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Incorporating Self-Directed Learning Practices into an Elementary Classroom

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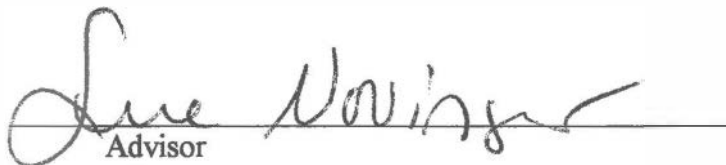
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Incorporating Self-Directed Learning Practices into an Elementary Classroom

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Introduction

Problem Statement

"Students will acquire knowledge...through a challenging, individually-oriented educational program" (Oxford Hills School District, 2006). "The Unalaska City School District...provides an exemplary education foundation preparing students to enter a world of opportunities, inspiring them to challenge themselves as problem solving, life-long learners, and contributors to an ever-changing global community..." (Unalaska School District, 2005). All across America, school districts are currently revamping mission statements and strategic planning to involve some sort of individualized learning and life-long learning skills. The two districts cited above, Oxford Hills (Maine) and Unalaska (Alaska) are just two examples. Even in districts closer to home, Holley Central School District for example, share a mission statement embodying the phrase "passion for life-long learning" (Holley Central School District, 2006).

School districts are recognizing the need to incorporate more than content and knowledge into their curriculum. The recent focus of these districts, and countless others around the United States, has been getting children to love learning and pursue their interests. The trick is to align this with current state and district requirements. In today's climate of high-stakes testing, I find it has been incredibly difficult to find the time for students to pursue their own interests. There are the extra-curricular activities such as intramurals, band, chorus and other arts involved areas, however, in my experience, very few teachers have actually incorporated the pursuit of student

interest into the general education setting. The idea is to tap into students' interests so the teacher can use these interests as motivation for learning, a learning that will transition into the students' adult lives.

Every teacher in every school hopes to reach children and inspire them to love and continue their learning beyond the classroom. When, however, do schools begin to create these learners? Should such an education take place only in a high school setting, or is this an avenue that children of all ages will be able to travel? We, as teachers, want our students to be passionate about their learning and to take charge of that same learning. With this goal in mind, I implemented a self-directed learning system into my fifth grade classroom to encourage my fifth-graders to become pursuers of knowledge. Through inquiry and collaboration, the students selected a wondering (Ancient Greece), researched and learned about it, and participated in a relevant, authentic presentation of their new, self-obtained, knowledge. I incorporated this model into my language arts class as it offered the most flexibility in curriculum and state requirements. The language arts standards were open enough to fit the need of many learning models, including the one I infused into my classroom.

Significance

Many teachers are bombarded with the question "Why do we have to learn this?" as well as other very similar questions. It was becoming incredibly difficult for me to justify learning that seems meaningless to my students as well as myself. I wanted my students to want to learn. I wanted them to learn things that interested them and that they valued.

Most New York State's curricular areas are laid out with very little room for incorporating what the students want to know. Districts base their own objectives, scopes, sequences and performance indicators based on the curricular outline form New York State. Science, math and social studies are incredibly content oriented. Language Arts was an open field where the students and I (as the teacher) could cooperatively create a curriculum of study that was both meaningful to the students as well as aligned with the New York State Standards and my district's objectives. This has typically been a curricular area where my students have had unenthusiastic reactions to activities and lessons based in reading and writing. The requirement of communication (reading, writing, listening and speaking) made language arts the perfect area for my students to create their own learning. My state and district curriculum is very specific about what skills the students need to learn and develop, however it does not specify what content needs to be used as the students gain those skills. Communication of knowledge is the essence of language arts. There are no specifications as to what the specific content or the delivery of instruction must be. Usually this content is teacher created and teacher delivered, however I enabled my students with the opportunity to create this knowledge and become motivated communicators of their new learning.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if a self-directed model of instruction is an appropriate teaching method to increase the motivation of students. My goal was to show the students that language arts could be a more motivating and

meaningful subject. The use of the self-directed learning model had the potential to show that students would be more motivated to read, write, learn and communicate to others material of a higher level. Not only did I hope the students would display these academic traits, I also hoped they would display a higher level of motivation to learn.

Motivated learners who are excited and pursuing knowledge that both the students and the teacher deem meaningful--these are the goals of every educator, from teacher to superintendent and school board member. All educators strive to create this type of environment and it was my goal that this research project will enhance my own professional practices. The ultimate goal of this project was that other educators would use this study to implement similar teaching practices into their own classrooms. Basically, what I wanted to know is how the incorporation of self-directed learning methods would affect the motivation of students in my fifth grade class? How would self-directed learning methods affect the meaningfulness of learned material in a fifth grade class? These two questions guided me throughout the entire research process.

Definition of Terms:

Andragogy- the concept of adult education, both formal and informal (Tough, 1971).

Authentic assessment- a creation, product or presentation, that represents the summative amount of knowledge based on a particular question (Brown, 2006)

Focus group- a small group of individuals (three to five) addressing a particular topic through discussion, negotiation and compromise. This group is often reflective in

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nature, being assembled for the purpose of creating, sharing and refining ideas and topics, while occasionally constructing some physical aspect of their learning (Brown, 2006)

Inquiry learning- a methodology of learning in which a question or wondering is created (often by a facilitator or teacher) and students seek to gain knowledge of the wondering in an attempt to answer the question. This often leads to further questioning and wondering leaving the possibility for further inquiry (Roberson, 2006)

Self-directed learning- a methodology of learning similar to that of inquiry, however it is the investigator, not a facilitator, who creates the question or wondering out of curiosity or need. This leads to an acquisition of knowledge and further wonderings. (Brown, 2006; Roberson, 2006)

Self-regulated learning- synonymous with self-directed learning. The participant creates the question, investigates, derives meaning and creates new questioning. The participant also determines the timeline of learning, setting goals and adjusting their plan in respect to new learning, questions and other aspects (Betts, 2006; Brown, 2006; Roberson, 2006)

Overview of Study

Following IRB approval, consent from my principal, parents and students, and extensive review of related literature, I implemented a self-directed model of instruction into my fifth grade class. I began by having students work on listening and sharing activities to promote social growth and compassion for others' feelings

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and thoughts. The students suggested a unit of study based on their interest (Ancient Greece) and through compromise and negotiation, the students planned the entire unit of study, from calendar of events and ways to obtain knowledge to activities and assessments. The students then implemented their plan of study, gaining knowledge and sharing that knowledge with others. At the conclusion of the unit, the students performed in a children's play of Homer's Iliad. Through out the study, I collected student work from six pre-selected students. I also had these six students participate in interviews and surveys, while I also collected field notes on a daily basis.

Summary

The focus for many districts has been to enable their students with the skills and abilities they will need to become successful individuals in an environment that is constantly changing. This means districts are attempting to create adults that are prepared with the ability to learn beyond the settings of the classroom. Through research of various learning models and instructional theory, I implemented a self-directed learning practice that promotes the skills necessary for students to become life-long learners. Through this study, I planned to learn if the self-directed learning model of instruction was an appropriate and effective method of instructing fifth grade students. I wanted to know if this model would promote and increase student motivation as well as depth of understanding.

Review of Literature

While preparing for this study, I reviewed literature from various sources on a number of different topics related to self-directed learning models. With so many school districts preparing students to be life-long learners, I started my research by asking what is a life-long learner? Being that most of our lives are as adults, it made sense to me that a life-long learner would be a learner who had the ability to learn as an adult. I started by researching adult learning and the studies of Alan Tough. From adult learning, I looked into the studies of self-directed learning. Through the self-directed learning studies, I found topics such as inquiry-based learning, problem based learning, differentiation and enrichment, and the use of reflection and journaling in the classroom. I also read some studies that caused me to become very cautious using this model. All the studies had something to offer and I would not have been able to proceed with their information and help.

Adult Learning

The focus for many districts has been to enable their students with the skills and abilities they will need to become successful individuals in an environment that is constantly changing. This means districts are attempting to create adults who are prepared with the ability to learn beyond the settings of the classroom. The study of adult learning and how they learn, andragogy, has been paramount in the understanding of what skills students will need in order to be prepared to take on this kind of learning (Tough, 1971).

A pioneer in adult education, Alan Tough did research on the ways that adults learn new abilities through their daily lives. "Through detailed interviews and quantitative analysis, this research uncovered deliberate efforts to learn in nearly every segment of our society" (Roberson, 2006, p. 2). Tough found that most adults he looked at accomplished an average of eight major learning projects a year (Roberson). Throughout daily life, an adult will undertake some sort of major learning. Tough went on to discover that most adults initiated the learning from both want and need and decided everything from planning to implementation and finally, completion.

Self-Directed Learning

This idea of adult learning led me to look for information on self-directed learning. Adult learning happens most often outside the classroom, where there are no district or state standards and curriculum, nor is there any pressure on performance. This doesn't mean that adults only learn in this way. Many adults undertake formal learning in schools all across the world, however Tough was concerned with the vast majority of adults who acquire their learning on their own time, in their own ways. The realm of adult education is grounded in curiosity and need. Successful completion of learning is often found in the performance or creation of something the adult has been learning about (Roberson, 2006).

Self-directed learning, or inquiry learning, is focused on interest. An individual has a question and seeks to answer that question with knowledge. The acquisition of knowledge in self-directed learning is often more reflective than

performance based, leading the learner to ask more questions and continue the learning (Schunck, 2005). Both of these ideas share the belief that education starts with a question or need and is directly related to the individual's wants and desires.

Inquiry-Based Learning

Inquiry based learning is not a new idea at all. Teachers have been implementing inquiry based learning models into their classrooms for years, noting its effectiveness in a number of areas. The most noticeable area is motivation and student enthusiasm. Adams (1996) noted that engagement of students is one of a teacher's most persistent difficulties. Adams noted that when the students he was observing were not engaged, they were disruptive, rude and detrimental to other students' learning. Through the use of parent surveys and student interviews, Adams found that his subject students "were not engaged, felt no responsibility and had poor views of themselves as learners" (Adams, p. 12). Parents and teachers both agreed that a lack of student empowerment was a root to problems faced in their school. A committee was created to investigate these issues and to determine some possible solutions. The question arose as to how to engage the students in their learning. After implementing an inquiry-based curriculum, students replied that their increased motivation and success were due to the high level of interest and personal involvement in what was being taught (Adams). Students were asked to set goals, in the form of questions, for themselves. The teachers then adjusted instruction of content to better address the students' goals, while remaining aligned with their state and district standards. At the conclusion of the unit, the students assessed themselves

in relation to their goals. The strategy was to implement cooperative learning in each of the curricular areas. The students and teachers worked to cooperatively create alternative assessments to traditional tests. The students worked cooperatively to create goals, instruction and even assessments for their classes. The students had a vested interest in their learning and felt that they had influence in their learning. At the conclusion of Adams' study, she found that student achievement had increased as well as student morale.

Kathy Hargrove (2005) noted that a second grade classroom she was observing was going through similar issues. Through the teacher's reflection, it was noted his largest concern was in creating an environment in which his students were willingly engaged and achieving a high level of success. He admitted that his second graders were not motivated during lessons and attributed this lack of motivation to his students' lack of success. After enabling his students with choices in their learning (a key in self-directed learning), while still maintaining instruction linked to his required curriculum, he found "his students exhibited greater persistence, drive, interest, creativity, and more dynamic creation of product" (Hargrove, 2005, p. 39). The classroom teacher worked with students to create the requirements of a learning project. He gave each student the freedom to choose any topic they wanted, and had them become experts on their topic. The teacher allotted class time for students to pursue their interests while also meeting with them to evaluate their progress. They then had a presentation day, which the students used to share what they had learned. The self-directed learning project he initiated created an environment in which his

students had a vested interest in what they learned. Through his daily journal, Hargrove learned that the teacher was initially fearful of releasing responsibility to the students. By the end of the study, the teacher found that he had a better understanding of his students' learning styles, abilities and personal lives. Not only was the implementation technique helpful, but seeing that the classroom teacher's journaling provided me with an idea for my own study.

Siegel (2005) and Berber and Brover (2001) conducted similar studies with similar results. After the implementation of self-directed or inquiry based instructional models, both studies noted achievement and enthusiasm both increased. The incorporation of student interest to the design of instruction seems to have a very positive effect on not only the content of what is being learned, but also the overall mood of the classroom. Siegel (2005) focused her study on observing an eighth grade educator as he incorporated cooperative learning techniques into his classroom. She observed his class daily and interviewed the teacher and the students. She found that while the educator was adequately trained in cooperative learning, he adapted the methods and practices to the needs of his students. I found that his adaptation of this model was similar to the learning styles of inquiry-based learning. The skills he was teaching to his students were cooperative learning skills. His delivery method was based in inquiry learning. He first assessed what the students knew about working cooperatively. He then designed lessons in which the students would learn and discuss about cooperative learning through experience and discussion. As a whole class, the students and teacher would then reflect on their learning and explore other

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avenues associated with cooperative learning. He determined what the students needed in terms of cooperative learning, then implemented a strategy to address these needs.

Berber and Brover (2001) implemented their inquiry-based instruction into the staff development of high school educators. After the students achieved very dismal state achievement scores in all of the curricular areas, teachers were instructed in the foundations of inquiry: that "knowledge is actively engaged, socially constructed and created and then recreated for individualized meaning" (Berber & Brover, p. 265). The teachers implemented these strategies into the classes in preparation for the end of the year when similar achievement assessments were given. The researchers observed a large increase in the overall achievement scores of the students. The teachers reported that the students were more attentive, actively participated, and connected knowledge to their lives. As trainers of the faculty, these are the exact traits Berber & Brover were planning on observing. This inquiry model led to a higher level of understanding and motivation in the students. To have a class that is ravenous for information and learning is the goal of any educator.

Similar results were found in a study of undergraduate chemistry students. De Jesus, de Souza, Teixeira-Dias and Watts (2005) implemented a question-based learning system into their college chemistry classes. The core of their study was to use the students' own questions to shape the small group work throughout the course of study. The researchers used this system as an organizational tool, grouping students with similar interests. They found that by answering their own questions,

student achievement and motivation greatly increased. The strategy is also believed to have led to a more open classroom, where the students claimed to feel more comfortable asking questions and participating in classroom discussions. They also implemented many reflective strategies into their study, asking students to create and answer questions before, during and after the students' investigations. The questions were designed to be thought-provoking, causing the students to hypothesize, test that idea and re-evaluate their hypotheses.

De Jesus and others used a framework, one they call phases, that mirrors the self-directed and inquiry models. The phases are as follows: "team organization, accumulation of ideas, divergence of ideas, structure and production, writing, oral presentation and exhibition of poster, and evaluation of the process" (De Jesus et al., 2005, p. 185). At the conclusion of their study, the researchers recognized that the questions were very effective classroom management techniques as groups were highly motivated and on task as they had a commonality of interest. They also noted social advantages with this model. They found that students were taking more active roles in their small groups as the group progressed through the phases. They again related this to a high level of interest in what is being studied. All of the researchers were pleased with the motivation and depth at which each group was pursuing their questions, citing examples of learning that the educators had not presented in class as evidence.

But how are these inquiry based instructional models being implemented to have such a positive effect on student learning and behavior? Since 1998, Mark

Springer, eighth grade educator, has been using a self-directed learning model with eighth-grade students (Brown, 2002). Cooperatively, the students "determine what they will learn, how they will learn it, and demonstrate what they know" (Brown, p. 54). Each year, his students spend close to a month at the beginning of the school year working on socialization and trust-building exercises. These are to enable the students with the ability to talk and share about what matters to the without the fear of ridicule or what others may think. "Success is defined by everyone's willingness to cooperate, to communicate clearly, and to be concerned about and react appropriately to the safety needs of others" (Brown, p. 55). Springer then works cooperatively with the students to narrow many ideas, teaching negotiation and compromise along the way, into main themes to be studied throughout the year. Sharing their learning was a cooperative process as was the creating of what content was to be studied. After a year in this setting, high school teachers noted that Springer's former students "were able to discuss curricular topics at a more sophisticated level [than other students]" while parents of students in the program "overwhelmingly endorse the program, citing their children's increased positive attitudes toward learning" (Brown, p. 58).

Problems-Based Learning

Going farther back into educational history, one can find commonalities of self-directed learning and inquiry based learning in problem based learning (PBL). Originally developed for medical training in Canada, PBL has made its way into many professional fields including education (Gijbels, van de Watering & Dochy,

2005). PBL uses small groups of individuals to address and solve problems. The group begins with a problem, about which they know very little. The group researches and learns as much as there is about their problem and attempts to solve it. The Canadian medical field used PBL to educate students of medicine by assigning the students a medicinal problem (symptoms of some illness) and expecting the students to research the problem, create a diagnosis and prescribe potential treatment for the patient (Gijbels, et al). This has segued into the educational field by teachers presenting students with a problem in the curricular area and allowing them time to research the problem and address it with their perspectives and ideas derived from their research. PBL methodology involves confronting students with a problem related to class material as opposed to traditional didactic approaches (Williams, 1999).

Ahlfeldt, Mehta and Sellnow (2005) found that using PBL in classrooms increased student engagement and led to more student connections to the learning. The study was conducted using seventy college courses (encompassing graduate and undergraduate courses), with class sizes ranging from ten to one hundred fifty. Ahlfedt et al. used a survey to measure the students' engagement. By comparing the data from their surveys to the data collected in the National Survey of Student Engagement (2000), the researchers observed an increase in the engagement of their students when using PBL in their classrooms. The researchers used volunteer faculty members in their study, training them in the use of PBL practices. Each volunteer used different levels of PBL in their classes and administered surveys to their students

to determine the level of student engagement. Their analysis showed that problem-based learning was an effective teaching practice, more effective than traditional models of instruction. Ahlfeldt et al. used a Student Engagement Survey, a fourteen question survey adapted from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Using this survey at various times through their study, the researchers were able to plot the growth of student engagement. They were able to statistically show the positive effects of using PBL practices in the classroom. They found that when a teacher employed a level four (very high) amount of PBL practices, more students fell in a higher-level engagement score. The researchers went on to say "instructors should be engaging students at these high levels in all class sizes and class levels" (Ahlfedt and others, 2005, p.18). While the researchers were probably referring to college level courses, the idea of using such strategies at any grade level has led me to implement a similar model into my own classroom.

For all of the potential success of a self-directed model of instruction, there are possible negatives if one gets careless. Moust, Van Berkel and Schmidt (2005) looked at the issues involved with the Maastricht University of the Netherlands. The university was developed over thirty years ago as a medical school. Its primary educational philosophy was of problem-based learning, very similar to the medical schools in Canada where PBL was originally developed (Moust et al, 2005; Gijbels et al, 2005). The school was extremely successful for the way it developed its student-centered curriculum (Moust et al). However, as years went on, each successive class brought a different base knowledge. Not only did this basic level of students' content

knowledge change over time, the students' attitudes towards learning the curriculum deteriorated (Moust et al.). As the nature and quantity of student content knowledge changed, the way in which the students solved the problem also changed. "These changes, which are unfortunately not reversed by their tutors, have some very negative effects on their learning process as well as their learning outcomes" (Moust et al., p. 669). Through these observations, Moust and his companions made some pretty interesting findings and conclusions.

Moust et al. (2005) found that what the students were practicing medically differed from theory. Medical students were applying techniques that were effective, however were not grounded in established medical theory. The researchers also found that the students were coming less prepared for discussions, literature research dropped, and students were becoming less diligent about the steps in the learning process, often skipping brainstorming and elaboration of their thoughts and even ignoring the original problem, instead focusing on understanding the symptoms of the problem (Moust, 2005). Moust et al. reported that students were no longer reflective in their learning and that the "watered-down process results in group meetings which are lacking a surplus value for the learning process" (2005, p. 670). They claimed that when the content of problem-based learning is more important than the process of PBL, similar result would be found in any investigation. The effectiveness of PBL was determined to be in the process, or the how, not in the content of what was learned. They urge that when using a self-directed learning approach, one should focus on the steps of problem-based learning, reflect on what is being learned, use

authentic assessment tools and encourage students to use a variety of media to enhance their learning (Moust and others, 2005). Most basically, it was the process of learning that inundated the students with such great learning.

Differentiation

Betts (2004) wrote an important article on the importance of differentiation, an educational hot word right now, for gifted and talented students. Betts wrote that a "Level Three: Learner-Differentiated Curriculum' was an important component in the education of gifted learners. Quite basically, it called for a self-directed model of instruction to be used with students of high abilities. It cited the importance of "students to be in charge of their own learning" (Betts, p. 267). It was shown that the self-directed learning model was beneficial for students' emotional and social development as well as curricular development. Betts argues differentiated instruction helps create independent and self-driven learners.

Differentiation comes in one of three levels. The first level is an educator's typical level of instructions. It is based on the standards and curriculum of the state and district and deviates little from that prescription. The second level of differentiation is a "teacher-differentiated curriculum" (Betts, 2004, p.268). This second level is when the teacher adjusts the curriculum based on wither student need or interest. The delivery and material of the lessons is created and administered by the educator. The last level of differentiation is the "Learner-differentiated Curriculum" (Betts, p. 278). The structure of level three differentiation calls for students to employ organization and planning skills, pursuit of knowledge and

development of project, presentations and other forms of assessment. Betts says that level three differentiation should have learners developing their own content, processes and products. He suggests educators use explorations, investigations and in-depth studies to create level three differentiation opportunities for students. For these reasons alone, I see no reason why these strategies should not be used for the education of every student.

Reflection

Throughout the course of self-directed learning, reflection has an incredibly important influence on the success of said model. Masui and De Corte (2005) tested the effectiveness of reflective practices in a college economics course. Throughout the first and second trimester, an experimental group of students were asked reflective questions to start class and as homework, requiring them to think back to past experiences. Many of these questions had no right or wrong answers, most leading off with the phrase "What do you need…" and "Why do you think…" (Masui & De Corte, p. 357). These questions were open ended and caused the students to think about themselves as learners. Their control group was taught using a traditional model, without the reflective questions. This group received regular lectures and their homework was content oriented, unlike the experimental group. In the third trimester, the experimental group was taught using the traditional approach to determine if the reflective strategies had an effect on their study habits and achievement. Masui and De Corte found that those who reflected on their surroundings, feelings and knowledge were able to make decisions with more

confidence and authority. They also found that reflective students had better study results and achievement on various cognitive assessments.

Brown (2002) noted that reflective journaling helped Springer's students create the themes to study and determine what they would do to show what they have learned. Reflection is also an integral part of Harada and Yoshina's (2004) research, stating that is important to "reflect on ones own process of learning and new understanding gained from and to pose new questions" (p. 23) and thus setting the whole inquiry cycle back into motion. Harada and Yoshina wrote a paper to help educators shift their teaching styles from rote learning to a more inquiry based approach. They claim that "reflecting on one's learning can increase self-direction, comprehension, interpersonal skills and teamwork" (p. 23). They stress that reflection is not an end to the learning, but a continuous part of it. By assessing their own progress and performance throughout the learning, students can determine where they need to spend more time, seek extra help, or not concern themselves with material already mastered (Harada & Yoshina). By reflecting on their learning, students become self-advocating and thus self-directed.

Georghiades (2004) also called for the use of reflection strategies in the classroom in his paper on the inclusion of metacognition methods to be used in classrooms. Georghiades stated, "classroom discussions, annotated drawing, keeping diary-like notes, and concept mapping will enhance the durability of children's understanding" (p.85). His study focused on the infusion of metacognitive activities like the ones listed above into grade five science instruction. Students who can speak

as to what they are doing, why they are doing it and how it affects them are said to be participating in reflective and metacognitive strategies. Classroom discussions were the most common from of reflective behavior, however he also had students keep science diaries, use picture notes and concept maps. He claims that at the end of his study, the participants were better able to create hypotheses and support them with relevant evidence. The students were more thorough with their explanations and added diagrams to help others visualize what they were explaining. While the classroom discussions were the most common reflective strategy, the diaries provided an opportunity for students to reflect on their learning individually. Such metacognition strategies are similar to the techniques used in self-directed learning that cause students to become more reflective in their learning. Reflection will play a very vital role in the implementation of the self-directed model I plan to incorporate into my classroom.

I plan to use a model of inquiry outlined by Harada and Yoshina (2004). In their paper, *Moving from rote to inquiry: Creating learning that counts*, Harada and Yoshina outline the inquiry process of connect, wonder, investigate, construct, express, and reflect, a model created by Stripling (2003). Connection is the spark of interest in the students. In this phase, the students reflect on previous knowledge and get an overview or general knowledge of something new. This is the link from something old, to something new. In the wonder phase of inquiry, the students develop questions they have about their connection. This is also were they plan what they want to learn. This could be difficult as most of the time we don't know what

we don't know. It is usually helpful to have students write down all of their questions about a given topic in order to gain an idea of where the instruction should go. In the investigation phase, students construct knowledge and begin to answer their questions. They take this new knowledge and should reflect on it and ask new questions to investigate. This is also where they may test a hypothesis or an idea they have. During the construct phase, students take the learning from the investigations and draw conclusions to their questions. This is where they organize their new knowledge in order to make sense and meaning of it. The express phase of inquiry involves communicating the new knowledge to others. This is where the students can construct presentations and projects to display their learning to others. Reflect is listed last in the inquiry process and often it is seen as a concluding activity, however this phase is incorporated in every step of the inquiry process. Throughout the entire inquiry, students should be reflecting on what they are doing, why they are doing it, what it means to them and how they are going to convey it to others. The whole inquiry process is very reflective in nature, and at the end of it students should be reflecting along the lines of "I learned this, it means this. I wonder...". Again, reflection plays an important role in the success of this model.

Summary

My research into the area of self-directed learning has led me to many other fields: adult learning, inquiry based learning, problem based learning, differentiation and reflection. I started my research into adult learning by thinking of changes in the philosophical thinking in many school districts. Requiring students to become life-

long learners implies individuals who continue to learn through their adult lives. This approach of adult learning led me to inquiry learning and the process of questioning, investigation, construction, expression and reflection. This helped me to construct the instructional model I implemented into my own study. I learned of potential problems and pitfalls with this model while researching problem based learning. I learned that the process of learning needs to be the focus of my study, not the content learned. I turned my focus to differentiation and found that the different levels of differentiation call for a self-directed learning model in the classroom to the benefit of higher achieving students. I question the use of such strategies with only high achieving students. It is my belief that all students would benefit from investigative and differentiated instruction. A common theme found in all of the fields was reflection. After researching reflection exclusively, I found the benefits in achievement, articulation and communication of learned material, while using reflective strategies, to be impressive and worth incorporating into my study.

Methods and Procedures

After a couple of months of extensive research into self-directed learning models, inquiry learning models, differentiated instruction and other topics related to my study, I felt I was ready to begin my study. The following chapter outlines the implementation of a self-directed learning model into my fifth grade class, as well as the research methods I used. Below, one will find a summary of the participants, surveys, interviews, and timeline of implementation.

Assumptions

I teach fifth grade in a suburban school district in western New York. My intervention strategy was extremely well supported for the chosen unit: Ancient Greece. My classroom has a number of Greek picture books, plays and other informational sources. My school's library has a very large amount of Greek books, raging from a very low readability level (picture books and easy readers) to more challenging books (plays and stories borrowed from the middle school). My students came in with a wide range of abilities and backgrounds. My students were excited about the intervention plan and responded well to various strategies used in the classroom. The students had some background knowledge of Ancient Greece, which was actually very helpful during the planning phase of our project.

My students range in ages, from nine to eleven. There are a total of thirty-five, making up two separate language arts classes. For the most part they are an enthusiastic group of children. Almost all students complete homework on a regular basis, save for one or two in each class (even these two complete their homework,

just on a much less frequent basis, perhaps three to four times a week). Over half the class raises their hands to participate, however since I employ random questioning techniques (selecting students at random to answer questions) most students contribute to class discussions. There are only a few personality conflicts in one class, none in the other. As a whole, the class meets my expectations on assignments. A few students fall short of these expectations and require assistance, while a few of the students routinely exceed expectations.

I currently teach in a suburban school district in western New York. I teach fifth grade, one of four sections of fifth at my school. Our fifth grade level is departmentalized with each teacher teaching his or her own mathematics class and one other subject. I teach mathematics and language arts to my class of eighteen, as well as another teacher's language arts class of seventeen. When my students are not with me, they are receiving instruction in science and social studies. I teach in a general education setting, supported with Academic Intervention Services (AIS) in mathematics and language arts for students who require further help. A number (12 total) of my language arts students are also enrolled in an enrichment program that meets twice a week for forty minutes each. Most curricular subjects are taught in forty-five minute blocks, save language arts, which is taught in ninety-minute blocks.

I am teacher in this study. This is my fifth year teaching. I have previously taught one year of fifth grade and three years at the fourth grade level. I am currently working on the completion of my Master's degree in Childhood Education. Upon completion of my Master's, I am eligible for New York State Permanent

Certification. I will also be the researcher of this study, documenting the progress and results of this study. It is my goal that this study will enhance and further my own professional growth.

Research Questions

How does the incorporation of self-directed learning methods affect the motivation of students in a fifth grade class? How do self-directed learning methods affect the meaningfulness of learned material by students in a fifth grade class?

Participants

The community in which I teach in is a suburban school district in western New York. Most of the families in this district are of the middle to upper middle class end of the socioeconomic spectrum. Many of the families have two working parents, with at least one in a high paying occupation like a corporate position. The town has no mass employment organizations, consisting of a couple of strip malls, a main street and surrounding neighborhoods. Many of the adults work in the central city or in some of the other suburban neighborhoods. The school district is composed of four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. Our total school population is near ten thousand students.

My school is home to almost five hundred students, housing grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Our kindergarten classes are half-day, something that is becoming uncommon in many other districts. We average about four sections per grade level and have a 12:1:1 class for grades one through three and another 12:1:1 for grades four and five. Our fifth grade is departmentalized, each teacher

teaching their class math and one other subject to each of the other three classes. As a result, I spend two ninety-minute blocks, teaching language Arts to two different classes. Each grade level has a reading and a math Academic Intervention Service (AIS) provider that pulls students out of the room during those subjects to work with students in need of extra help. The school offers a variety of extra-curricular activities, academic clubs (book clubs, chess club, soduko club), physically oriented organizations (intramurals, knock-hockey club) and fine arts programs (drama club and painting club).

My classroom is roughly twenty feet wide by almost fifty feed long. It has twenty desks, in four groups of five, for student use. The students' desks are located in the front of the room, near a set of blackboards, where a majority of instruction takes place. My desk is located at the back of the room and is rarely used. I have a large table toward the back of the room for students to use as workspace. We have a computer center, with three Internet capable computers, a scanner and a printer. There is a TV in the room with a video/DVD player connected to it. My class also has three bookshelves filled with books ranging from non-fiction and biographies to fantasy and mystery. There is also a cart in my room with a set of dictionaries and two sets of encyclopedias. I also have two closets filled with math manipulatives and arts and crafts supplies. All in all, my classroom is very adequately equipped for traditional instruction as well as being on the edge of current teaching practices.

The intervention was implemented during my two Language Arts classes, one ninety-minute block each. My classes are comprised of eighteen and seventeen fifth-

grade students respectively. Within the two classes, I have eighteen males and seventeen females. I have a total of twenty-seven Caucasian, four Asian, two Hispanic, and two African-American students. According to last years New York State Assessments, I have ten students who exceed the New York State Language Arts Standards, nineteen who meet them, and five who do not. The one student not represented in these scores is a student who recently moved into our class from Puerto Rico and is currently an emerging English speaker. As a result of these scores, I have four students being pulled out for additional language arts help. My students have a wide range of maturity levels (from very primary and childish to almost adult like), something very common in the fifth grade.

All of the students participated in the curricular project, however data was collected from only six students (one high, one medium, and one low achieving student from each class). These six students became my focus group. The reason for the focus group was not to make generalizations about the entire student population involved with this study, but to more easily mange the amount of data I collected. These six students were selected because they showed me the effect of my practices on high, medium and low achieving student. I selected the students based on their grades, participation and effort in my class. The low students were average to poor in grades, rarely participated in class discussions and almost never completed homework. My medium students were average in academics, participated some of the time and usually did their homework. My high students were top of the class in academic marks, always joined the discussions with thoughtful and insightful remarks

and observations and always had their homework done. These six students supplied me with wonderful thoughts, ideas, suggestions and data through the course of my study.

The intervention began at the end of February 2007 and concluded in the middle of April 2007. Every day the students of both classes participated in the study, and every day I collected field notes. On alternating weeks, I conducted interviews with the focus groups and alternated the other weeks with a survey that allowed me to assess the level of motivation in the class. All thirty-five students participated in the curriculum they designed. While all of the students learned the content and were members of the process of learning, I only collected data for my study from the focus group. For example, through the History Strand of learning, all of the students researched the history of Ancient Greece. All the students went to the library and computer labs to record dates and events. Each student created his or her own timeline that reflected the data he or she had collected. Each student shared that timeline with others and as a group they created a group timeline. Each group shared their timeline with the class and cooperatively, the class created a large timeline that had information from ever student. As a teacher, I collected student journals and took notes of the presentation of timelines for the students' grades. For the purpose of this study, I wrote in my daily log and also conducted interviews with my focus group.

Before I implemented the self-directed learning model into my classroom, I secured consent from the parents of my students and the students themselves. After explaining the project to each of my classes, a letter was sent home to all of the

parents/guardians. In the letter, I introduced myself as a researcher attending the State University of New York at Brockport and an explanation of what the study entailed for their children. All students would be participating in the curriculum they designed, however I was asking permission to collect data and use that data in this thesis. Attached to the letter was a consent form for the parents to sign. Consent letters and forms for parents/guardians, principals and students can be found as Appendices A through D. I received one hundred percent of the consent forms with all of them granting permission to collect data on their children. Once parental consent was acquired, I gave each of the children a consent form. I read the consent form while the students read along, then asked if the students if they would participate in my study. All of the students agreed to participate in the study, checking the appropriate box and signing their names.

Confidentiality was of the utmost importance to me and I made sure to take proper precautions to protect the identity of my students. All of the names of the case study students and identifiable information were deleted from all written documents. Students were identified by numbers, age, and gender only with no reference to the school or district the children attended. All of the data collected (field notes, students work, surveys and interview logs) were collected and stored in a locked file cabinet in my classroom. All of the data I collected will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study. With these measures to protect the identities of the children, parents and students gave their consent to participate in my study.

Instruments

Throughout my study, I collected data in a variety of ways. I collected data every day through my own observations and classroom notes. These were done every day, thirty-four in all, spanning from the end of February to the middle of April. I collected samples of student work, however this was on a more liberal scale. I photographed work completed by the students at various times, while also collecting hard copies of student work (most of the times these were journal entries and writing pieces) for both immediate and extended purposes. At various times through my research study, I would collect my students' journals for assessment reasons. I also collected the journals and copied all of the entries that were done during or referring the curricular project the students completed. This enabled me to make immediate changes to instruction as well as analyzing the entire implementation of the self-directed learning model. At three times during the study, I interviewed my focus group and recorded their answers in my daily logs. Four times through the study, these six students completed surveys, reflecting on student motivation and the model of instruction being used. One of these surveys was specific to the beginning of the study, and one was specific to the conclusion. All of these instruments provided me with great and valuable data, however the most beneficial in my eyes, was my own daily log.

While the focus group was great for data management, I felt that by logging what I saw and heard in my classes daily, I was getting a picture as to the mood and impressions of each class. All thirty-four entries of the log were filled with what I

heard, saw and felt in my room. Each night, I sat down and wrote what happened during the classes that day. As I did, I expanded the events with my own feelings and my observations of the students. The log was great for documenting the informal aspects of my study: the conversations between students, the comments they made to each other, and whole class observations. It was also invaluable as a reflective piece into my own teaching practices. Not only was there a documented record of what my students did each day, but my feelings of what they were going through were recorded, as well. I found it to be a great release of stress as I wrote down my own frustrations and hardships with the students and even my fellow faculty members. Through this journal, I was able to look back at dates now mixed and mashed in my memory, and pull specific details of a child's reaction to certain aspects of my study. With so many things happening daily, recording each day was truly a blessing.

I kept my student interviews informal and unscripted. I had the surveys for formal questioning. What I wanted to obtain through the interviews was an honesty I believe can be lost on paper. I started most interviews with a similar question "How do you think this unit is going?" From there, the interviews were more like conversations. I would say, "Tell me more" or "Who did that make you feel?" I would refrain from asking a lot of questions and just let the student tell me what was on their mind. It was my intent to explore the feelings and behaviors of the focus group. At the end of each interview, I would summarize what the students told me, and ask if there was anything I missed. Often, the focus student would throw in a few more ideas or thoughts about what we were doing or what they would like to do. I

made sure to thank each student for his or her time and participation during the interview. Through gentle questioning (questions reactive to their responses and expressions) I was able to collect data I would never obtain through a survey like the eyebrow furrow of confusion, the large smile of pleasure, the slight smile of uncertainty, the eye shift of nervousness and the facial explosion of excitement. I was just as interested in the physical expression of my students as I was in what they had to say because this allowed me to authenticate their responses. The students may have told me what I wanted to hear, however they could not hide their emotions. These interviews were all recorded into my daily log, again an invaluable piece of data, so that I could look back later and remember that yes, at this point this kid was motivated because even though her hand was up, she kept shouting answers with a huge smile on her face and barely stayed in her seat. These interviews allowed me to collect a whole range of data that would have been unrecorded through survey and questionnaires.

My study was based in the idea that students could select, plan and implement a curriculum of their interest while still holding true to the New York State Standards as well as my district's objectives. I collected student work for a number of reasons, the primary reason was to show that my students were sticking to a fifth grade level of work and meeting the standards and objectives expected of them. The student work collected helped me to answer the meaningfulness of what was being learned in my research questions. The photographs I took of their work and presentations (whole class timelines and mythological beings presentations) allowed me to evaluate

not only their level of involvement but also the amount of knowledge possessed by that individual. The pictures that were taken were of the large displays of work that would have made transportation or storage impossible and student presentations. I also collected many journal entries and written pieces. I collected journal entries from the focus group on the last day of each week. Over the weekend, I would read through each of the entries from the focus group. The journal entries were multi-purpose during my study. Many entries had to do with new learning, addressing the meaningfulness of my research questions again, some entries were suggestions and reflections of the learning model, addressing the motivation aspect of my research, and a couple were simply questions I had of the entire class. The written pieces collected were done to assess the level of knowledge obtained through the use of this instructional model. I collected the individual student timelines, the posters and written work of the mythological beings presentations and both the original and revised persuasive essays. Lastly, I recorded the performance of the Trojan War the student put on. This was used as a reflective piece for the students and myself. Cooperatively, the students and I reviewed the play to determine the grade each student would receive. I also used this recording, as well as a written copy of the play, to document the fact that my students were involved with language arts at least a fifth grade level. The collection of student work was beneficial as it provided documentation that my students were doing fifth grade level work, a concern of my coworkers. Because of this collection, I was able to provide proof that I was staying true to the standards and objectives required of my students and me.

The surveys I made for my focus group to complete were done so to satisfy a need I had for authenticity of student reaction. Many of the questions on the survey were similar to the questions I asked during the interviews, however this provided documented responses by my students. It also allowed me to collate the responses students gave in person and one they gave when they were not required to answer directly to my face. There is a sense of security in being able to truthfully answer questions without an immediate reaction from an authoritative figure. This avenue of data collection also has the potential of false data, students not answering truthfully because of this freedom. This potential is what makes having triangulation of data necessary. The questions were usually open-ended, directed at motivation and their thoughts and suggestions for how class should be run. The questions "What are we doing well?" and "What should we be doing differently" were asked on every survey. The first and last surveys were more time specific dealing with the beginning and end of the student planned unit. The first survey dealt with expectations and hopes of the upcoming unit they had planned, while the last survey was more reflective of what they accomplished through the unit, what worked instruction wise, and what didn't. This data became valuable because it had the participants' exact words, as they said them, documented for me to look back to and reflect on. The three different surveys can be found in Appendices F through H. Protocol for administering the surveys can be found in Appendix E.

Procedures

The following steps were taken to implement a self-directed learning model into my classroom.

1. My students began writing in daily journals, reflecting on new learning and asking questions about the knowledge gained that day or about future wonderings. As new content was presented to the students, a journal entry topic may be to write three questions you have about this. For example, as we read of schools in New York being placed on the Persistently Dangerous School list, many of the students had questions about this topic. They wanted to know how schools are placed on this list, what makes an act violent and what happens if you go to a school labeled Persistently Dangerous. While we did not use this topic for the student-planned unit, it did provide some excellent discussions and reviews of further literature. The Persistently Dangerous School article and journal entries allowed the students to practice skills they would use throughout their planned curriculum. This was an integral piece of the self-directed learning model as it helped to guide the students' interests into themes of study. Masui and De Corte (2005) found that when students used reflective strategies, they had better study habits and their levels of achievement and understanding improved. Reflective journaling became a daily practice throughout the entire study.

2. The students spent three weeks learning to communicate (both share and listen to content and thoughts) respectfully with an open mind. I taught my

students to be active listeners. I would create a social story setting and allow the students to role-play and cooperatively create a socially acceptable solution to the situation. They asked each other more questions to find the feelings behind the actions. They then connected the feelings of their peers to their own. In the social stories projects, the students were confronted with certain situations and had to determine what the respectful and appropriate course of action was. They also worked on team building activities that built trust and cooperation. Two of the activities were Blind Maze and Pipeline. In Blind Maze, one partner is blindfolded and the other must provide directions through a maze. In this activity, the maze was actually an obstacle course set up outside, where the students had to crawl, open doors, step up and down, and pick up specific objects with the help of their partner. In Pipeline, the whole class participates. Each pair of students was to hold a two-foot long piece of "U" shaped pipe. The object is to transport a ball from one piece to the next across to a destination. The distance was seventy feet, requiring each pair to use their pipe and move to the end of the line and use their pipe again. This requires cooperation from the whole class to not drop the ball and start over. At the conclusion of the activities, the class reflected on their feelings and actions, and then shared these during a class discussion.

3. Two students each day searched the newspaper for an article of interest to them. They presented these articles the following day to the class. This created new opportunities of interest based learning while also creating new

questions for students to ask and learn about. Presenting articles of interest became a daily activity through the study.

4. Using compromise and negotiation, the students and I selected thematic units of study to be studied based upon student interest. My students had a large interest in Ancient Greece. One of the students shared a magazine article about the Trojan War. She was very excited about her article, sharing for much more than the typical five to eight minutes. Her interest in Greece was echoed by others in the room and that became the unit of study. The students completed a KWL chart where they listed what they knew about Greece in the "K" column. They then listed all the questions wanted to answer during the unit in the "W" column. All of the questions, each and every students', were written on the board. For two days the classes grouped and regrouped these questions, finally summarizing each category of questions with a phrase. These phrases then became the content strands of their unit, much like Number Sense and Operations: Factors and Multiples are in math. The students were then asked to place these strands into a calendar to create a scope and sequence for their unit. Through the entire process, compromise, negotiation, understanding, listening and respect were required of everyone for the success of this project. Once the scope and sequence was settled and agreed upon, students began their pursuits of knowledge.

5. During the planning phase of their unit, the students also put in for requests of materials from our library. The also designed presentations and activities

they would like to accomplish through each of the content strands. My role during these times was to steer the students in a direction that led them to activities and work that met fifth grade expectations.

6. Through the learning phase of the unit, small groups were formed and met daily. During these daily meetings, new knowledge was shared with the group, goals were set and plans of how to acquire more knowledge or how to present that knowledge to the class were discussed and determined. Through this phase, I made activity suggestions, required readings of the groups (especially during the Mythology strand) and required writing pieces (persuasive writing), making sure we were still meeting fifth grade standards.

7. At the end of the learning phase of their unit, the students participated in an authentic assessment of their choosing. The students chose, learned and performed a play, reenacting the Trojan War. This was recorded and students were asked to reflect on it, while I also met with each of the participants to cooperatively assess their performances, looking for inflection, other reading characteristics, and effort into learning and performing their parts. A written assessment about the Trojan War was also given at the conclusion of the unit.

Limitations

There were only a couple of factors that limited the direction or flow of my study. The first factor was myself. I was not only the researcher of this project (as a graduate student), I was an influential participant (as the classroom teacher). It was my job to make sure that the curriculum the students designed still met the standards

and expectations of my district and state. At various times through the study, I needed to advise and suggest modifications to the intended plans to meet those district and state standards. As I noted the developments of my class, I would switch from the role of observer, to classroom manager. Some of the changes I made affected the course of the study and will be discussed later this paper.

Probably the most limiting factor of the study was time. As the classroom teacher and graduate student, I planned for this study to end by April sixth, our beginning of our April break. I did not want the study to halt and resume after a week long vacation. I currently feel that this was a detrimental decision and was contrary to self-directed learning philosophy. As I had given the students the opportunity to plan their learning, as well as create a scope and sequence, I should not have restricted the length of their study. According to Schunk (2005), the learners should have the ability to dictate the conclusion of their learning. This model of instruction allows for the learner to pursue his or her knowledge to the acquisition of that knowledge. When the learner has obtained his or her goal, he or she had concluded their study. Unfortunately, my students did not address all of their goals, due to the restriction of time I placed on them. This was a necessary limit needed for the purpose of this thesis. As a side note, I do not typically make a practice of continuing a learning thread over a weeklong break. Personally, I find students have difficulty quickly returning to material not seen in a week. By coming back to material not seen in a week, I find that my students and I lose a couple of days in

review in order to resume that learning. In future studies, the time should not be limited as it was.

As it turned out, both of these factors came into play as time ran out in the students' study. As a teacher, I was unsatisfied with the project the students completed toward the end of their unit. This was one of the assignments I was requiring (as a teacher), and they completed it in a very unsatisfactory manner. I required them to re-complete the assignment, as it was crucial to me that my students be held accountable to fifth grade standards. Unfortunately, time did not allow us to address this issue until after the April break, thus extending my data collection and the over all time of my study.

Data Analysis

With all of the forms of data collected (researcher log, student work, interviews, and surveys) analyzing data was a long and arduous task.

Student Work

I first went through all of the student work I had collected: journal entries, presentation materials, persuasive essays and recording of the Trojan War performance. I had collected a number of pieces of student work for the evaluation of how meaningful the material was to the students. It was my assumption that the more meaningful a topic or lesson was to a student, he or she would independently and consistently create grade level or higher quality work.

1. Journal Entries: I collected the journal entries of the focus group. I collected this each week of my study. I used these entries as writing assessments, looking for typical writing expectations at the fifth grade level: topic sentence, detail sentences, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and voice. I also looked to see if the entries were literal, recounting the day's activities or simply answering a question I had posed to them, or if it was insightful. An insightful response not only answered the question or summarized the day's activities, it added a question or connection the student had. My thinking was that the more insightful and detailed the entry was, the more meaningful the topic was to the student.

2. Presentation materials were also vital in determining the meaningfulness of the content the students were learning. Instead of physically collecting all of the materials my students used during their mythological being presentation, I photographed the student during his or her presentation. The posters the students created were used as a writing assessment, again I was checking for grade level expectations in the written work. Through the use of the photographs I was able to document if the student dressed up as their mythological being or had props to help their presentation.

3. Persuasive Essays were a requirement of my district. The students wrote persuasive essays based on Greek Mythology. All of the students completed this assignment for the purpose of our class, however I only

collected the focus groups essays to include as data for this thesis. Again, I was looking for grade level standards in the students' writing. If the paper was insightful, full of voice and extremely well written, I would say that the topic had more meaning for the students.

4. The last piece of student work I collected through my study was a recording of the Trojan War play my students put on. The students spent time learning parts for the play, created costumes for their sock puppets, created settings for the stage, rehearsed and finally performed their play for their classmates. Each student in the class participated in this project, however I used the recording as data on my focus group of students. I analyzed this data by reviewing the recording of the play and noting certain aspects of the student performances. When I reviewed each focus student's performances, I was looking for if the student had memorized his or her lines, spoke those lines with inflection, loud and clear, put forth effort in the costume and decoration of his or her puppet, and lastly if the student acted well during the performance.

With all of this data gathered through these collection strategies, I was able to determine the depth of understanding the students had for the different content strands of their unit. Based on the amount of effort and commitment into their projects, essays, plays and presentations, I was also able to get an idea of their motivation

Research Log

I wrote in my log on a daily basis. In my log I documented what happened each day in my classroom. I wrote down what the children did, what their reactions were, the comments they made and the interactions they had with each other. I used my log to see the progress my students were making through the self-directed learning model. At the conclusion of my study, I reviewed the log for data on the motivation of my students. I had recorded the comments they made to each other as well as their physical expressions during their interactions. When the students were excited and wanted to contribute, I wrote it down. When I had to pry the class for information, or step in on a disagreement, I recorded. The log helped me to analyze other data as well. Because my log was a daily record of what was going on, what the students were doing and even what I was doing and feeling, I was able to link data from other collection methods to my log. When my students performed well on their mythology presentations, I went back to my log and looked at the planning phase entries and sure enough, the students had all voted to have a mythology strand. The daily log provided information that I would not have been able to remember through the entire seven weeks.

Student Interviews

Also included in the daily log were the results of the student interviews I conducted with the members of the focus group. I had three interviews through the course of my study. These interviews consisted of very open-ended questions. I would start an interview off with "How are you feeling about this unit?" or a similar question. I would then ask probing questions or ask the students to tell me more. I

was able to get an idea of the level motivation in the students based on their contributions to the conversation as well as the physical expressions when they were talking. When I combined this data with the data I received from the surveys the focus group completed, I was able to authenticate the students' responses.

Surveys

Four times during the course of my study, the focus group of students completed surveys for me. The surveys consisted of a few questions like "How excited are you about this topic?" and "How important is this topic to you?" All of the questions had a scale, from 1 (not at all) to 4 (Very), which the students chose the appropriate response based on how they felt about the topic. This survey fulfilled a need I had for verifying the results I received during the student interviews. I matched up a student's interview responses with the responses they gave in the survey. I would then look for relationships between the interview and the surveys. I would also look at the surveys and the student work. I noted that when a certain student did not perform well on his or her persuasive essay, they had claimed that the topic was not exciting or important to them. Having the survey was an excellent way to find correlations between the level of work completed and the importance or enthusiasm of that work to the student.

Upon completion of analyzing each of these data collections independently, I reviewed this data to identify themes and concepts that cross the various kinds of data.

Time Schedule

The following schedule was used for the implementation of my self-directed learning model:

1. Week 1 (2/26/07 through 3/2/07) Incorporation of social stories, daily journaling and newspaper article reporting. The journaling and newspaper reporting continued through to the end of the study. Through this week the students determined curriculum. This week has since been referred to as the Planning Phase. The students completed the KWL chart, listing out all questions, organizing questions into content strands, determined the length of each strand, organized strands on a calendar, created scope and sequence of unit, and determined the activities and presentations and assessments for the strand. Surveys were completed by the focus group for a beginning assessment of motivation.

2. Week 2 (3/5/07 through 3/9/07) History Strand: My students researched the history of Ancient Greece during this week. They used the Internet and books on loan from our library to create timelines. Each student created his or her own timeline with information he or she thought was valuable and important. Individual students were then grouped together into groups of four, where the students combined their timelines. The class then combined each of the group timelines into one large timeline. The students then located themes and connections on the class timeline. On this week, I interviewed my focus group. Notes of the interview were recorded in my daily log.

3. Week 3 (3/12/07 through 3/16/07) Mythology Strand: The students selected a mythological being to research and present to the class. They used reference materials, stories involving their mythological beings, and the Internet. I also required groups of students to learn a mythological story (Danaus, Perseus, and the Gorgon; Theseus and the Minitour; The Golden Fleece, etc.) and present it to their classmates. I collected the students' presentation materials and photographed them during their presentations. Through this week, I had each member of the focus group complete a survey to note their thoughts on class and motivation. Unfortunately, as the week progressed, we realized that there was not enough time for the students to do their presentations. The students decided to push back their presentations to the following week, allowing for extra time to prepare for presentations.

4. Week 4 (3/19/07 through 3/23/07) Mythology Strand continued: The students took three days to complete their presentations. The classes had not planned on taking so much time on their presentations; however the amount of effort and enthusiasm they displayed was impressive. The students created costumes and had props and posters to present their myths and took more time for each presentation. At the conclusion of the week we began to read another myth that would lead into our next content strand. I interviewed the focus group again and wrote down their comments into my log.

5. Week 5 (3/26/07 through 3/30/07) Battle Strand: The myth we read the previous week was used to set the stage for the Battle of Troy. The students

used the same research methods learned earlier to research the Trojan War. They made lists of common facts from each of the stories as well as some of the differences. We read a couple of different versions of the Trojan War comparing and contrasting each. I also had the students write a persuasive essay that pertained to the myth causing the Trojan War. Their essays ended up being extremely unsatisfactory and needed to be re-completed. The students and I agreed to extend the schedule of events one week to accommodate for this task. The focus groups completed surveys this week. I also collected and copied the students' original persuasive essays.

6. Week 6 (4/2/07 through 4/5/07) Battle Strand: The students used this week to learn, rehearse, create props and film a children's version of the Trojan War. They decided that they would perform this play using sock puppets that they designed and created. This medium allowed me a real window into the students' level of motivation and commitment to the play. The film was collected as student work. I also interviewed the focus group through the course of the week, wanting their thoughts on the play and class motivation.

7. Week 7 (4/16/07 through 4/20/07) Persuasive Essay Revisited: After a disastrous turnout for the persuasive essays, the class revisited what was necessary to persuade an individual to do a suggested activity. Students then edited, revised and completed than their previous essays. These were of much higher quality than the essays students submitted earlier. These were

collected for this purpose of this study and will be discussed later in this paper. I had the focus group students complete an end of unit survey.

Summary

After first teaching my students to work cooperatively, building trust and respect for each other, I implemented a self-directed learning model into my fifth grade class. Over the course of seven weeks, I recorded my observations, interviewed focus students, had that same focus group complete surveys and collected student work. After collecting these various forms of data, I analyzed each piece independently to identify interesting information about individual students. I then returned to the data and looked at it holistically, noting patterns and themes found through the focus group as a whole. All of this was done to determine the influence self-directed learning had on student motivation and the meaningfulness of material learned.

Findings

The purpose of my study was to determine how the implementation of self-directed learning practices would affect the motivation of my fifth grade students. I had hoped to show my students that the language arts curriculum could be fun and exciting while also meeting the expectations placed upon us by the district and the state. By giving the students an invested interest into the creation of learned material, I had hoped to see a higher level of motivation towards reading, writing and communication of learned material. Not only did I hope to see an increase in motivation, I had also hoped to see an increase of depth in the skills and abilities displayed by my students. I also implemented this method to see if the students would construct a deeper understanding of the material being learned.

My research study took place in a suburban school district over the course of a month and a half. My implementation of the self-directed learning model affected my two ELA classes, one of seventeen students, the other eighteen. All of my students participated in the study. Each of my students planned, learned and presented new content. Each student participated in all of the activities throughout the study.

I had two roles. First and foremost, I was the classroom teacher. I was responsible for the day to day activities as well as making sure that my students were held accountable to both state and district standards. I was also an observer, documenting the progress of the participants, interviewing the focus group, and teaching the process of self-directed learning.

Focus Group

The focus group was comprised of 6 students, 3 from one class, 3 from the other. These 6 consisted of 2 low, 2 average, and 2 high achieving students. These students were recognized as low, average, and high based upon observations of participation, effort and academic performance. The focus group was constructed to more easily manage the quantities of data that I collected. It is not representative of my whole class, nor any other population.

1. Student 1: Student 1 is a shy quiet male. He rarely raises his hand during class discussions, barely speaks above a whisper, and scores below expectations on assessments. He is not disruptive, rude or a behavior issue, but he does not display the drive or enthusiasm a teacher would expect to see. He does receive language arts assistance twice a week, as well as speech services once a week. For these reasons, I selected him as a low student member of the focus group.

2. Student 2: Student 2 is a female student. She is a talkative individual who usually does her homework and participates well during class discussions. She raises her hand only when she's sure she has the correct answer. Her work is at grade level expectation. She is one of my two average students.

3. Students 3: Student 3 is another female student. She always strives to please teachers, asking if she can do extra work or jobs and willing to go above and beyond what is required of her. She consistently achieves higher than grade-level expectations. When she does not, she is quick to make corrections and

resubmit her work. Her hand is always in the air, waiting to be called on. In fact, she often does not wait to be called on to share her contributions, which are usually insightful and correct. She is one of my high achieving students.

4. Student 4: Student 4 is a female student. She has had a troubled past and has continuous emotional problems. She rarely does any homework, does not participate in class discussions, and usually refuses to talk when called upon. Her work is minimal at best, completing just enough to turn in. She does not correct her work or revise any written pieces. Her consultant teacher tells me to accept what she does in order to avoid any confrontations. She meets with a counselor twice a week and receives Academic Intervention Services (AIS) three times a week for language arts, and three times a week for math. Even with these additional services she still performs below grade level. I am not sure if it is a lack of effort or if she is really working to her potential. She is one of the most challenging students I have ever had, and this is why I have labeled her a low student.

5. Student 5: Student 5 is a male student. His work is usually at or above grade level expectation. He participates in class discussions, raises his hand, waits to be called on, and shares ideas and information. His writing has good topic sentences, details and conclusions. For all of these reasons, he is a typical student. While all of his work meets expectations, only some of it exceeds them. He is one of my average students.

6. Student 6: Student 6 is a quiet, female student. While she is quiet, she has an incredible wealth of knowledge. She raises her hand to participate, and when she does, she shares some extremely insightful and detailed information. Her written papers are incredibly well written, with exceptional details and wonderful use of voice. All of her work is above grade level. She takes part in an enrichment program that meets twice a week to provide enriched and differentiated instruction for students who consistently and independently exceed grade level expectations. She is the highest achieving student I have.

Research Questions and Instruments Used

How does the incorporation of self-directed learning methods affect the motivation of students in a fifth grade class? How do self-directed learning methods affect the meaningfulness of learned material by students in a fifth grade class?

I collected data in a variety of ways to gauge the impact self-directed learning had on my students. The largest amount of data I collected was through my own daily log. In my log, I documented the progress of my study, from the first days of my own personal planning to the very end of my study. I recorded the students' planning phase and learning phase of their planned unit. In this log, I was able to record the interactions between students, the compromises, negotiations, questions, explanations, summaries and connections. I documented the activities my students planned and carried out. In this log, I also recorded my own teaching practices and reflections to look back on. This was a very useful tool for myself both as a researcher and as an educator.

I also conducted interviews with the members of the focus group. These were done informally, without a set of scripted questions, for the reason of honesty. I wanted to be able to document more than just the students' verbal responses; I wanted to record the physical expressions of my students during those responses. As a student would give an answer, I had the freedom to ask a question in response to that answer. Through the use of interviews, I was able to collect reliable, authentic data based on students' reactions.

I collected student surveys for similar reasons. The surveys provided data that supported that information gained through the interview. These surveys allowed the students an outlet in which they could respond freely. The surveys were altered, according to the time at which they were completed, in order to gauge the differences in motivation from the beginning to the end of the study. The questions on the surveys were vague and open ended, allowing for extensive student responses. These surveys provided data needed to authenticate the responses given during the student interviews.

To help provide documentation that my students were meeting district and state level expectations, I collected student work throughout the study. I also did this to document the meaningfulness of content learned. While the interviews and surveys gave me great data for the motivational aspect of my research questions, the student work I collected allowed me to access the depth of the material being learned. This documentation was very useful for covering myself as fellow members of the faculty questioned my teaching practices. Even when I adequately argued and

provided research for this method, other educators asked the principal to investigate my practices. I was glad to have the documentation and work from a variety of students. My focus group provided the work I needed to satisfy and impress my supervisor and quelled any further questions about my study.

Through these forms of data collection (daily journaling, student interviews, surveys, and student work), I was able to determine the impact the self-directed learning model had on my fifth-grade students.

Focus Group Case Studies

How does the incorporation of self-directed learning methods affect the motivation of students in a fifth grade class? How do self-directed learning methods affect the meaningfulness of learned material in a fifth grade class? To help me answer these questions, I analyzed the three interviews I had with each of my focus students. I also analyzed various student work I collected throughout the study and the surveys the focus group completed. The interviews and surveys I conducted were to provide data to help ascertain the influence self-directed learning had on the motivation of my students. Student work was collected to address the motivation and meaningfulness aspects of my research.

1. *Student 1:*

    a. *Student Interviews:*

I interviewed all members of the focus group three times through the course of my study. Student 1 had very little to say through our interview sessions. He remained quiet through my entire study. When I would ask him a question, I had to

ask him to repeat or explain himself many times. At three separate occasions, I asked this student if he was enjoying himself and only during the last interview did his answer change from "It's okay," to "I'm having fun." When he said that class was okay, I asked him to explain. His response was that we were still doing writing and reading but that the topic was different. For him, the topic didn't matter, our class still completed the same type of activities. He claimed that his change of from okay to fun was a result of having a major role in our class play. He really enjoyed participating in the play, I noted that his smile was large and he made good eye contact when telling me this. This was a very large change from previous interviews when this student would look at the floor and avoid eye contact. During the first two interviews, when I asked what could make class more exciting for him, he said "I don't know". On the third interview, Student 1 told me that he wanted to be in more plays. He said that he had fun learning the lines and acting with his peers. His favorite part was a battle scene with his best friend in which his character died. He said that he spent a lot of time at home learning his lines and practicing with his sock puppet in the mirror. He said it was important to him to put on a good performance. While the first two interviews were very short, about four minutes each, during the third interview, this student and I had a wonderful conversation for almost fifteen minutes. He was very open and talkative during this last interview, something I had not seen yet this year.

b. *Student Work:*

At the onset of the study, Student 1 rarely completed homework and did minimal levels of work. His writing lacked clear direction and supportive details. He did not read individually. His journal entries were completed daily as required, however many of the entries were one or two sentences. At the beginning of the study, Student 1 responded to a journal prompt of "What did you learn today?" by writing "The Greeks had a Dark Ages." As the topics of the unit progressed, his journals took a different tone. As he learned about a mythological being, he recorded his learning in his journal. From one sentence, Student 1 began writing more and more. Eventually he began writing two or three pages in his journal about what he learned, what he thought about a discussion the class had, or how he wanted his character for the play to look. While his organization was still poor, he wrote many colorful details and thoughts into his journal. I also collected a few other pieces, listed below, from him through the course of my research.

During the mythology phase of the unit, I required my students to research a mythological being and present what they had learned to the class. I photographed all of the focus students during their presentations to capture the posters, props and costumes they had created. Student 1 had a very informative poster with a lot of details. While these details were written in sentence fragments, they were informative and supportive to his presentation. He used sentence fragments such as "Son of Cronus," "King of Gods," and "Defeated Titans". He told us of a story involving his being and referred to his poster. The poster was colored with great care, had many colorful pictures of his creature and some text explaining some of the

pictures. He did not dress up and did not have props that would have been supportive to his presentation, however he made up for it with his very animated speech. He kept eye contact with the other students and only needed to be reminded once to speak up. He told his story using little bits of humor throughout. Together we agreed that his presentation was at a level three: meeting the expectations of the project.

As we learned of the Trojan War, the students elected to perform a play depicting the Battle of Troy. Each student selected a role in the play, learned all of that character's lines, created a sock puppet of their character and lastly performed the play using a set and props they had created. I filmed the play for both the children and myself. My students and I reviewed the film and assessed their performances for a grade. As a researcher, I used the film as data to assess the level of enthusiasm in each of the focus group students. The performance Student 1 put on was masterful for a fifth grader. His part was very large in the play and he had memorized every one of his lines. He performed his lines with the emotion needed to convince viewers of his anger, pain and ultimately his death. His sock puppet was outfitted with colorful Trojan armor and weaponry. He had drawn a face onto his puppet and attached arms to use in his combat scenes. It was obvious that he spent many hours preparing for this.

The last piece of work I collected from the focus group was a revision of a writing piece I had previously collected and was disappointed with. During the Mythology Strand, I had the all of the students write a persuasive essay. The purpose of the essay was to convince the Prince of Troy to give an enchanted apple to one of

three goddesses. Each goddess was offering something unique in return for the apple and the prince had to decide whom should get it. The students wrote a letter to the prince convincing him which goddess should receive the apple. This assignment was originally done so poorly, I did not grade them. I realized that this was an extremely large issue since my goal as both a teacher and researcher was that the students could still meet grade level expectations while they learned what they wanted to learn. The revised letter Student 1 submitted was satisfactory. He had set the premise of the situation, "Paris, you need to choose who should get the Golden Apple," and informed the prince who to choose, however beyond this, Student 1 faltered. He told Paris who each of the goddesses were, and told the Prince of Troy, "Pick Artemis, she will make you really smart." He did not provide convincing details as to why the choice should be made, nor did he provide details as to why the prince should not pick either of the other two goddesses. His writing was organized into one paragraph, where optimally three would have done the job.

2. *Student 2:*

a. *Student Interviews:*

Student 2 remained happy and enthusiastic throughout the course of my study. She answered many of my questions with a smile on her face, which she claims is from being asked her opinion on "important stuff." When I asked her what was going well for her, she replied that she liked planning out the unit. She was amazed that teachers do this for each unit they teach. She admitted that it was a lot of work creating the timeline of activities and then plugging them into the calendar. As I

interviewed her throughout my study, she became more and more excited over what we were talking about. She was very happy with the role she selected for the play and was excited to "act in front of a camera." She said she felt like a "movie star." She had a lead role in the play, a narrator, and would be heard in every scene of the play. When we talked about re-writing her persuasive essay, she became very adamant about what she would include in a revised letter. It was fun to see her squint with disapproval at the bribes the goddesses were offering. She mocked one of the goddesses' gifts of power, saying "why does he need that, he's already a prince and owns lots of land and stuff." When I asked her what her favorite part of the entire Greek unit was she said, "You let us plan it. All the stuff we wanted to do, you let us." She was appreciative of the fact that I let them have creative input into the material learned.

b. *Student Work:*

Student 2 usually completed homework and did satisfactory work inside the classroom. She seemed to enjoy doing the work as I never heard her complain about any of it and she always had her work ready by the planned due dates. She would begin work when it was assigned, not delaying or putting it off. Most of the assignments were turned in with a smile, and when asked during interviews, Student 2 claimed, "The homework and journals are fun. I like doing them." The journal of Student 2 was completed daily from the onset of the unit. There wasn't a day when she didn't write in it. At the beginning of the study, her journal was basic and lacking any sort of reflective pieces. Entries consisted of a paragraph with a main idea and

three detail sentences. The entries were literally what I asked for in class. When I asked for three questions about the history of Greece, the questions she wrote down were factual questions that could be answered in a word or two, like "When did the Greeks end monarchies?" or "When did Alexander the Great die?" While they were good questions, she easily found the answers with little thought. After a couple of weeks of instruction, her journal entries began to become more thought provoking. She commented on the fact that many of the mythological stories of Heracles are similar, but that they had differences as well. In her journal entry Student 2 wrote, "Heracles had to do two extra labors because he had someone or something help him. Should he have to do more work because he got help?" She questioned this and presented it to the class during one of our discussions.

Her mythology presentation was excellent. She dressed up as her deity as well as had a poster and prop for support. She told us a wonderful story about her creature using the props and poster for support. Her poster had many colorful pictures and pieces of text that explained them. She supported what she said with details that were confirmed by others' presentations. She spoke with good clarity and volume, maintaining eye contact with her audience. When I asked her what she liked about this topic, she said that she was excited to dress up as a goddess and present to the class. Cooperatively, we assessed her presentation at a level four: exceeding beyond expectations.

Student 2 also claimed to be very excited about her role in the play of the Trojan War. Her role as the narrator required a lot of memorization as she had lines

in every one of the fourteen scenes. She memorized her lines and spoke them loud and clear. As she did not have an acting part she did not create a puppet and was not visually recorded on the film. Her voice was recorded, however, and that was what we used to evaluate her on this project. While she did memorize the lines for the play, an impressive feat, her reading lacked the inflection that character voice actors need when they are not seen. We agreed to a level three: meeting expectations for a final grade.

The first persuasive essay Student 2 submitted mirrored the classes' as unsatisfactory. She originally wrote only one paragraph explaining why the prince should choose one of the three goddesses. She had sufficient details, but never argued why the prince should not pick one of the other two goddesses. When I talked with her about revising her essay, she reluctantly agreed to incorporate this piece into her essay. She had actually asked me "Isn't it good enough for something?" I was surprised by this lack of care as she had shown a lot of effort and progress in her journal writing. I asked her why she didn't want to revise her writing and she told me "It doesn't matter, the prince chose Aphrodite. I know how it ends." I encouraged her to change the prince's mind and use that idea as an argument against Aphrodite. She seemed to embrace this idea and resubmitted a satisfactory essay. She did incorporate the idea that choosing Aphrodite would lead to war, but did not develop and expand this idea as much as I had hoped.

3. *Student 3:*

    a. *Student Interview:*

Student 3 was excited through each of the three interviews. Each time I asked her what was going well, her reply was pretty similar: "We're (the students) in control." She told me that she liked the ability to work with others in the planning of the unit. She was a little frustrated that the rest of the class did not embrace some of her ideas for topics to study. She said, "We could learn to write and speak some Greek". It took me some time to convince her that the time we had set aside for this unit was too short for that kind of depth. She rolled her eyes at this and said, "We learn to say hi, goodbye and some other important phrases." I encouraged her to look them up on her own time and share them with others. She seemed pleased with this suggestion and greeted me at our second interview with, what I think was, a Greek greeting She remained happy and enthusiastic through all of our interviews. I was not sure if I could cite this as enthusiasm toward our class project or her normally positive demeanor.

b. *Student Work:*

The journaling Student 3 completed remained consistent through the entire implementation of the self-directed learning model. She started and ended with an average of two or three pages of journal writing a night. Her entries are always detailed and insightful. She listed out the reasons for the fall of the Greek Dark Ages (written language, larger tribes, increase in trade) and posed questions such as "If monarchies were abolished, but democracies took another one hundred years to form, how did the Greeks govern themselves?" She even questioned the basis of the Trojan War, asking "What if Troy gave Helen up right away?" Her journal entries were

impressive and useful for class discussions. How so? The entries showed me that Student Three was very invested and motivated in the topics we covered. Even with some of her topics for study not being selected by the class, she remained interested in the content. Her writing continued to be at a higher than grade level expectation. Her writing exceeded the level of the class on a consistent basis.

I photographed Student 3 during her mythology presentation in order to conference with her about it. She had dressed up as her being, Aphrodite, had a large colorful poster, used props and had handouts for the rest of the class. She did an exemplary job presenting what she had learned. She first started off by telling us a couple of stories involving her deity, using the poster to support and give visualizations. She used the props (hearts, lace and music) in a similar way. She had small chocolates and candy hearts to pass out to the class. She made wonderful eye contact with her audience and presented from the point of view of her deity. She greatly exceeded the expectations for this project. When we met to talk about her grade, she said that she really enjoyed dressing up and acting and was looking forward to the play.

During the play, Student 3 did another exemplary job. As there were more parts than I had students, Student 3 volunteered for three roles, one major and two small parts. She made three distinctly different puppets for each of the roles. Each character had a different outfit and a different face. She really tried hard to show the differences in each of the three roles. She memorized all three parts and read them clearly and with emotion. She even added an accent to one of them, as it was a royal

character. When she and I met and viewed the film, we both agreed that she again exceeded expectations.

The original persuasive essay Student 3 submitted was one of the few that I considered satisfactory. She had adequately made an argument for one of the three goddesses with lots of supporting details in her writing. She had a clear focus and direction and supported her choice well. She also attempted to discredit the other two goddesses. She did this somewhat basically, addressing both in the same paragraph without separate and sufficient reasons: "Don't pick Hera or Artemis, you already have a happy home and are plenty smart". When we had our conference about this and I suggested two paragraphs, one discrediting each, she happily agreed and worked on it right way. Later that day, she showed me what she had written during her free time and asked me to look it over. The students had three days to revise their work, yet she had already started a revision. She turned in this new revision on the due date and it was great. She had already successfully argued for her goddess and through this revision, she had provided creative and humorous details as to why the prince should not pick the other goddesses. When arguing against Hera, Student 3 said, "Why does Hera need to give you a happy home? You're a prince with a beautiful princess." She then wrote out summary of all of the things the Prince of Troy would own, and then asked "How can Hera make your home happier than all of that?" Her writing was clear, organized, and detailed. We agreed that this exceeded the expectations of the assignment.

4. *Student 4:*

a. *Student Interviews:*

Student 4 provided my shortest interviews of the study. She kept all of her responses to simple phrases. When I asked how class was going, her reply was "Fine" for the first interview "Okay" for the second and "Good" for the third. On the first interview, I asked her what is she looking forward to, she replied "I don't know". The last time I interviewed her, she said that the thing she enjoyed the most was "acting in the play." It was really difficult getting her to expand on her responses as she usually just shrugged her shoulders. I felt that I was able to make some progress with her through the use of the interviews. While she kept her responses short, she gave away facial expressions that I found to be informative and relevant when dealing with this student. Throughout the first interview, the responses Student 4 gave were short, however her eyes never made contact with me. She would draw while talking to me and would not look at me. During the second interview, she looked up at me from time to time, still giving me short answers but at least partially looking at me when doing so. On the third interview, she continued to draw, but she looked up and smiled when she said "Good." I asked her what in the play made her happy, she smiled again and told me that she liked being on camera. She wanted to see her puppet and hear her voice in the film. After showing her the film, she blushed, smiled, and would only say "I did good."

b. *Student Work:*

The journal of Student 4 showed a true progression. When we started the unit, Student 4 would only complete two or three of the daily journal entries a week. The

ones that she did do were very simple, consisting of only a sentence or two. When I prompted the students to think about why the Trojan War started, all this student wrote was "Helen went to Troy." While her journal entries never evolved into any more descriptive writing, I did note Student 4 putting forth more effort. Once we began researching mythological beings she began completing her entries daily. This continued through the end of the unit. Her entries did increase in length as well. The first ten entries were roughly three sentences apiece. The last ten entries were between seven and eleven sentences each. When I asked the students to pick their three top choices for the play and explain why you want them, she wrote out one sentence for each of her three choices. When she got into an argument over set design with another one of my students, I asked her to write out what happened and she did provide me with a one-page summary of the incident. This was her longest entry of my study, and I feel it's noteworthy because the argument was of great importance to her and she willingly wrote about it. She said that "[the other student] wasn't letting me draw anything. He said that I can only color what he draws." She felt that she should be able to draw some of the items of in some of the sets. She wrote, "I read the same books as [the other student] and I could draw the temple of Apollo." After reading her entry, I assigned her and a few of her peers the task of designing and coloring the set of Achilles' tent. She worked on this over the course of three recess periods. I did not hear her complain about the partnerships or work on the set after this incident and as she gave up her recess to work on the set. I took this to mean that she had a vested interest in her work.

When Student 4 presented her mythological being, she did so dressed up as her being. She also used a poster to support her presentation. The costume was minimal compared to the other students', however for her, it was a large step forward. Her poster was bland and lacked any color or important information. It was hard to read and after looking at it more closely, most of the written work was in phrases. While the poster and costume was lackluster, her presentation was well done. She spoke softly, but gave some very detailed information about her deity. Her presentation was short, less than ten minutes, but she told us of her symbols, history and shared a story about her character. She answered a few questions from the class, however when I noticed her frustration level rising at not knowing all the answers, I ended her presentation.

When it came to the play, Student 4 acted in a way that I had not seen from her before. She had learned and memorized all of her lines with the help of some of the support staff with whom she worked. She also created a costume and designed her sock puppet for the play. She spoke her lines loud enough to be recorded and read them with slight inflection. She got into an argument with another student during rehearsals as the other student couldn't remember his or her lines. It occurred to me that Student 4 identified a line that the other student had misread and knew what should have been said. The only way she would have been able to do that was if she had memorized others' roles. I asked her if she had memorized this other student's lines and she said "I know them." I asked if she memorized any others and she said "just the ones in my scenes." I took this to mean that she was intensely

interested in the material and that she was committed to the play. This level of enthusiasm had been missing from most, if not all, of her assignments previous to this. She only shrugged her shoulders when I asked her why. We both agreed that she had met the expectations for this assignment.

When it came to her persuasive essay, Student 4 originally submitted a paragraph stating why one of the goddesses should be chosen. Her handwriting was hard to read and lacked supporting details. She wrote, "Paris, choose Hera. She will give you a happy home. That is better than a pretty wife or being really smart." When I held a conference with her about it, she did not look at me and only shrugged her shoulders when I asked her if she would revise it with more details. When she resubmitted, it was the same paragraph, written neatly on new paper. We met again about this and again she shrugged her shoulders when I asked about fixing it. I told her that it was below expectations and her comment was, "Okay". She did not say this happily or matter-of-factly, she said them sadly and to me, regrettably. I asked if she would revise it if I gave it back and she admitted "Probably not."

5. *Student 5:*

a. *Student Interviews:*

My interviews with Student 5 were very comfortable. He talked with ease to me about what he thought and felt. He felt that "it's cool that [I] let the kids decide what to do". He was very pleased with the control the students had in directing how and what the class would be learning. He said that he really like the social stories we did and how everyone's voice was getting heard. He thought that the board full of

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questions was a great idea. He told me that he felt it was a lot of work to plan he unit, but he would like to plan another one soon. During his final interview, Student 5 said that the best part of the unit was the planning. He liked how we used everyone's ideas. Through each of these interviews, he kept smiling and telling me that it was a great idea to let the class pick what they wanted know. In the final interview, Student 5 even thanked me for letting the class have so much control. He said "Thanks, Mr. C. You let us do what we want."

b. *Student Work:*

Student 5 always completed his journal entries on time. All of his entries were well written and easily read. Most of his entries were about a paragraph in length, quickly summarizing what we did in class. Most of his entries had a topic sentence leading off with "Today we..." or some variation. As time went one, Student 5 began to incorporate himself into his journal writings. He started the unit off with "The class did..." or "We..." followed by statements of doing. One of his entries from the History strand started with, "Today we went to the computer. We looked up important dates about Ancient Greece." He followed this up with some of the notes he wrote down. After a while, I noticed that "I" replaced the "the class" and "we". By the end of the unit, Student 5 was writing solely from the first person perspective and incorporating his feelings into his journal entries. He used statements like "I had fun rehearsing for the play today" and "I hope we get to learn more myths." His entries usually remained about a paragraph in length, however this was of little consequence since the quality of his entries had developed so well.

Student 5 chose Heracles as his mythological being to research. He came in for his presentation wearing armor he had made out of cardboard at home. He also brought a poster with him and a very large bag of props to help him with his presentation. His presentation was excellent. In the bag of props, he had one artifact for each of the twelve labors Heracles went through. As he told the story of each labor, he showed the prop (a stuffed lion, a golden apple, etc) to give the class a visual. His poster was also very well done. It was colorful and had a lot of information about the twelve labors. It was obvious Student 5 had spent a lot of time preparing for his presentation.

Student 5 went on to impress me with his selection of a major role in the play that the children put on. He memorized his lines and performed them with great enthusiasm. As Achilles, he had the lead in the play. He spoke his lines with great authority and an air of machismo. He spent time dying his puppet, creating two sets of armor and weaponry, and rehearsing at free times. I noticed him and a few others rehearsing during recess one day. After we filmed the play, Student 5 and I reviewed his scenes and agreed that his superb performance was exceeding expectations. He later told me during one of our interviews that he had such a good time, preparing and acting in this play, that he was trying out for an upcoming fifth-grade play.

The persuasive essay that Student 5 originally submitted wasn't as bad as some of the others. Similar to his journal entries, Student 5 turned in a paragraph that had a good argument for choosing one of the three goddesses. He had a solid topic sentence and supportive details, however he never argued against the other two

goddesses. After conferring with him, he told me that he understood and would fix it that night. He then submitted a satisfactory paper, arguing for one of the goddesses and discrediting the other two. He used the same paragraph he had written before and added a new paragraph with a topic sentence of "Don't pick the other two, they won't make you happy." Student 5 didn't use any details from the story provided and really just made up excuses why to not pick the other goddesses. Among his reasons were that Aphrodite was too "pushy" and Hera was "mean". Neither of these were sound arguments, nor were they grounded in the reading I provided the students. It was a little disappointing to see this as his final written piece.

6. *Student 6:*

a. *Student Interviews:*

Student 6 provided plenty of commentary of how she thought the class was going through the student-planned unit. At each interview, she had some very useful criticism and ideas for how she felt progress was being made. In our first interview, she praised and thanked me for letting the students plan out their unit. She said she was disappointed that I had put a time limit on the unit because not all of her ideas were going to be used. During our planning phase, she had shared some extremely creative and enriching activities (modernizing the Greek myths for example), but due to the time constraints, she said she understood that we could not pursue all of her suggestions. In our next interview, she had vented to me that she was frustrated with a group that she was working with. She wanted to learn and research some of the lesser-known myths as she already knew the major ones, but her group would not buy

into it. She told me that her group voted and she lost, so she would do what they wanted, but this very visibly put her out. I offered her the opportunity to work alone on what she wanted and she took it quickly with a huge smile of triumph. In our final interview, she was extremely happy and said the progress the class made was great. She was excited about filming the play in a day or two and asked me if she could have a copy of it. I told her that she could if she brought me a tape to put it on and she did so the next day. She said that the upcoming play was her favorite piece to this unit because "everyone's in it. We all made the sets, the props, and the characters. We film it, we watch it, and we do it. It's all ours."

b. *Student Work:*

Student 6 wrote at great length in her journal each night. Her writing skills far exceeded those of the rest of my classes. Her writing was filled with voice (asking the reader questions and using words like "WOW!"), descriptive details and great flow from one idea to the next. Her journal entries started and finished being very reflective in nature. She usually asked questions to herself in her writing and then answered them in latter entries. She started one entry off asking, "Why did the Greeks think that their gods wanted human sacrifices?" This was while we were learning parts of the play when a Greek king sacrifices his daughter to the gods asking for their blessings during the coming war. Later, after learning about the Mayans in Social Studies, she revisited this topic of human sacrifices. She wrote, "Oh my gosh, the Mayan sacrificed humans too! The, didn't sacrifice the people they knew like the Greeks did, but they still killed people in for their gods." She then went

on to write, "How many other civilizations have human sacrifices? Does anyone still do this?" It was interesting to read the confusion in her writing when her group didn't want to do the myths she was interested in. I saw the strategies we learned earlier, where her group discussed, voted, and compromisingly, she went along with the vote. This entry started off with, "Why does my group want to do the common myths? Everyone knows about Heracles, Apollo and Zues." I also saw the point where I told her she could work alone if she liked. I could read the excitement in the "Yeah, yeah, yeah!" she led off that journal entry with.

Student 6 did a superb job presenting her mythological being. Knowing that it was a lesser-known deity, Persephone, she first led of with stories of her character interacting with the better-known deities. She dressed in a wonderful costume with flowers draped all over making floral toga. Along with this costume, she had a couple of props and a poster to help show her stories. The poster was very colorful with lots of pictures. Below each picture, she had written a small summary as to what the picture was and why it was important. She had done such a thorough job with the poster, everyone who read it knew plenty about her character. After reviewing the poster and her presentation, we both agreed that she had exceeded the expectations of this project.

Even her part in the class play was done with perfection. She had a very important character in our play and spent a lot of time designing a costume with props for her puppet. She memorized her lines and performed them with clarity and inflection. She was very excited about being in the play and it was obvious as she

had helped to make a majority of the sets. Her motions were very well rehearsed as her puppet looked like it was actually talking and running. After watching the film, we both agreed that she exceeded the expectations of this project as well.

The persuasive essay Student 6 wrote was one of three that I accepted without a re-write. Her original set the premise for the argument well, constructed a sound argument and debated the offers of the other two goddesses. Student 6 began her paper with a great set up of the problem. Using quotes from the story we read, she constructed a paragraph that brought the reader into the situation in which Paris was placed. She then went on to say that Paris should choose Artemis. She said, "People say wisdom comes from age and experience but you won't need either if you choose Artemis." She continued her paper by discrediting the offers of the other two goddesses claiming, "With the wisdom Artemis will give you, you'll be able to rule your kingdom well. This will grant you a happy life." She also combined the offers of a happy home and a beautiful wife by saying, "By being a wise and good king, you can pick from any woman you want for a wife and you'll have a happy home." Student 6 also identified flaws in the offer of a beautiful wife by saying, "Aphrodite might give her to you, but she may not like you." Her paper was well done and I did not require her to re-submit a new one.

Themes From Cases

I identified three themes found through my analysis of the case studies. The first theme I noticed was an *increase of reflective behavior in my students*. This was not only noted in the interviews, but also in the journal entries and the student work

collected. The second theme I found was an *increased commitment in student presentations*. I found that students were investing more time and energy when they were responsible for showing each other what they learned or teaching new material to classmates. This level of commitment was echoed through the performance of the Trojan War Play. The final theme I observed was an *inconsistency in the students' writing*. While the students were showing an increased effort and progress in their writing skills, the original persuasive essays were a disappointment to myself as a teacher.

The students in my focus group became more reflective of their learning and experiences. When I conducted the first round of interviews, I found that the students required many prompts and probing questions to identify their hopes, desires and feeling about the beginning of their unit. During the last round of interviews, I listened as the students explained their thoughts about the topics we completed. I did not have to ask the focus students to explain their ideas as they supplied me with plenty of reasons and were much more open with me than in the preview rounds of interviews. There was a shift in the interviews, as I found my self saying "Tell me more," and asking fewer "How did that make you feel?" questions. Some of the students were straightforward saying "I really liked when we made the class timeline." Because I conducted this study using two classes, many of the students claimed that they enjoyed seeing the contributions the other class made to the class timeline. Many of the focus group students asked what members of the other class were doing. Student 5 showed me some of his mythology work, told me of some of

his ideas for his presentation and asked if anyone in my other class was doing anything like his. He seemed concerned about being original. When conducting the conferences with student to go over the grades of projects and work, the students became more articulate about what they did well and how they could improve. One student said, "I could have told a story using my god" when presenting his mythological being. The reflective behavior wasn't always about how a particular lesson or activity made the student feel, but was thinking, or reflecting, about what they did that day. It was a reinforcement of what they learned. The reflective behavior also showed up in the students' journals and work.

This theme was also mirrored in the journal entries of the students. As time progressed, the journal entries of the focus students changed from being short one-paragraph summaries to being one or more pages of summaries and connections. The first week of entries showed a style of writing I called "formula writing", a paragraph of one topic sentence and a couple of detail sentences. The last few entries about the student planned unit showed that the students were more invested in their entries. The length of the entries increased as well as the consistency at which they were being completed. The content of entries was more reflective in nature. The entries still contained a summary of what happened that day, however my students also began incorporating what those activities meant to them, how it made them feel, and what they hoped would happen next. In many of the students' journals, questions were beginning to get asked, providing ideas and topics for classroom discussions.

One student even answered some of her own questions in her entries as she learned. Good detail to support your finding.

I also noted this increase of reflective behavior in the students' work. At the completion of the mythological being presentation and the Battle of Troy play, I conferred with each student to cooperatively evaluate her or his performance and presentation. During these conferences many of the students were able to articulate what they had done well and what they could have improved upon. Many of their suggestions and ideas were similar to the notes I had taken during those presentations. The students also commented on the play as a whole saying that it was, "Fun", "Funny" and "Hard work." When I asked them to elaborate on these the replies began to differ. Two of the students claimed the Achilles and Hector battle was one of the funniest things they saw. Many of the focus group said the "talking socks" were really funny to watch, both during the recording and during the showing of the play. Most of the students said memorizing the lines was hard. Student 6 suggested, "If we do another play, I think we should learn the lines for one scene, rehearse it, tape it, and then start the next scene." She said this would make the workload on the students easier. Many of the students were also able to communicate why they deserved the grade they assigned themselves. The most common suggestions to improvements were, "I need to speak louder" and "I need to hold my hand higher so the camera can see me." Student 2 identified a problem with her performance saying, "My puppet isn't looking at who it should be when I talk." She had found that her character always faced the camera, despite the fact that she was communicating with

characters to her right, left and behind her. Reflection is a key to the self-directed learning model. It allows the learner an opportunity to think about what he or she has done, the good and the bad, and allows for progressing to new learning and skills.

A second theme I identified was an increased level of commitment and work when the students had to present or perform for their peers. During class discussions, and informal meetings and sharing of information, students were able to talk to their peers and convey certain pieces of information. However, all of this was done orally. When the students presented their mythological beings and again during their play performance, the students exhibited an increase in work ethic. I first noticed this increase when the students were preparing for their mythological being presentations. While researching their myths, the students were required to use three different sources to gather information. Many students went beyond the requirement of three and used more. I found that the students were also doing research on their own time as well as during the class time I provided for this purpose. When my students presented their learning to the class, many of the students dressed up as their mythological beings and had props. Some of the students acted as though they were their being and interacted with the class as such. It was obvious that they had spent a lot of time outside of class on these costumes and props. One student had even made the lower half of a horse, out of cardboard, as he was a centaur.

This commitment to quality presentations and performances continued through the play the students produced. Over half of the students gave up their recesses to help with set design and creation. At the elementary level, recess is

everything to these students and the fact that they gave it up for a school project speaks volumes to their commitment. The characters of the play were represented using sock puppets, a medium that saved us time and space, however required more of students in preparation and acting. Each puppet needed to be outfitted with a costume and some students performed multiple characters. Many of the students also created props associated with their characters: crowns, armor, weaponry, boats and even a Trojan Horse. All of this was done on their own time as we used class time to rehearse and learn lines. The learning of the lines also speaks to the commitment of these children as the play is written at a middle school level, with many lines for most of the characters. Two of my focus group students really showed their involvement as one of them had memorized the lines of other characters and the other student was the narrator, a speaking role in each of the fourteen scenes. My students' interest and commitment to the presentations and performing arts was an incredible sight.

The last theme I identified through the data collection was an inconsistency in the students' writing. It was my goal that with an invested interest in the content of learned material, my students would be willing to create grade level appropriate writing pieces consistently and independently. While I was pleased with the evolution of the journal entries, the level of writing for the persuasive piece was a blow to me. The original work that was submitted, was as a whole class, below expectations. Most of the essays consisted of a topic sentence followed by two detail sentences. My expectation for this assignment was a three-paragraph essay. The first paragraph should have told the setting of the decision. The second paragraph should

have presented the student's argument with the third paragraph discrediting the other choices. Most of the persuasive essays made a suggestion of who to choose with a reason or two of why.

After a class discussion, I required my students to make revisions and resubmit their essays. This second version of these essays was much more aligned with my expectations. I conducted my interviews with the focus group students the same week as when students were revising their essays. I asked students why they thought the class did such a poor job on the writing pieces. Most of the focus group students claimed that they felt the essay was similar to a journal entry and wasn't as formal as I was making it out to be. They all agreed that revisions were necessary to meet the expectations I was placing on the assignment.

I then began to think of the self-directed model of instruction and realized the relationships between expectations or desires and the level of commitment and effort put in to achieve those expectations. To put it simply, it seemed to me that when the students created the expectation, they worked hard to meet them, when the expectation was from an outside source (state, district, or even myself) the work ethic diminished.

Surveys

I administered four surveys over the course of my study. These surveys were to provide data addressing the motivation of the students when using self-directed learning methods. I asked two types of questions asked on the surveys. One type was an open-ended question with space left for the students write in and expand their own

answers. The other type of question was a one where the students could mark on a line showing their attitude on a range of "not at all" to "very." The first question on each of the four surveys was "How excited are you about the topic we are covering?" Another important question on the survey was "How important is this topic to you?" On the table that follows, I've tabulated the results from these two questions. In Survey One, the topic being covered was the history of Greece, in Survey Two: Greek Mythology, Survey Three: Trojan War and in Survey Four: Persuasive Writing.

Table 4.1: How excited are you about the topic we are covering?

And

How important is this topic to you?

Student	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3	Survey 4
1	Partially Excited, Not Important	Excited, Very Important	Very Excited, Very Important	Not Excited, Not Important
2	Excited, Important	Very Exciting, Important	Very Exciting, Very Important	Not Exciting, Important
3	Excited, Important	Very Exciting Very Important	Very Exciting, Very Important	Exciting Important
4	Not Excited, Not Important	Partially Exciting, Important	Exciting, Important	Not Exciting, Not Important
5	Excited, Very Important	Very Exciting, Very Important	Very Exciting, Very Important	Exciting, Important
6	Very Excited, Important	Very Excited, Very Important	Very Excited, Very Important	Very Excited, Important

Interestingly, when a student chose "Not Excited", he or she also chose "Not Important". When a student claimed that something was important to him or her, he or she also said that he or she was excited to work on it. The relationship between excitement and importance was astounding. The more important a topic was to a student, the more excited he or she was to cover it. The topic that was deemed the

most important to the students was the Trojan War, with five of the six students marking "Very Important". The students also claimed that this was the most exciting of the topics we covered. The topic that generated the least amount of enthusiasm was the revisions to the persuasive essay. It is worth noting that although the students were not that enthusiastic about the essay, they deed feel that it was important to revise and resubmit their work.

The open-ended questions on the survey provided some interesting data as well. Two questions that appeared on all of the surveys were "What are we doing well?" and "What could we be doing differently?" I've listed some of the focus groups' responses to these questions below. The responses shown below were selected by the multiple times they appear in the student surveys. A response listed may have written by multiple students, or written multiple times by the same student. By appearing more than once on the surveys, the response is deemed important to the students and is included in the table below.

Table 4.2: Open Ended Responses

What are we doing well?	What could we be doing differently?
- We get to plan - We get to choose what to do - Lots of dates and info - We are dressing up - Having fun - Working with groups - Learning parts of play - Acting - Convincing Paris - Sharing info with class - Learning from friends	- Spend more time on History - Shorten presentations - Let us act in play, no puppets - Talking to Paris instead of writing to him

On each of the surveys, the "What are we doing well?" question was always answered. Many of the responses were common among the focus group. All of the focus group students were pleased to be able to do the planning and choose the activities that they felt would benefit them. When the play came around, many students agreed that they enjoyed acting in the play and rehearsing.

At the end of the unit, the final survey asked, "What part of the unit do you think worked the best?" The responses varied a little, however all were centered around the idea that they learned a lot from their peers during the different

presentations and classroom discussions. With responses like, "Presenting the Myths", "Rehearsing the play", "Making the sets", and "Group and class meetings", it was fairly obvious that the students preferred to work together. When asked to explain why this part of the unit worked well, a few of the focus group responses were, "It was fun working with friends" and "My friends helped explain stuff I didn't understand." It was clear to me that working with their peers and being social about what they were learning was important and helpful to my students.

On each of the surveys, I asked what we, as a class, could be doing differently to enhance learning. This question was not answered seven of the twenty four times it was posed. Many of my students claimed that they wished they had more time to go over the history of Greece. My students had created a class timeline and had a discussion of it, noting important dates and themes. Unfortunately, due to the calendar the students planned, we went on to mythology instead of exploring those dates and themes further. The students said that they would have liked to ask questions about the events on the timeline and then go find the answers to their questions. Three students claimed that we were spending too much time presenting the myths. They said that each presentation should have been limited to less than ten minutes to keep the presentations to one or two days, not the four we ended up needing.

As the class moved closer to the play, the focus group voiced their concerns about using the sock puppets for the play. They wanted to make a full sized movie using themselves in costumes. When I told them that this was a money and time

saver and that sets would need to be much larger to accommodate the size of the children, their response was "Give us more time." At the end of the student-planned unit, three of the focus students claimed that instead of writing out their persuasive essays, they should be allowed to speak their arguments. I agreed that speaking was a communication tool and it could have been another option, but for the purpose of meeting district requirements, writing out their persuasive pieces was necessary. They begrudgingly agreed to write out their essays for this reason.

Over all, the surveys provided a wonderful source of data to evaluate the merits of self-directed learning on student motivation. According to the data gathered through the surveys, the focus group students preferred to work cooperatively using presentations and class discussions to convey new knowledge to their peers. I found that as a student was more interested in a topic, he or she was more excited and thus, willing to put forth more effort into his or her work. By allowing the students the opportunity to design the activities and content base of the curriculum, the students became more interested in topics they deemed important. This increased their level of motivation, a result I was planning to observe.

Summary of Findings

I constructed this study to determine the results of implementing a self-directed learning model into my fifth grade classroom. The goal of the model of instruction was to increase the motivation in my students as well as increase the depth of skills and material the students learned. I gathered data throughout the course of my study to help answer these questions. Using my daily log, surveys and interviews

of the focus group, I was able to determine if this model did increase the motivation and commitment my students had. I collected and analyzed student work to see the depth of learning.

Through the course of my study I observed an increase in motivation in my students. They selected a topic of study out of interest. My students pursued their questions, planning out the unit and activities. They presented their learning to their peers, reflected on material learned, performed a play and wrote a persuasive essay. I watched as the students became more and more excited as they learned and presented about the different myths they had researched. I observed the students as they diligently prepared for and performed their play. The surveys showed an increase in excitement over the course of the study.

I used student work to assess the level of understanding and knowledge they gained. Through this analysis, I was able to see that the students were gaining new base knowledge. The students' journals, presentations, performances and persuasive essays provided the data I needed to see that the students were gaining knowledge and were expressing themselves in more meaningful ways.

Going back to all the data I collected showed me some interesting information. I learned that the students were really into their performances. The surveys all showed that the students enjoyed working in groups and sharing what they learned with others. This was mirrored in their presentations. Each student did a good job teaching his or her classmates while also enjoying themselves. The students did poorly on their original persuasive essays. This was an activity that was met with

less excitement than any other project. One thing that did stick out among all of my data was that at the point of the play, each of my focus group students was excited, writing excellent journal entries, learning and performing complex scripts, and were engaged about a topic they felt was important to them. The performing arts part of the student-planned unit succeeded in meeting all of my expectations.

When I set out at the start of my study, I had two goals: to increase the motivation of my students, and to have them construct meaningful knowledge. I collected data (student work, journal entries, classroom observations, interviews, and surveys) on six of my 35 students. I found that when I implemented self-directed learning practices into my fifth grade class, my students became invested, excited learners. They were motivated to learn material and complete projects, presentations, and performances they planned. My students exhibited reflective behaviors as the study progressed. Finally, they gained and displayed knowledge and skills that were meaningful to them, while still be held accountable to state and district standards.

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Over the last year I've looked at the possibilities of using a self-directed learning model in my fifth grade classroom. I began with questions about student motivation and meaningful learning. I read various studies based in inquiry, adult learning, differentiation, reflective practices and problem based learning. I incorporated a self-directed learning model into my classroom, collecting various forms of data to evaluate the results of this model. Now, at the conclusion of my study, I find myself with new insights, learning, thoughts, practices and even new questions.

Discussion

After analyzing the data I collected, I uncovered three large themes. As my study progressed, I found that my students were becoming much more reflective of their learning. I also found that my students had a higher commitment to material and projects they deemed important and exciting. The final theme I uncovered was an inconsistency in student writing throughout the study. While each of these three themes singularly stands out as important, after more consideration, I find them to be intrinsically linked.

Over the course of my study, I noted my students were participating more in the reflective aspects of learning. I first noted this while reading over the journals of my focus group students, then began to look for reflective behavior during student interviews, my own interviews of the focus group, and during the conversations students had with one another. What I concluded was that this material was more

meaningful to my students, and thus they were more willing to think about what they had learned. As the material become more interesting or important to my students, I found them discussing subject matter outside our classroom structures. My students began asking more questions about the material they read. The discussions they had with one another became more articulate, filled with rich details. Masui and De Corte (2005) noted that after employing reflective practices, the participants of their study made decisions and spoke with more authority and confidence. This was mirrored in our classroom discussions as students debated ideas with support from their own learning. Classroom discussions were key reflective practices that Georghiades (2004) claim, benefit all learners. I could not agree with him more. As students prepared for their mythological being presentation and for their play, the two most important and exciting topics for my students, they wrote rich journal entries and linked their own knowledge to the knowledge presented by their peers. Connecting current learning to past learning is the essence of reflection and one of the steps of the inquiry model laid out by Stripling (2003). Even my lower achieving students, students who struggled with homework and journal completion, displayed a fresh attitude toward their learning. By the end of my study, my students were thinking about their learning, reinforcing what was obtained and leading them to new questions to investigate.

Another important theme I found was a commitment to presentations and performances. My students had planned a variety of learning activities, along with ways to share that new learning. Most commonly, the students participated in small

group and whole class discussions to convey new learning and pose new questions. These discussions required a great quantity of confidence to speak in front of the class. Along with these discussions, the students also selected to do presentations of their mythological beings and a performance of a Trojan War play. Both of these projects required students to, yet again, be in front of their peers to convey material they had learned. Many of the students dressed up, created costumes, props and posters for their presentations. Students gave up their free time to create sets and rehearse the lines for their play. This level of commitment to communicating their knowledge had gone unseen previous to this study. Hargrove (2005) claimed similar results in a study of a second grade classroom. Once the teacher had allowed for student choice "his students exhibited greater persistence, drive, interest, creativity, and more dynamic creation of product" (p. 39). When the teacher of that second grade class incorporated student input into the assessments he used, he found that the students preferred presentations and projects to traditional written exams. My students also selected such forms of assessment for their unit: whole class and small group presentations and performances. Looking back at the surveys, the play and mythology presentations were rated the highest in terms of excitement and importance to my students. More clearly, to my students, these two projects were the most important aspects of the Greek unit they planned. Again, when the students felt a project or the material was important, they put forth the effort and commitment needed to produce a high quality presentation.

The next theme found in my data analysis was an inconsistency in my students' writing. I previously wrote that as my students progressed through their unit and participated in more socially constructive activities, they became more reflective in their discussions, work and journal entries. This remains true. As time went by, I was impressed by the amount and depth of work they were completing, however the anomaly of this trend was the persuasive essay piece described in the previous chapter. As I've stated before, the original work submitted was far below expectations and needed to be addressed, revised and resubmitted. Looking back at this assignment yielded two factors that, I believe, contributed to this sub-par performance of my students.

The first factor lies in my practices as a teacher. Previous to the Greek unit, I had instructed my students of the parts of a persuasive essay. My students had completed two persuasive pieces before this unit as well. When it came to this Greek persuasive piece, I did not review the material required for this writing. It was my assumption that my students would remember and employ the skills I taught them previously. This was my mistake, as an educator should always review the expectations of an assignment and then check for understanding. It was unfair of me to assign a task without adequate instruction specific to it. Again, I assumed with the knowledge they had gained earlier in the year and the high quality work I was observing in class, my students would be able to produce a product of grade level expectation.

The second factor that led to these poor quality writing pieces comes back to the idea of importance. Looking, again at interview logs and surveys showed me that the students were not excited about this project, nor did they see it as important. It is my view that because the students did not see this as important to them, they were not excited about completing it. Unlike the mythology presentation and the Trojan War play, my students were not excited and were less likely to put forth the effort and commitment seen in those two projects. What students felt was important dictated the level of effort they put into their work. This idea, embedded in each of my three themes, led me to answer the first of my two research questions.

Personal Reflections

When I set out at the onset of this study, I asked myself, "Will self-directed learning increase student motivation? Would it lead to more meaningful learning?" Now at the end of my study, I find myself able to easily answer one question and struggling with the other. Self-directed learning had the positive impact on motivation I was hoping for. I saw this in the amount and length of wok completed, the free times and recess given up to continue and refine learning and the amount of effort, preparation and quality of class discussions, presentations and performances. Many studies I read touched on this idea that increased interest and engagement would result in higher student participation, achievement, and student morale. Adams (1996) reported that the students he interviewed claimed their increased motivation and success was a result of being more interested in the material being taught and having some personal responsibility in deciding what that material should be. Berber

and Brover (2001) noted the increase in student motivation and achievement when educators simply asked what questions the students had (related to a topic) and designed instruction based on those questions. De Jesus, de Souza, Teixeira-Dias and Watts (2005) grouped chemistry students based on the questions and interests they had, designed units of study based on those questions and interests. They too noted when a student addressed his or her own question, he or she was more motivated to learn than if the educator assigned the question. Brown's (2002) article on Mark Springer's model of self-directed learning also clearly states the positives of using student interest to motivate learners and help them to achieve the levels of understanding prescribed by states and districts. Brown cites the students' positive attitudes toward learning and the high level of discussions as direct results of Springer's involvement of the students and their interests when creating a curriculum for the year. I could not be more pleased with the drive and initiative my students displayed throughout this study.

On a more difficult note, did this increase in motivation lead to more meaningful learning? I struggled with this question at great length through the entirety of this study. The struggle comes from one simple question that blossoms into many different avenues of thought: What is meaningful learning? At the onset of my research, I defined meaningful learning as depth. As a learner went deeper into material and content, the more meaningful it would be to the learner. Unfortunately, this thought process was clouded as the students and I interacted, learned and arrived at new thoughts on meaning. What was meaningful for the state and district turned

out to be very different than what the students and I took as meaningful learning. For me, the idea of meaningful learning as depth has evolved into importance to the learner. Some might question this thought saying that these are two very different concepts; however I ask, "If the material isn't important to you, you find no interest or excitement towards the topics being learned, how meaningful can it be to you?"

Tough (1971) claimed that adult learning is initiated based on need and desire. Both of these concepts involve a measure of importance to the learner. What is needed or desired by the learner is important to the learner. Ultimately, what is meaningful learning is different for each person. The educator may see the meaningful learning as the depth of material being learned or the non-content specific skills (talking, communicating, respect towards another, compromise, etc.) the students acquired through this process. What is important and meaningful for the students may be the content of the course aligned to their interest, or it may be the fact that the teacher valued his or her students' opinions and desires enough to cooperatively design a course of study.

Harada and Yoshina (2004) stated that it is important to "reflect on one's own process of learning and new understanding gained, as well as to pose new questions" (p. 23). After reflecting on my own learning and new understanding gained, I find myself filled with many more questions I would like to investigate. This idea of meaningful learning certain needs to be given more thought and exploration, however at this point I feel confident in saying that during this study, my students and I both gained knowledge that was important and meaningful to each of us.

Summary and Conclusion

The children in my study displayed an increase in motivation through the implementation of self-directed learning practices. This was displayed in the results of the surveys, the notes of my daily log, and the interviews I conducted with the focus group. Enthusiasm grew especially high in the more theatrical activities of the unit the students planned. When asked what part of the unit they enjoyed the most, the students overwhelmingly claimed that the control they had over the unit led to their enthusiasm and higher levels of motivation. They claimed that because they were able to decide what, how and when content was learned, they were more enthusiastic towards their learning.

While the students displayed a heightened sense of motivation, I did not note an increase in the depth of material learned. The student work I collected showed me a satisfactory level of understanding. The posters, essays, journal entries and performances completed by the focus group did show an increase in the amount of work completed and a slight increase in depth from my two low students (Students One and Four), but for the most part there was no great change in depth from the other students. This is not to say that I am disappointed or that this technique was a failure. The students did perform to grade level expectations. The students also exceeded my personal expectations during the performance of their play, however I did not see an overall or great change in the depth of work completed by my students. Perhaps I would have noticed more of a difference had I observed only low achieving students, but being that my focus group was comprised of low, medium and high

achieving students, I felt that as a group they continued to perform at grade level expectations.

This method of instruction was beneficial to my fifth grade class. The self-directed learning model was influential in the increase of motivation in my students. The participants of the study performed at grade level expectations. These are results that any educator would deem a success. The participants of the study were able to articulate, "Why do we have to learn this?" My students selected, planned, implemented, assessed and reflected content material they deemed important to them. Earlier I had asked, " When do students begin to become life-long learners? Should this type of education take place only in a high school setting?" At the conclusion of this study, I say students become life-long learners when they take charge of their learning. Through my study, I've realized that even young students, such as my fifth graders, can take control and direct their learning. Yes, they needed assistance, suggestions on activities, probing questions, locating and acquiring materials, however this is no different than adults wanting to learn something new such as a foreign language or home improvements. All learners require some level of guidance, a suggestion or a point in a certain direction, and this was no different for my students. With my guidance and suggestions, my students were motivated to learn material they had chosen and performed to grade level expectations.

Adams (1996) studied the effect of student and staff cooperation on the motivation and achievement in the students. He found that when the students worked cooperatively to create the authentic assessments, students performed at a higher

level. While my students did not perform at higher than grade level expectations, they did meet the expectations for their work. Hargrove (2005) had noted that once second grade students were allowed to make choices about their learning, they "exhibited greater persistence, drive, interest, creativity, and more dynamic creation of product" (p. 39). When my students were allowed choices in the content, delivery and presentation of material, enthusiasm and motivation increased, as did the number of assignments completed. Compared with these studies, the implementation of the self-directed model of instruction I implemented was successful. My students displayed a heightened sense of motivation and performed to grade level expectations. My students mimicked the successful behaviors cited in the studies I used in preparation for this study.

Recommendations

Through this study, there are many possible research avenues to pursue. In the future, I plan to implement a similar model of instruction in a primary grade level to see the effects with younger students. Would these students be developmentally ready for such a model of instruction? As I grow professionally and begin to teach at other grade and developmental levels, I plan to carry out this model of instruction into those various settings. Next year, I am teaching third grade. It would be interesting to see the effects of self-directed learning at this level. Would students, at that level, be able to negotiate and compromise? Would the planning phase of this model be similar or would younger students require more support and direction? Knowing that

this model is successful at the fifth grade level, I am excited at the opportunity to incorporate these practices into a younger setting.

Another avenue I would like to pursue would be to compare the effect of this model on high achieving students versus low achieving students. While I noted that the low achieving students of my focus group did complete assignments on a more regular basis, I did not notice a significant change in motivation or depth of learning from my higher students. My higher students performed well previous to the implementation of the self-directed learning model. It would be interesting to study the effect this model has on a low group of students. Perhaps this may lead to strategies educators could use for students that have little to no interest in the material being learned.

Finally, I would suggest studying this model with a larger number of student participants. My study focused on the impact self-directed learning would have on six students. This is a very small sample of the students I see from day to day. Observing the impact on a larger population would seem the next logical step in this study. While data management may be difficult, identifying the potentials for this model on a whole class scale does seem to come next. As I started this study observing the individual students, the mood, motivation and thoughts of the entire class were not documented and evaluated. Currently, I can state that this model of instruction is beneficial for the individual students. I would anticipate that this model would also be beneficial for the class, however further research would be needed to justify this claim.

It is my recommendation that the self-directed learning model be implemented in the intermediate levels of elementary schools. With the proper guidance and structure, students have the ability to decide what they want to learn and how to display that growth of knowledge. I'm not saying educators should disregard the content, curriculum, or standards of their districts and states. On the contrary, educators should help the students stick to these standards and expectations while also pursuing the knowledge students desire. By asking the students what they already know, one can avoid redundant classes. By asking the students what they want to know, one can create a classroom where the students are motivated and willing to complete work at grade level expectations. All students, no matter the age, feel pride and motivation when they are in charge of their learning or when an educator is interested in what the students want to learn. This cooperation builds a relationship of trust and hard work between educator and student. When the students feel that their thoughts are important, they become motivated. When the students are motivated, they complete assignments and perform to our (teacher and student) expectations.

Motivated learners performing at grade level expectations; this is the goal of all educators. This is my goal for myself as a researcher and a classroom teacher. My students planned, pursued and presented content they deemed important and that I helped align to district and state standards. Now at the end of my study, we can look back and say that we've successfully met our goals.

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Parent/Guardian Consent Form (Cover Letter)

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Chuck Conway. I am currently completing my Masters work in the Childhood Education department at SUNY Brockport. I am also your child's Language Arts teacher. I am researching the effects of self-directed learning practices in an elementary classroom. As part of this project, your child will work in small groups to create topics of investigation during the Language Arts classes. The students will then narrow these topics to create a general idea, or topic, for the class to study. This topic will be based on student input and interest. At the same time, I will be aligning the instruction to the state and district requirements (business letters, persuasive essays, non-fictional reading, multi-genre readings, etc.) to the topics chosen. All students will participate in the classroom activities. I am seeking to collect data from this work for my study.

If you grant consent for your child to participate, she or he will be involved in the data collection using the following:
- Students will complete surveys and questionnaires to evaluate the practices implemented.
- Field notes and observations will be collected throughout the implementation to determine the effectiveness of practices as well as student involvement.
- Student work will be analyzed and possibly copied to evaluate the practices.
- The data collected will be kept secure in a locked file cabinet.
- All data collected will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study.

The attached Guardian Consent Form includes information about your child's rights as a project participant, including how I will protest your and your child's privacy. Please read the form carefully. If you are willing for your child to participate, please indicate you consent by signing the attached statement.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.
Most sincerely,

Charles E. Conway III

Appendix B:
Consent for Self-Directed Learning Study
Parent/Guardian

1. I understand that my child/ward will participate in the research to study the effectiveness of the self-directed learning model. The research includes:
   - Students will complete surveys and questionnaires to evaluate the practices implemented.
   - Field notes and observations will be collected throughout the implementation to determine the effectiveness of practices as well as student involvement.
   - Student work will be analyzed and possibly copied to evaluate the practices.
   - The data collected will be stored in a locked file cabinet.
   - All data collected will be destroyed one year after completion of the study.
2. The results of this research may be published or presented at professional conferences. The following steps will be taken to protect the confidentiality of the child's identity and the information he or she has contributed.
   - All names and any other personally identifiable information will be deleted from all written documents.
   - Students will be identified by number, age and gender only and no reference will be made to the school that your child attends.
   - All work completed by your child will be kept in a locked file cabinet.
   - All data collected will be destroyed one year after completion of the study.
3. Participation in this research study is voluntary. If I do not give permission for my child to participate in the study, my child will not be penalized in any way. My child may withdraw from participation in the research study at any time during the project and will not be penalized in any way. I can contact Charles Conway at _____ at any time with my questions about the project.
4. I will be informed of any significant new information that may affect my willingness to grant consent for my child to participate in the project.

Please check one of the following, remove this lower portion from the rest of the sheet and return it in the attached envelope.

_____ Yes, I hereby consent to allow my minor child/ward, _____, to take part in the research project directed by Charles Conway and sponsored by the Department of Education and Human Development at SUNY Brockport.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

____ No, I do not hereby consent to allow my minor child/ward, _____, to take part in the research project directed by Charles Conway and sponsored by the Department of Education and Human Development at SUNY Brockport.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

I, (Principal's Name), Principal of the (School Name) Elementary School, (School District), grant consent for the students of Mr. Charles Conway's classes to participate in the research project specified below.

Mr. Conway is researching the effects of self-directed learning practices in an elementary classroom. As part of this project, the children of his classes will work in small groups to create topics of investigation during the Language Arts classes. The students will then narrow these topics to create a general idea, or topic, for the class to study. This topic will be based on student input and interest. At the same time, he will be aligning the instruction to the state and district requirements (business letters, persuasive essays, non-fictional reading, multi-genre readings, etc.) to the topics chosen. All students will participate in the classroom activities.

The children will be involved in the data collection using the following:
- Students will complete surveys and questionnaires to evaluate the practices implemented.
- Field notes and observations will be collected throughout the implementation to determine the effectiveness of practices as well as student involvement.
- Student work will be analyzed and possibly copied to evaluate the practices.
- The data collected will be kept secure in a locked file cabinet.
- All data collected will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study.

Principal Signature: _____ Date: _____

Statement of Informed Consent

To be read to Fifth Grade Students:

My name is Mr. Conway. I am a graduate student at SUNY Brockport. I am studying how children react to student-directed learning. During this research project, students will work together to decide a topic to learn more about. At the end of this project, students will create projects and presentations that will demonstrate what they have learned. During the project, students will be asked to reflect on how they feel about this style of teaching.

I will ask you to complete some surveys and answer some questions. I will take notes and look at some of your work. Some of your work may be copied, but don't worry, I won't have your names on these items.

If you decide to participate in this project, I will only use numbers instead of your names when I share the data and results with others. Your parents/guardians have given their permission for you to take part in this project, but it's up to you to decide if you want to. If you want to, but change your mind later, you can tell me you changed your mind. It is okay to change your mind at any time.

If it is okay with you to participate in this project and for me to share results with others, please write your name below. Below your name, please print the date.

Thank you very much,

Mr. Conway
_____

I give my permission for Mr. Conway to do his project with me, ask me questions about the teaching style, share my work and results with others and to write about my experiences.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E:
Protocols for Administering Surveys

- Surveys were administered to each focus group member on four separate occasions, the end of weeks 1, 3, 5, and 7.
- Surveys were administered during student "free time" so as to not to interfere with class work.
- Students were allowed as much time as needed to complete the surveys.
- Appendix F is a copy of the "Start of Unit" survey that was administered at the end of the first week of this study.
- Appendix G is a copy of the "Mid-Unit" survey that was administered at the end of weeks 3 and 5.
- Appendix H is a copy of the "End of Unit" survey that was administered at the conclusion of this study.
- No identifiable names were to be placed on the survey. Instead, each focus group student was given a number (1-6). This was his or her number to place on each of the four surveys. This protected their identity while still allowing me to identify which student completed a specific survey.
- Prior to passing out the surveys to the focus group students, I met with the group and read each question on the survey to them. I then allowed them to ask questions to clarify the survey before sending the students back to their desks to complete the surveys.
- Students were instructed to write on the back or a separate sheet of paper if they required more room to answer a question.
- Completed and collected surveys were placed into a locked file cabinet. They reside there when not being analyzed or used for the purpose of this study.
- All surveys are to be destroyed one year after the completion of this study.

Focus Student Number: _____

Directions: Circle the answer that best describes how you feel.

1. How excited are you about the planning we are doing right now?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	A little excited	Excited	Very Excited

2. How much do you feel you have learned about planning this unit?

1	2	3	4
I've learned nothing	I've learned very little	I've learned some	I've learned a lot.

3. How important is planning this unit to you?

1	2	3	4
Not important	A little important	Important	Very Important

4. How well do you think the groups are working?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	They work okay	They work well	They work great

Explain why you chose your answer for number four.

_____

_____

_____

5. What are some things we are doing well?

_____

_____

_____

6. What are some things we could be doing differently?

_____

_____

_____

Focus Student Number: _____

Directions: Circle the answer that best describes how you feel.

1. How excited are you about the topic we are covering right now?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	A little excited	Excited	Very Excited

2. How much do you feel you have learned about this topic?

1	2	3	4
I've learned nothing	I've learned very little	I've learned some	I've learned a lot.

3. How important is this topic to you?

1	2	3	4
Not important	A little important	Important	Very Important

4. How well do you think the groups are working?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	They work okay	They work well	They work great

Explain why you chose your answer for number four.

_____
_____
_____

5. What are some things we are doing well?

_____
_____
_____

6. What are some things we could be doing differently?

_____
_____
_____

Focus Student Number: _____

Directions: Circle the answer that best describes how you feel.

1. How excited are you about the topic we are covering right now?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	A little excited	Excited	Very Excited

2. How much do you feel you have learned about this topic?

1	2	3	4
I've learned nothing	I've learned very little	I've learned some	I've learned a lot.

3. How important is this topic to you?

1	2	3	4
Not important	A little important	Important	Very Important

4. How well do you think the groups are working?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	They work okay	They work well	They work great

Explain why you chose your answer for number four.

_____

_____

_____

**Now I want you to think about the entire unit you and your classmates just planned and carried out. We are now at the end of your unit of study.

Directions: Circle the answer that best describes how you feel.

5. How much do you feel you have learned during this unit?

1	2	3	4
I've learned nothing	I've learned very little	I've learned some	I've learned a lot.

6. How much do you feel you accomplished during this unit?

1	2	3	4
I've done nothing	I've done a little	I've done some	I've done so much

7. How well do you think the groups worked?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	They worked okay	They worked well	They worked great

Explain why you chose your answer for number seven.

_____

_____

_____

8. What are some things that went really well with this unit?

_____

_____

_____

9. What are some things that should have been done differently?

_____

_____

_____

10. Would you like to plan and carry out another unit? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____