ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study uses Autobiographical Inquiry to examine a ninth-grade class of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students in an urban high school in eastern Pennsylvania. The study documents the observed behaviors and reported experiences of these ESOL students as they participated in autobiographical inquiry in the classroom. The students were asked to keep daily journals in response to questions eliciting their opinions; construct a timeline of their educational experiences; and participate in Language Arts activities designed around the essential question, “Who Am I?” The highlight of the research came as the class participated in a district-wide “Young Authors’ Celebration.” The students wrote autobiographical poetry and fabricated papier maché masks as a metaphor for the way they viewed themselves. The poetry and masks were displayed during a public event. Students completed surveys about their attitudes toward the classroom, the school, and their experiences during the study. The observations from this study provided insights for the teacher to reflect on her teaching methods and attitudes, and to gain the flexibility needed to reach the students on a daily basis. She discovered that project learning was an enjoyable and effective experience for students and teacher alike, and that many of the issues she interpreted solely as struggles with language acquisition were essentially normal, teenage angst amid the search for personal identity.