

Public Abstract

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Title:A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF NEW ADULT READERS' PARTICIPATION IN A COMMUNITY READING PROGRAM

This research presents a phenomenological study of readers who participated in a community reading program. It examines participatory education in the context of a community reading project hosted by a public library. Narrative interviews, observation, and document analysis were used to find the meaning of participation and reading for the literacy students and other program participants and instrumentalists. The study is theoretically informed by critical studies in education and society. Interviews indicated that the students in this study have had past negative experiences with education. They said that the literacy classroom was a positive step in ameliorating those past experiences. During this project, the students engaged in group reading and the discussion of literary fiction. Public library systems across the nation have followed Seattle's celebrated "Seattle Reads" project by inviting the city to read and discuss a book. One purpose of these programs is to strengthen community ties and to create a sense of universal understanding through the discussion of literary fiction. The literacy students in this study participated in such a program. This study utilized phenomenological methods in order to find the meaning of participation in a community reading project for two major groups: program instrumentalists, and new and experienced readers. The interviews and observations revealed that reading out loud and discussing fiction was pleasurable for most of the literacy students. Regular participation in reading groups might give the students more tools to participate in society.