

## **Abstract**

This qualitative action research study documents the lived and reported experiences of twenty-two 6<sup>th</sup> grade students and their environmental science teacher as they engaged in student-directed activities, including journal writing and reflecting, small-group activities, and a small-group project. A large part of the research study revolved around social dialogue and student interaction, peer-tutoring, and small-group activities. These activities were included in hopes of promoting more student-directed understanding of environmental science concepts.

Results of participant observations, surveys, interviews, and quantitative assessments, suggest small group work can encourage peer tutoring which can enhance understanding of material. This enhancement did seem to increase as students gained more experience with small groups and group discussions, in addition, authentic learning activities provided better opportunities for reflection and discussion, again, enhancing better understanding of the science concepts being taught.

The researcher questioned the feasibility of journal writing, with ample time given for discussions in groups and subsequent reflection by students, throughout the year, due to time restriction. Difficulty in managing many small groups during projects was also addressed by the researcher as an area that needed checklists specific for each group to help to complete each step of the project successfully. The researcher further discovered that discussions in small groups often needed to be guided by the instructor through the use of open-ended questions and monitoring.