The Lived Experience of Middle School Students Engaged in Student Driven Inquiry

RESEARCH PROBLEM
Most educators know, if not through well-grounded research, then through intuition and experience, that capturing and maintaining student interest in academic work is critical to student engagement and achievement. Managing such a feat is a challenge. To this end, the purpose of this study is to glean an understanding of the lived experience of middle school students as they engage in Student Driven Inquiry (SDI), a student-centered form of Inquiry Based Learning, where student choice and voice is first. In SDI, students take the helm and steer their own learning by determining topic of study, designing the course of research, conducting academic writing, creating relevant artifacts, and presenting findings to peers and teachers. Does the student ownership afforded in the SDI learning framework provide students with significant experiences of relevance, meaning, and authenticity in this particular academic pursuit?

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION
The middle school lived experience of engaging in Student Driven Inquiry will be examined through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This recently developed theory asserts that the highest, purest form of intrinsic motivation is made manifest when individuals relatedness, feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Feelings of autonomy are defined to include control of their environment and ownership of ideas, task and purpose. Students feel a sense of competence when they believe they can manage the work and challenge before them. Relatedness is the need to interact with and be connected to others. Consistent with Self-Determination Theory, we will consider the student lived experience of SDI with a focus on the extent to which it promotes intrinsic motivation.

RESEARCH METHOD
This study will use the phenomenological research method, a qualitative human science (van Manen, 1990) featuring tools and strategies of analysis gathered through participant interviews and researcher observation. This method is particularly appropriate for an exploration of the essence of the lived experience of the individual (van Manen, 1990). A phenomenological research approach will illuminate a more holistic view of the experience of SDI, including the intentions within the undertaking (Sokolowski, 2000), something other methodologies might not afford (Saevi & Foran, 2012).

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES
The qualitative findings in this study may include specific themes emerging within student perspective and behavior, which will complement the large volume of existing quantitative data on Inquiry Based Learning. Themes that may surface include:

- satisfaction
- discernment
- challenge
- decision-making
- new learning
- ownership

- inspiration
- perseverance
- sharing
- collaboration
- problem-solving
- future plans

REFERENCES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: I am grateful for the on-going expertise, support and guidance of Christine Bruce, Mary Ann Harlan, Sylvia Edwards, and Clarence Maybee.