

## ABSTRACT

As a teacher of the gifted, providing the best learning opportunities for my students is my main concern. It is my job to introduce my students to and help them develop the foundational skills that will support them throughout their educational careers and beyond. With this in mind, I set out to discover what the observed behaviors and reported experiences would be, for my third and fourth grade gifted students, when I implemented self-directed learning and what effects it would have on their critical thinking abilities. I decided to focus on critical thinking because it represents an important and desirable set of skills. I wanted to know if it could be enhanced or improved in any way. I had previously stumbled upon Malcolm Knowles' work with self-directed learning and read about the success he had had with adult learners. I decided to implement self-directed learning in my own classroom.

I introduced a student-directed research project that followed the Independent Study Model (ISM). The students self-selected a research topic, developed focus questions, collected and organized pertinent information, and chose and developed an appropriate research product to demonstrate the knowledge gained. I provided support, but did not involve myself directly in the day-to-day routine of the classroom. The entire thrust of this study was based on the *students'* abilities to plan, implement, problem-solve, and produce. For me, the finished products were exceptional in variety and quality. On-task behavior

was frequent and the level of investment was high throughout the research process and development of products. Critical thinking ability was determined through a variety of assessments, including the Test of Critical Thinking (TCT), and a variety of reflective writing assignments. There were significant gains for several students from pre- to post-assessment using the TCT. However, I believe the most salient data could be derived from the writing the students did and the thoroughness and thoughtfulness with which they prepared their products.