

ADOLESCENT INTERVIEW

Interview Subject and Context

“Aileen” is a 15-year-old El Salvadorian-American female. She has been classified as ESOL at a school in Alexandria since she was in 2nd grade. She is now in 8th grade and is still classified as ESOL Learner. Her teacher noticed that she have some difficulty dealing with long text and her “shyness” seem to be a roadblock in expressing herself in class. This also seems to be the reason why she does not seek help as needed when interacting with her textbook. The teacher wants to help her find ways to be more vocal and engaged in class. She agreed that doing an interview with Aileen might help her find ways to connect with and make her more comfortable in learning the text used in the class.

I interviewed Aileen on Friday, October 8, 2010 after school from 2:30-3:00. We discussed Aileen’s interests, her experiences at school, the reason why she was in the ESOL class, and her view of herself as a reader. Aileen was helpful with her responses but she was a little passive with her replies. I felt she was anxious as to what extent the interview is being done for. When we talked about her interests, it seems that she has limited interest in terms of after school activities. I had to give her examples of things other kids her age do afterschool to peg her responses to.

Interview Findings

Psychological/Motivational

Aileen told me she views herself as an “ok” reader. She mentioned that she does not like reading lengthy texts or books. Although she will attempt to do her school work, she admitted that if it’s “too long” she just does not feel like doing it. She feels that school reading is fine as long as it is not too lengthy because it gets boring. She admitted that she has problem reading especially when it comes to pronunciation of certain words. She also told me that when she encounters words that does not make sense to her, she just skip it, especially when it is coming from long texts. I asked her if she uses any strategy to find out the words she has problems with and she said no. When asked if she go to the teacher for help or clarification, she honestly

admitted that she is too shy to do that. She did say though that she feels she has a good relationship with her teachers.

Aileen told me that she does not really read much at home. She said she will read about 20 minutes or so when she has time. But, she honestly said that she does not really have much time to read because she always have homework or has to do something else. She did not elaborate on what other things she has to do.

Music seems to be the only interest that Aileen has at the moment. She is into Latin-Spanish music. She is not into reading magazines or any chapter books that most teens follow through in a series. Her friends are mixed and she is member of an after school club—College Partnership—that checks out college schools. I asked her if she knows what she wants to do in college or what school she wants to go to, but she said she does not know yet. I inquired if she does a lot of college pamphlet reading for the universities but she did not really give me a clear response as to what they do in that club. She was not volunteering much information after several attempts and prompts. I went back asking if there is anything in particular that she is interested in doing after going to their club meetings and she said she might consider nursing. I told her about my sister who is a nurse and the great school around the tri-state area that she might be interested in reading about.

I also asked Aileen if she is into the whole vampire thing that is such a trend right now and she passively said she is but she does not read the books. I told her that most movies based on books are better in the book version than the movie version and she might like to try reading and she if it is true for her. She was not really enthusiastic about that suggestion.

Sociological

Aileen's parents are first generation Americans. She has one older brother who is in the same grade as she is and a younger half-sister. She told me that when she was 2-years old, her biological mother brought her and her brother back to El Salvador. They stayed there until she was 8 years old. They came back to the U.S. when she was in 2nd grade and by then she was struggling with learning English. When asked if she sees her parents reading at home, she said that her mother will read books in Spanish and her dad never really read for leisure. She mentioned that her dad owns his own contracting company and that it took away much of his time that he does not have time for reading. At home, they primarily speak Spanish. I asked if

she has family members who live nearby and she said none and that she does not really see much of her relatives.

I went back and inquire about her friends. She mentioned that her group of friends only converse in English. They do hang out sometimes and go to the school library. Her friends are primarily from the College Partnership club that she goes to.

Aileen mentioned that she goes to the library when she needs to look for information for her school projects. She checks out books and likes to read with friends from time to time. She said her mother takes her to the public library often because her younger sister loves going there. She said she had bought books in the past but just does not have time to read.

At school, Aileen said that she likes doing choral reading because it is “comfortable” for her and it helps out with words she struggle pronouncing. She emphasized that if the text was not long, it will be better.

Linguistic

Aileen felt that living in El Salvador did contribute to her English problems. She said that her struggle with understanding what the text is about has something to do with how she cannot pronounce/read a particular word and this affects her understanding. She does not think she has low reading skills, she just thinks she has problem with some words and understanding “some stuff”.

I asked Aileen if it will help if the words in the text she is reading are simple and it was not too long, and she replied that it might help with her finishing the reading and doing the homework that goes with it. She emphasizes that if the text were shorter, she thinks it would not be much of a problem. She also said that she does not really like reading the textbook and journal writing, and especially homework that involves a lot of reading.

Connections to the Literature

Aileen admitted that her main struggle with revolves around text comprehension especially when there are unfamiliar words or words that are hard to pronounce. She further explained that in general, if the text is too long it discourages her reading it. Same goes if the homework assigned requires reading a lot of text. Aileen seem to be a girl who can be engaged in reading if given texts that she can relate to and she finds within her reading comfort. Being in the ESOL criterion since 2nd grade, the teacher should keep in mind that she has struggle with text comprehension and should give her alternative text, aside from the textbook, that covers the information she needs to learn in a shorter text format. This seem to be the turn-off for her—text structure that “appears” too long.

Psychological/Motivational

Aileen mentioned that they use a textbook in class and this is the only source use for journal writing and homework. Often times she finds the text long which outright disengages her into reading. Brozo and Simpson (2007) stated that a text is not difficult or easy but rather difficult or easy relative to a person’s abilities, enthusiasm and perseverance. Obviously, the text offered in class is not something that peaks Aileen’s enthusiasm for reading and might not even meet her reading ability which does not help with motivating her to read and learn.

Motivation is another area that Aileen can improve on. When asked if she reads for pleasure, she immediately responded that she tries to but she does not have time. I feel that if she can be engaged enough to read using other text choice, she will find time to read and subsequently expand her vocabulary and improve her text comprehension ability. Aileen’s attitude and enthusiasm towards reading is lacking because the text offered at school does not reach out to her. Researchers have discovered that the books youth would prefer to read are often scarce to non-existent in schools (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). According to Schiefele (1999) personal interest plays a role in increasing student’s interest in reading as this deal with the reader’s personal identification with the content of text. Studies have shown that when students read texts related to their interests, they processed information at deeper levels and comprehend text better than when the texts were not related to their interests (Krapp, 1999; Renninger, Hidi, & Krapp, 1992; Schiefele & Krapp, 1996).

Taking into consideration that Aileen is still an English Language Learner, her disciplinary teachers should make every effort to get her interested in the textbook topic and try

to incorporate alternative texts that she can use at her own reading level (Sadoski, Goetz, & Rodriguez, 2000; Schiefele, 1999; Wade, Schraw, Buxton, & Hayes, 1993). Furthermore, her reading engagement as it correlates to her being an ELL student necessitate that her teachers provide texts relevant to her life and experiences to get her hooked towards reading. Interests are modes of self expression (Taboada, Guthrie, & McRae, 2008) and if majority of the topics and texts students encounter at school are irrelevant to their world their self-efficacy as a learner will be compromised. When connections between ELL students' interests and reading are established, it becomes easier to make build engaging classrooms for students like Aileen that makes them want to read.

Sociological

According to Vygotsky, social and cultural factors are important in the development of intelligence and that though individual learning takes place, social learning is essential to cognitive development (Cash, 2008). Interaction helps learners explore and build their knowledge base in a social environment. Teachers who think of reading as a social event understand the importance of social interaction and collaboration in the classroom (Taboada, Guthrie, & McRae, 2008). Aileen herself mentioned that she likes the choral reading they do in class and the small group works. When social interaction is set up around the text in the classroom, teachers can take advantage of this literacy situation and introduce different strategies that engage the students into interchanges and dialogues. Youth in disciplinary classrooms should be encouraged to build shared meanings of information and concepts through numerous formal and informal interactions with peers and teachers (Brozo & Simpson, 2007).

The primary language used at home is Spanish but Aileen uses English in and out of school. Aileen indicated that she goes to the public library for multiple reasons—one being to meet up and read with friends. As an ELL who does not use English to communicate at home, this is great because any interaction outside school is motivating. When students come together to share their learning and build upon one another's thinking as they seek to understand text these become a vehicle for self motivation. Research has shown that library use is a powerful predictor of reading achievement and motivation (Guthrie & Greaney, 1991). Public library visit should be done more since children and adolescents perceive the public library as a place where they can engage in literacy activities of their own choosing (Alvermann, Young, & Green, 1997)

which can then increase their self-efficacy as readers. Library visit is something that Aileen should keep up doing since she does not really read and use the English language at home.

Choral reading is one activity that Aileen likes because it helps with her pronunciation of words and she feels comfortable doing that. One activity that Aileen might benefit from is multiple groups and multiple text reading which involves student-directed, cooperative learning groups for reading and sharing multiple sources (Burns, 1998). This will allow for Aileen to participate in meaningful literacy tasks and be exposed to different text sources while still being in that comfort zone of reading with the class. As Klingner & Vaughn (1996) said in their research, there is benefit of having ELLs collaborate using reading strategies that make them use the English language with their English-speaking peers.

Linguistic

Aileen had told me that she does not like working with long text because they are hard to read. She also mentioned that if she does not understand a word it oftentimes makes her not understand the text. She also mentioned that when that happens, she just skips that part. When I asked if she consults a dictionary or searches for it online, she said she does not. I asked her if she asks her teacher about it, she said she does not because she is shy. It is quite obvious that Aileen lacks attack strategies to help her in her reading pursuit. Endowing youth with cognitive strategies to improve their comprehension is the responsibility of all disciplinary teachers (Brozo & Simpson, 2007). Students need to be guided through direct, explicit instruction and modeling, and be given opportunities to apply the strategies they have learned until they can apply it independently (Cash, 2008). A wise combination of direct instruction and student-centered activity is the goal for which classroom teachers should strive as opposed to direct instruction (Dowhower, 2002) alone. This kind of instruction combination supports student-centered whole language.

ELL students like Aileen can benefit from a modified guided reading approach which provides them additional language learning opportunities (Avalos, Plasencia, Chavez, & Rascon, 2007). This can address the struggle to meet the linguistic expectations of school when it comes to “academic English” used in content areas.

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