Abstract

This qualitative teacher action research study examined the observed and reported experiences of both students and teacher on civic engagement when authentic instruction was implemented within a 12th grade college preparatory American Government and Economics class in a large urban high school in eastern Pennsylvania.

Methods of gathering data included surveys, participant observations, informal interviews, student work, and detailed field notes. Methods of analysis included reflective memos, coding of observational logs and student work, and construction of theme statements. The participants engaged in various authentic assessments, including simulations, opportunities for debate and discussion, and research of and writing about belief structures relevant to individuals. The study suggests that the use of authentic assessments allows students to become more motivated to develop civic self-identity and become civically engaged. Civically engaged students demonstrate key content knowledge, discuss their knowledge with others both in and out of class, debate civilly, employ critical thinking, and understand complex issues from multiple perspectives. Developing civic engagement also poses numerous challenges to the classroom teacher.