

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study documents the observed and reported experiences of a regular education language arts teacher and her class of thirteen eighth grade students when using the strategies of student choice and self-directed inquiry in a democratic classroom setting. The study examines the use of these strategies and their effects on student learning, including student motivation. Self-directed inquiry is defined in this study as the pursuit of knowledge in a topic chosen individually by the student participants. This study defines a democratic classroom setting as one wherein the student participants actively negotiate together, through whole class interactive discussion, in making the decisions that shape their learning environment. The study suggests that students are more motivated to explore an avenue of inquiry when it pertains to a topic of specific interest to them, but will demonstrate various forms of resistance to learning when the topics are not ones that interest them. The author documents the student participants' experiences with problem solving, negotiating with peers, researching topics, and practicing verbal and written skills. Finally, the author questions the role of the teacher in student choice and self-directed inquiry and considers how to incorporate student choice and self-directed inquiry in future contexts.