

Teaching Adolescents - Spring 2011, USF, Education Department, South Campus

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Reflection on teaching adolescents,

As I began discussing with my classmates about different sections of this assignment, I learned from their experience that going to Sequoia High School in Redwood city, CA would be one of the best options. I live in South Bay near to Willow Glen High, Presentation High, Independence high and Santa Teresa High but I thought going to a new campus would not only be another unique experience but also more informative. My assignment partner is Julio Calles. He works in Sequoia High School and has many times talked to his classmates at USF about this school and its Latino population.

Group Observation:

I went to Sequoia High on Friday, April 15th at around 10:00 AM. After a short campus tour I learned about four different spots that students usually hang out. We had a chance to talk to one of school security staff in the campus. He recommended that main quad would be a very good area for our observation. We decided to stay in the main central quad and begin our formal one hour observation.

There were several groups of students in the quad and they looked to me fairly quiet. As the security authority accompanied us to there and stayed with us in the first few minutes

of our observation I asked him about the usual atmosphere of the quad and how students behave as they gather there. He said that the high school social setting makes the students be friendly to each other and usually behave well in the central and other main quads and they hang out. He also pointed out to some teachers who were among the crowds and mentioned that the teachers are also responsible for the security and disciplines of the quads in turn and usually two teachers are present to check the students in each quad. I was looking for the student groups with mixed socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural or gender members. Very soon I realized that almost %30 of these groups had equal gender members. Asian or Middle Eastern was not a big minority of this high school but there was almost a balance of Latino and White culture in the school. As I was observing briefly all groups to choose one for a more complete observation I asked Julio about the cultural difference of the students in the main quad with students who were hanging out in another quad. He and the security person both agreed that main quad is usually shared by students who are in sport teams and are usually considered athletes of the school while the other quad was usually shared by the students who were members of academic clubs like math or chemistry clubs. I also observed the friendly relationship of teachers and security staff of the school with the students while they were hanging out in the quad. I was very much surprised as I had never had this kind of observation experience in any high school. The greetings between the students and the staff were very informal and I learned that the staff was very successful in building up good relationships with the students. As I had many questions and concerns to look for in the crowd, Julio draw my attention to a student group which all in a sudden became louder and more energetic in their interaction. They

seemed to be a group of 10th graders and they were mix of girls and boys. A boy joined the group and offered a bouquet of roses to a girl in the group. He was very welcome and everybody looked to be happy. Cheers were very loud and made all other groups to pay attention to them celebrating the occasion with joy and perfect happiness. Julio and I decided to continue observing them. As girls usually like to show to other girls that they have been given roses it was a very smart act by the boy to show up in the group with a bouquet of roses to offer to his girlfriend or the girl that he was interested in. We also liked the simplicity of the occasion and tried to find out the relationship of this kind of clear act and the adolescence and social life of high school students. This simple approach was a sign of psychological needs of teens because the hormone level is high and those needs are great. As we observed them we decided to discuss the relationship between high school loves or romances and the risks of early pregnancy or venereal diseases. As we were discussing about how much adolescents tend to talk rather than listen we also observed that fact and found out that they mostly say what they want to say in their conversations and do not really follow each other's responds. Over all the level of energy among them was high but did not lead to any fight or misbehavior.

Group Interview:

We finished our group observation by noon and went to a conference room to interview 4 students. To my surprise Julio's son already 15 years old was a student of the same high school. He was able to help his father with making a group of 4 students for our interview assignment. His name is Bryan and is in 10th grade. He had asked 3 friends to attend with him our interview session who were already in front of the conference room when we

went there. They were a group of Latino students and I soon learned that they could be considered peers who usually hang out together.

Two girls: Stephanie and Yarelli

Two boys: Bryan and Mario

We agreed that I write about Bryan and Yarelli as Juilio writes about Mario and Stephanie.

The first section of the interview was about academic aspects of education and life:

The image of a typical Latino high school student I had in mind before going to this interview session was mostly Donna from our classroom readings and discussions. Very soon I learned that the socioeconomic situation of this group was very different. None of them suffered from a broken relationship in family and did not have to live with only mother or only father. They all informed us that had not experience divorce in their families between their parents. The economic situation of their parents also places them in the middle class level as the sociocultural situation of their parents showed signs of high level of education and educational goals and expectations in their families.

The average immigration history of our interviewees was above 15 years and as we began our questions with a set about academic goals, expectations and perspectives I learned that although they were born in the United States they had a deep cultural attachment to their Latino heritage. This attachment made them had specific perspectives and comments on education system of their high school. They believed there is usually a different set of expectations for Latino students which is lower than their comparable for white students. I prolonged our conversation in this section of interview. I remember that in our class discussion I was confused about a

White privilege and the fact around this idea. Our interview with this group opened another window and made me realize some of these facts. The students highly believed that their Latino background makes them usually be treated as students with less desire for learning, completing homework and taking tests. Since I am from an immigrant family and an immigrant myself (I reunited with my family in the United States when I was thirty years old.) I thought that when somebody has no problem with language they are not considered immigrants any more in a educational setting. The interview made this clear to me that linguistic borders do not only associate with the language but also with culture. The cultural background of a Latino makes him or her the be very popular among the other Latino students while not very welcome and accepted among the white students. The typical Latino students need to maintain he's on her popularity by acting according to their standards of their community. As they continued to speak I remember from some of our in class readings and discussions that “being Mexican means being popular, cutting classes, acting crazy,”.

This interview proved to me that the concept of culture essential to the development of the students’ “*multiple worlds model*” and that each world contain values and beliefs, expectations, actions, and emotional responses familiar to insiders of that world. (Adolescence World, Phelan).

As we continued our interview about their definition of a good teacher, all of them insisted on the ability of building deep relationships with the students. As I thought about their definition of a good teacher I realize the effect of the heavy weights of the fact that there is some white privilege in the education system of the United States. (According to CTC %72 of the public school teacher population in California in 2008 was white.)

One of our other main questions was about their desire for attending the college.

Although their answers were different from each other but they were all very well thought and smart. Yarelli said by attending college she can gain knowledge and be able to serve her community better. And Bryan's answer was to continue to learn for better life.

The second section of our interview was about social aspects of education and life:

As we asked the students about their interest in sports and their participation in sports clubs I realized that there was some kind of gender borders obvious in their answers as Mario and Bryan showed a deep interest in soccer but the girls including Yarelli that I was supposed to write about emphasized their interest in cheerleading. In the same time I also observed the effect of positive peer pressure as if Stephanie was already an established cheerleader but Yarelli was new to this sport and was obviously encouraged by Stephanie to join the cheerleading team of the school.

The other questions included their interest in online social networks, their memberships in any social club of the school or their community, and the music they usually listen to: when I compared Stephanie answers to Yarelli's answers I was not really very surprised. Their answers were really different from each other's but to know about adolescence life made me understand the scientific reasons for these differences. Each girl might have been in a different stage of maturity. As a 10th grader Stephanie talked about her membership in photography, safe program, Zumba and precollege program

clubs. Yarelli did not mention any club and I learned that I should pay a lot of attention to the difference between a 10th grader girl and a 9th grader girl.

The third section of the interview was about the family life of our interviewees:

our interviewees were asked if they believe in cliques in their high school.

All of them agreed upon existence of cliques and they were also aware of their belonging to one of the major ethnic and cultural groups of the school.

The other question that we made was if they constantly hung out with friends out of school. The two different answers of the girls once more drew my attention to the age importance of age difference of adolescence and their behaviors or thoughts are being analyzed. While Yarelli simply said she wanted to spend more time with her family at home after school time, Stephanie one year older than Yarelli said she enjoyed a lot hanging out with friends in malls or parties after school. Investigating upon these two answers made the most effective part of the last section of our interview. Stephanie feels a great need to seek out more social life outside her family and she talked about it. As girls usually reach full maturation age 17, this is most likely that Yarelli is still halfway through as an adolescent. She can still feel perfect just by staying with her family after school. I specially liked it when she used the term “homebody” to express her interest for staying home after school. Since the members of this selected group are also close friends they look at her and say this is also because you have a “cool family”.

In the end of the interview Julio and I asked them how they generally like Sequoia. They said they had already found it more laid back and relaxed community and they said there

is diversity in this high school which helps make it a good community. They said this is obvious that there are different ethnic and racial groups but they don't look for problems and they feel safe. They also compared their high school to other high schools of the district and mentioned that the presence of cliques is felt more heavily in other high schools. They said that minorities in those high schools are either with their group or with nobody. They said they were not Asian but they were cool with them! And the Asians were also not Latino but were cool with them. We also talked about my ethnic background and I had an opportunity to give them some information about my racial and ethnic specifications as I had also learned from them more usages of the term "cool". I told them that I am also not a Latino but Julio and I are cool with each other. We thanked them for their time and engagement with our interview assignment and ended the session at about 1:00 PM.