about the reason the global perspective was excluded from the methods curriculum, empirical research has delved into potential rationales behind the omission of the global perspective. Teacher educators report that they avoid incorporating assignments related to global understanding as they feel lack adequate knowledge and confidence in the subject areas (Hauerwas et al., 2023; Rapoport, 2010; Ukpokodu, 2020). They also report that they have a lack of time due to the additional institutional constraints placed upon their curriculum (Parkhouse et al., 2015). Ukpokodu (2020) and Guler and Ullom (2023) expanded on this constraint concluding that global citizenship often must compete with pedagogical paradigms such as culturally responsive teaching, multiculturalism, and social justice to gain time and attention within teacher preparation courses or the curriculum. Reflecting upon the curricular decisions made by the teacher educators in this study, time was also a factor. Having enough time to include other curricular content was a serious concern that left global citizenship out of their implementation of civic competence instruction.

### ***Possible Ohio Legislative Initiatives***

The teacher educators expressed concerns about how the legislative bills within the Ohio House of Representatives could impact their methods and practices and their students in their field placements. Echoing the tenants of Thornton's gatekeeping, teacher educators must possess a comprehensive understanding of the local legislative bills and

how those bills could affect their preservice teachers in the future. This knowledge will help them make informed decisions as they tend to the curricular gate within their methods course. Depending on their conclusions and personal convictions, teacher educators would be encouraged to take part in the political process. This advocacy aligns well with the call for informed action outlined by the C3 Framework. As New et al. (2021) noted, “There are no guarantees in education, however, and a host of factors could intervene allowing traditional teachers to maintain their practices. But if the impact of the C3 Framework on state standards grows, then the potential for substantive change in social studies classrooms multiples” (p. 245).

### **Informed Action and the Curricular Gate**

Among the many dimensions of civic competence, “informed action” holds a distinct position as it is the culmination of all other areas of civic knowledge. While acquiring civic knowledge and understanding its principles are important, informed action applies those ideals in the form of action in the real-world. Informed action defined by NCSS (2013a) is when students use their knowledge, skills, and perspectives to “inquire about problems involved in public issues; deliberate with other people about how to define and address issues; take constructive, independent, and collaborative action; reflect on their actions; and create and sustain groups” (p. 62). This section delves into the absence of this key dimension of civic competence.

The teacher educators within this study made conscious decisions to allow many areas of civic focus through the curricular gate and into their methods classroom. However, one area that is key to developing civic competence were not present in this study: informed action. Both NCSS and empirical research have continuously highlighted



the importance of informed action as an essential component of civic education (Levinson & Levine, 2013; Miller-Lane et al., 2007; NCSS, 2013a, 2021b). The absence of informed action can have a ripple effect on the larger educational ecosystem. Being an informed and active citizen is a significant pedagogical responsibility of all social studies teachers and teacher education programs must measure how candidates are actively participating as citizens within their communities (NCSS, 2018). Preservice teachers, without proper exposure to informed action, may enter classrooms less equipped to guide students in real-world civic activities. This not only affects individual classrooms but can also shape the broader landscape of civic engagement in our society.

Within this study, the teacher educators showcased glimpses of integrating informed action through their facilitation of discussions related to controversial issues, but there is a deeper call, for teacher educators and preservice teachers alike, to use their knowledge that they gained in these discussions to foster real-world civic activities. As Heybach and Sheffield (2011) explain, the role of the teacher educators goes beyond just training preservice teachers, but to push further into “difficult knowledge” and to include social justice issues such as inequity, racism, and global injustice. NCSS (2018) reflects this as well as a call to informed action is highlighted in the standards for the preparation of social studies teachers:

Element 4c: Candidates engage learners in ethical reasoning to deliberate social, political, and economic issues, communicate conclusions, and take informed action toward achieving a more inclusive and equitable society. (p. 22)

Element 5c: Candidates take informed action in schools and/or communities and serve as advocates for learners, the teaching profession, and/or social studies.

(p.25)

As I mentioned in limitations, I did not ask the participants specifically about the area of informed action integration. One participant, Scott, was an outlier in this study as he touched upon these standards. Scott spoke readily about informed action during his interview and provided a supporting activity entitled, “What was YOUR informed action?” This was a project at the end of the semester where students were asked to provide a three-to-five-minute presentation reflecting upon their civic contribution in their classroom at the end of the fall of their junior field placement. It is beyond the scope of this study to determine the success of this lesson or its lasting impact on Scott’s preservice teachers.

I do not pass judgment upon the participants for not including these areas as the inclusion or non-inclusion of a particular concept is natural in gatekeeping as “tending the curricular-instructional gate is more complex than it is commonly thought to be, at least if it is done conscientiously” (Thornton, 2001b, p. 237). The teacher educators in this study may have known about these areas but did not feel they had significant background knowledge to design lessons around them. Equally so, the teacher educators could have possessed the background knowledge and the drive to include these topics in their lessons, but due to the time constraints of their course or department pressures, decided to not include them. On the other far end, it is possible that the teacher educators were not consciously aware of these areas and simply left them out as they did not know to include them. As a further choice, the teacher educators could be incorporating these

areas in their methods curriculum, but they are not fully recognizable as they do not match the universally accepted term. William and his service-learning project could fall under this umbrella as he refers to it as service learning and not “taking informed action.” As Thornton (2005) asserts, “It is questionable... if the relationship of subject matter and methods is a simple linear one where subject matter knowledge comes first and then it is arranged for instructional purposes” (p. 95). I would consider all these scenarios that occurred while the teacher educator was controlling the curricular gate.

Teaching with the aim of informed action is ambitious teaching. It is not easy. The teacher educator is responsible for creating activities that foster rich intellectual knowledge about the world, communities in which the preservice teachers serve, and encouraging the civil engagement of social change within the preservice teacher themselves. While the participants in this study did not fully explore informed action, I believe that they are committed to growth in this area with the following recommendations.

### **Further Implications and Recommendations**

This study has showcased that NCSS’s vision of teaching civic competence is not an easy task. If it were an easy task, there would be no need for conducting this study as everyone would already be proficient in it. A greater focus on integrating civic competence into social studies is still warranted.

### ***In Research***

One area that warrants further research is an extension of this study to incorporate observations of civic instructional strategies within the social studies teacher education classroom. This observation would address the limitation of self-reporting by the teacher

educator. Additionally, the voice of the preservice teacher is absent from this study.

Including the preservice teacher's perspectives on civic instructional strategies would add to empirical research in this area. These recommendations would help create a distinction between merely discussing civic competence, effectively teaching about civic competence, and ensuring that preservice teachers understand and internalize civic competence.

One instructional strategy found in this study could be at the forefront of transforming social studies methods. In the area of facilitating civic and controversial issue discussions, Artificial Intelligence (AI) was used by Scott to assist his preservice teachers in facilitating discussions on civic and controversial issues. Scott utilized Mursion Simulation to program and facilitate practice discussions for his students. Other current research on AI developed when Kaka et al. (2021) introduced digital simulations or 'practice spaces' where preservice teachers can facilitate conversations on controversial issues through a web-based interface. Preservice teachers are provided a brief background of each AI student to review. Then the simulations utilized video, images, audio, and text to simulate a conversation about a controversial issue between AI students. While both the experiences of Scott and the research of Kaka et al. (2021) have not documented if there is a causal relationship between the impact of the simulation on the teaching practices of the preservice teachers, the integration of AI in teacher preparation is an area yet to be explored.

Furthermore, while this study explored how teacher educators addressed civic competence in their teacher preparation classroom, the empirical studies on curricular-instructional gatekeeping on the part of teacher educators remain limited. Other relevant

areas of exploration include understanding how social studies teacher educators integrate lessons on the C3 Framework, addressing diversity, equity, race, and inclusion as well as how advocacy of civic competence and global competence. Each of these areas is a current topic influencing the field of social studies and the political climate of the world.

### ***In Teacher Education***

If teacher educators are going to continue to foster civic competence and grow in utilizing ambitious instructional techniques, they will need training and time. Building a strong foundation of knowledge is an essential component in teaching civic competence, (NCSS, 2018) and tending the curricular gate (Thornton, 2005). Teacher educators can acquire this knowledge through various means such as attending conferences, participating in meetings, as well as sharing resources and instructional strategies with other social studies teacher educators. Additionally, teacher educators can also grow in their professional knowledge by reflecting upon their practices and conducting research studies on civics integration into their methods course. As the curricular-instructional gatekeeper, teachers play a pivotal role in determining when, how much, how, and if civics is included. Hence, building up the knowledge and background of civic competence is crucial.

Once teacher educators expand their curricular foundation, they need time to implement this information. They need time to discern and to reflect upon how to integrate civic understanding into their methods course, but also time within their methods course to enact these changes. Currently, civics is one component of the social studies methods course, but it is not the focus. Some possible solutions to gain more time could include reorganizing and designing the methods syllabus to make civic the focus

(Conklin, 2015), collaborating with colleagues who are also teaching the same preservice teachers, or partnering with mentor teachers in the field on furthering civic integration (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Another solution that emerged through my research in this study is the possible benefit of designing the social studies methods curriculum through a global lens. Investigation into global-civic competence and the research of Cruz and Viera (2022) and newly published text by Ullom and Guler (2023), has outlined how focusing on citizens of the world can help us better understand our history, our rights, and interactions with one another and more importantly ourselves. The benefits of including global citizenship within a civic focus have been well documented and the field of international education continuously calls upon social studies teacher educators to integrate more of a global perspective into their teaching methods (Cruz & Viera, 2022; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kasemsap, 2017; Misco, 2020; Murray, 2017; Parkhouse et al., 2015; Pashby & Engel, 2020). Harshman (2016) specifically highlighted how the vision of the C3 Framework's relation to civic competence can be applied to critical global competence where candidates first develop an understanding of global issues, then critically engage within those ideas, concluding with taking informed action related to global challenges. Similar to a collective civic competence focus, this vision cannot happen without significant knowledge, skills, and training measures about global issues (Hauerwas et al., 2023; Kasemsap, 2017). Educators must then use their knowledge to apply intellectual dispositions (Journell, 2013) and informed action toward global citizenship to see any real change.

### ***In Policies***

This study was conducted in the Fall of 2022, during a period of uncertainty with state legislative decisions. While the results of this study only occurred in the Fall of 2022, rumblings of the impact of future legislative decisions at the local, state, and national levels cannot be ignored. Despite the acceptance of the C3 Framework by CAEP, it is not recognized within the state of Ohio Academic Content Standards. This political disparity between the expectations put forth by CAEP on teacher education programs and the academic expectations that preservice teachers face in the field will continue to impact civic education in Ohio. To combat this, professional social studies, and teacher education organizations such as NCSS, CUFA, OCSS, or SIG must continue to provide a platform for social studies teacher education to engage in professional development and conversations around civic competence. This can be through the organization of national and local conferences, expanding professional development seminars, drafting position statements in support of legislation, or lobbying representatives in state boards to support the field of social studies research must remain vigilant, question prevailing norms, and strive for a robust civic education to prevent the marginalization of the field of social studies (Crocco & Livingston, 2017; Evancho, 2022; NCSS, 2021b; Pace, 2022).

### **Final Thoughts**

In gatekeeping, we always need to ask why a topic should be studied (Thornton, 2005). Civics, citizenship, and developing civic competence, we must recognize that these concepts are not mere novelties. Being a “good citizen” encompasses more than being born in a particular country or a set of academic content standards. The study of

civics delves into an exploration of our identity teaching us the foundations of knowledge, justice, and political equality. Without a solid understanding of civics, individuals may lack the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate societal issues, engage in productive discussions, and participate effectively in democratic practices. By making civic education a priority, we equip citizens with the skills needed to address societal changes, promote inclusivity, and uphold the rights and dignity of all.

Building upon this purpose, this study exemplifies the importance of prioritizing civic education within teacher education programs. This study contributes to the research fields of teacher education and civic education by including the voices and practices of social studies teacher educators. A curtain behind the curricular-instructional gate of teacher educators was revealed that is often overlooked in teacher education research. Furthermore, this study provides insight into how a sample of teacher educators understand civic competence and how civic instruction is occurring in some teacher education programs. Additionally, this highlights the dedication of some social studies teacher educators in Ohio to civic education, despite the influences of political policies. It is worth noting that these findings are specific to the participants who volunteered to participate in this study, however, the aim of social studies remains the same, which is civic competence (NCSS, 2021a).



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## Appendix A

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### ADULT RESEARCH SUBJECT - INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A qualitative study of social studies teacher educators' use and understanding of civic competence.

**Principal Investigator** *Dr. Rebecca Schneider Associate Dean of Graduate Studies*  
419.530.2504 [rebecca.schneider@utoledo.edu](mailto:rebecca.schneider@utoledo.edu)

**Other Investigators** *Rachel Beth Corrigan Doctoral Candidate in Curriculum and Instruction*  
419-265-4533 [rcorr3@rockets.utoledo.edu](mailto:rcorr3@rockets.utoledo.edu)

**Purpose:** You are invited to participate in the research project entitled, a qualitative study of social studies teacher educators' use and understanding of civic competence, which is being conducted at the University of Toledo under the direction of Dr. Rebecca Schneider and Rachel Beth Corrigan. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how social studies teacher educators understand civic competence as well as how they are incorporating civic competence into their teacher preparation curriculum and instructional practices.

**Description of Procedures:** This research study consists of three stages:

1. You will be asked to gather your course syllabi from your social studies methods course as well as any blank templates of corresponding instructional materials (assignments or activities) that relate to civic competence that you are willing to share with the research team.
2. Using WebEx platform, you will be asked questions about your experiences with teaching methods, your views on civic competence instruction, and the materials that you have provided. WebEx will be used to record both video and audio during the interview. This interview should last no more than one hour in length.
3. At the conclusion of the interview, you will email any of the documents and materials that you discussed during the interview to the research team.

**Potential Risks:** There are minimal risks to participating in this study. There is a low risk of a breach of confidentiality. The researchers will implement safeguards to minimize the risk of a breach of confidentiality; however, you will be sharing their viewpoints and lessons surrounding civic competence your identity might be recognizable by others who are familiar with your thoughts and practices.

**Potential Benefits:** The only direct benefit to you if you participate in this research may be that you will learn about how social science studies are run and you may learn more about social studies teacher educator's viewpoints and practices pertaining to civic competence in the preservice social studies classroom. The field of education may benefit from this research as little empirical work has been done focusing on social studies teacher educators, their views about civic competence, and the related curricular practices. Others may benefit by learning about the results of this research.



**Confidentiality:**

The materials submitted to the research team will be kept in a password-controlled folder and only be accessible by the research team. Video recordings will be securely stored in a password-controlled folder separate from the other data. A key code chart with your name and pseudonym will also be securely stored separately from the other data and destroyed at the end of the research. The additional identifying information from the materials that could include your name or institution of your employment will be removed by the research team to ensure confidentiality. You are encouraged to complete participation in a private space and the research team will do the same.

**Voluntary Participation:** The information collected from you may be de-identified and used for future research purposes. As a reminder, your participation in this research is voluntary. Your refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled and will not affect your relationship with The University of Toledo, Ohio Council of Social Studies membership, SIG Higher Education branch of OCSS membership, or your CAEP accredited institution. At any time during the interview, you may skip any questions that you may be uncomfortable answering. In addition, you may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits.

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions at any time before, during or after your participation please contact a member of the research team Rachel Beth Corrigan ([rcorrig3@rockets.utoledo.edu](mailto:rcorrig3@rockets.utoledo.edu)) or her supervisor Dr. Rebecca Schneider ([Rebecca.schneider@utoledo.edu](mailto:Rebecca.schneider@utoledo.edu))

If you have questions beyond those answered by the research team or your rights as a research subject or research-related injuries, the Chairperson of the SBE Institutional Review Board may be contacted through the Human Research Protection Program on the main campus at (419) 530-6167.

**CONSENT SECTION – Please read carefully**

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Any questions about this study can be sent to the research team for further clarification before committing to the study. You may also indicate through email to the research team that you have read the information provided above, you have had all your questions answered, and you have decided to take part in this research. You may take as much time as necessary to think it over. Verbal consent will be obtained at the onset of the WebEx interview.

By participating in this research, you confirm that you are at least 18 years old.

## Appendix B

### Initial Participant Request Letter

Dear Social Studies Colleagues,

My name is Rachel Beth Corrigan, and I am a doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Instruction at The University of Toledo. With the assistance of my advisor, Dr. Rebecca Schneider, I am seeking research participants for my dissertation entitled *A Qualitative Study of Social Studies Teacher Educators' Use and Understanding of Civic Competence*.

NCSS (National Council for the Social Studies) defines civic competence as “fostering of political knowledge, a self-interested investment in political engagement, and a disposition towards a more inclusive, just, and equitable society.”

The purpose of this study is to explore how social studies teacher educators understand civic competence as well as how they are incorporating civic competence into their teacher preparation curriculum and instructional practices.

To complete this study, I am looking for full-time Social Studies Education Professors who serve as a course instructor in at least one of the following courses: Middle School Social Studies Methods or Adolescence to Young Adult Social Studies Methods.

To explore the purpose of this study, the research team would like you to explain and share any assignments or activities that you utilized in your methods course related to civic competence during your interview. This will be during your one hour interview. After the interview, we are asking that you share any of the assignments or activities that you discussed as well as your course syllabi through email with the research team. In participating in this study, collectively you will be asked to share the following documents with the research team after your interview:

- A course syllabus from your social studies methods course(s)
- Any blank templates of instructional materials (assignments or activities) that are utilized in your methods course in relation to civic competence.

An interview conducted on the WebEx platform will follow where you will be asked questions about your experiences with teaching methods, your views on civic competence instruction, and the materials that you have provided. This interview should last no more than one hour in length. The researchers will implement safeguards to minimize the risk of a breach of confidentiality.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please review the attached consent form and reply to this email with your name, title, and collegiate institution if you would like to participate. If you have questions before consenting to this study or about the consent form itself, please contact Rachel Beth Corrigan at [rccorrig3@rockets.utoledo.edu](mailto:rccorrig3@rockets.utoledo.edu). You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Rebecca Schneider at [rebecca.schneider@utoledo.edu](mailto:rebecca.schneider@utoledo.edu).

Thank you in advance; your participation is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Rachel Beth Corrigan

Doctoral Candidate

University of Toledo

## Appendix C

### **A qualitative study of social studies teacher educators' use and understanding of civic competence.**

**Principal Investigator** *Dr. Rebecca Schneider Associate Dean of Graduate Studies*

419.530.2504 [rebecca.schneider@utoledo.edu](mailto:rebecca.schneider@utoledo.edu)

**Other Investigators** *Rachel Beth Corrigan Doctoral Candidate in Curriculum and Instruction*

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#### **Interview Protocol**

1. Tell me about your teaching background before going into higher education?
2. What made you change careers and become a teacher educator? How did you arrive at your current position?
3. How long have you been teaching social studies methods?
4. Have you noticed a change in your approach to teaching social studies methods between your first year and now?
  - a. If so, what has changed?
  - b. If not, what has stayed the same?
5. What do you think the future of social studies methods will be?
6. NCSS defines civic competence as “fostering of political knowledge, a self-interested investment in political engagement, and a disposition towards a more inclusive, just, and equitable society.” Breaking down three different components to this definition:
  - a. How do you understand civic competence as fostering political knowledge?
  - b. How do you understand civic competence as a self-interested investment in political engagement?
  - c. How do you understand civic competence as a disposition towards a more inclusive, just, and equitable society?
  - d. How do you understand this definition as a whole? What does this definition mean to you?
7. How do you prepare preservice teachers in this area?
8. As we are considering civic competence, I want to transition our conversation to your methods course and the activities and assignments that you brought with you. Is there one that you would like to start with?
  - a. Follow-ups:
    - i. Take me back to when you first developed this artifact. What inspired you in this approach and creation? Why did you choose this method?
    - ii. What did you hope that your preservice teachers would learn through this artifact?
    - iii. How did your students respond to your activity or assignment?
    - iv. Have you made any additions or modifications along the way since using the artifact in your classroom? If so, what did you change and why?
9. What haven't I asked you yet? Is there anything else I should ask you in relation to how you prepare preservice teachers? Is there anything else you would like to add pertaining to your understanding of civic competence planning or instruction?

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