Abstract

This qualitative research study examined the observed behaviors and reported experiences when alternative high school freshmen read pertinent young adult literature and used new technologies like wikis and podcasts to discuss and interact with the literature in the conducting of literature circles. The author set out to increase motivation to read in the students by creating a third space, a place both literal and metaphorical in which students’ comfort levels are nurtured by various components.

Fifteen alternative high school students acted as participants in the study, which was conducted at a rural high school with a population of approximately fourteen hundred. While these students are not targeted for special education, most are disaffected, have behavioral issues, and have difficulty “fitting in” with the general population. Many test proficient in reading and writing, but simply do not have much interest in doing either one; in fact, most are oppositional when asked to do assigned work.

The researcher found that in addition to the variables employed in the study, other factors became important to the success of the class’s efforts. Because of their aversion to school and their perceived regimentation of its authority, students benefit from the ability to have time to play when new tools and concepts are introduced, the time to speak “true words” either related or
unrelated to the curriculum, and the fostering of a comfortable environment in the classroom. In addition, the researcher concluded that students do indeed benefit from a certain amount of choice, but might become ambivalent when too much choice is introduced.