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What U.S. K-12 Educators Think About the Sudbury Approach: A Mixed Methods Study

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Proposal

A major contribution of this paper is to discuss to what extent democracy is practiced in K-12 schools in the United States. However, this study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to see the correlation between these two traditions. For the quantitative part of our study, we will use the scale which has been developed to examine the beliefs and attitudes of principals and teachers regarding the readiness of the implications of Sudbury Approach. As for the qualitative part, we chose constructivist version of grounded theory proposed by Charmaz (2000) and ethnographic case study. By using constructivist version of grounded theory, we would like to understand participants’ experiences and generate theoretical insight into the participants’ experiences and by using ethnographic case study, we will employ various methods such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews (including individual interviews and focus groups), and documents/artifacts. This triangulated data collection will enhance internal validity of the study.

The Sudbury philosophy is based on Aristotle, who argues that every human being is naturally curious, thus the Sudbury model relies on the belief that learning is an innate part of living and that people learn best when the motivation comes from within instead of from external influences like parents or teachers (Huang, 2014). At schools that adopted such practices, there are no classes imposed by staff members or parents but rather need to be initiated or asked for by students themselves (Greenberg, 1995). This kind of learning is called “student initiated learning” (Huang, 2014, p. 36) and can be observed in childhood development already. Sudbury philosophy considers for instance a baby struggling to be able to walk and talk, and suggests that the baby does not quit until it is finally able to take its first steps and pronounce its first words. Sudbury approach claims that this inherent motivation to learn and develop does not end just by reaching school age (Huang, 2014).

Sudbury schools are based on the beliefs that 1) children already have the main behaviors needed in adulthood, and 2) having full democratic rights in childhood is the best preparation for life in a democracy. Democratic education is an educational ideal in which democracy is both a goal of the schools and an instruction used in schools. It brings democratic values to the school and can include self-determination as well as values of justice, respect and trust (Huang, 2014).
References
Huang, V. (2014). Laying the foundations for democratic behavior - a comparison of two different approaches to democratic education. *Journal of Unschooling & Alternative Learning, 8*(15), 29-68.