

SPED 413

Teaching Adolescents with Learning Problems

Adolescent Interview and Reaction Paper

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In order to gain insight for an adolescent who has a learning disability or an at-risk student, an interview was conducted to find out about the adolescent's school life, career goals and life goals. This was done in order to write a reaction paper on the views of the adolescent.

Permission to interview the teen was given both by the teen himself and his mother. Louis John* is a fourteen year-old adolescent male, of a low income single parent home. He is the third son for his mother. He goes to the Marverly Primary and Junior high school. He is in the eighth grade. The school is located in what is termed as a Ghetto area. He lives in Duhaney Park where there is a mixture of working class to poor families. His mother is a seamstress, but works periodically because of a medical condition. His father who does not live with him is a taxi driver. His two older brothers do low income work also, and his younger brother is in grade two in primary school. He went to one of the prominent primary schools where he found out that he has a learning disability. He is a gamer who loves to play cricket, football and basketball. He listens to Reggae, Dancehall and Hip Hop music. His favorite meal is rice and peas and stew pork.

In interviewing Louis he was a little shy in answering the questions. I had to let him know that I was not going to tell anyone about this interview other than my lecturer. He then went on to answer the questions. The interviewee described his school life as that he didn't like school, because it showed up his inabilities in reading. He did not have a connection to school; he just saw it as a place to pass his time since he didn't even do his GSAT and he was held back in his grade six class for a second year. He said that few teachers try to motivate him, because he feels that they judge him because of his disability. When asked how they can motivate him, he said that maybe they could give him one on one talks, help him privately with his work and listen to him more keenly. He said that they could try a different approach to help him understand and learn more. He stated that his peers motivates him because they understand him, and some of them help him with his task. Louis* said that he hates the subject English language, because he can't read well or write good stories. He likes math and computer class a lot, because he understands how to work out the problems. He likes computer class because he loves to learn about how the computer functions. When asked if he likes to learn something new his answer was sometimes, if whatever he was doing was interesting and not boring. He rarely does homework mainly because he sometimes does not understand it or his mother does not force him to do it. He doesn't study

for tests, because it doesn't spark his interest he says that no matter if he studies he is not going to pass them anyway. His grades are below average. When asked how he can improve his grades, he says that if he tries hard to read and understand he might make better grades. The interviewee, when asked do you think you if he has enough time for school, he said yes, because he thinks that if time was supposed to be added on he would get ,more frustrated because he is not learning anything already. The last year school Louis* said he missed 20-25 school days, because he was ill or he didn't get any bus fare or lunch money. When asked if he had repeated any grade his reaction was a little reluctant. I had to remind him again that I was not there to judge him and what he says to me nobody but my lecturer and me wereas going to view this. So then he told me that he repeated the sixth grade in which they deemed him not ready to take the GSAT in the first year and when the second year was completed they told him he could not sit the exams because it would affect their school records of good passes. He was left without a school placement, because neither the school nor his parents made provision for him. He said a lady that lived on his avenue had to take matters in her own hands and found a placement for him. When asked how he felt about this situation, he responded by saying bad, mainly because the teachers and his parents did not have his interest at hand. He felt stupid because he could not even take the exams after spending a second year there. He said that sometimes he just feels lonely. When asked if he has ever been suspended, his response was twice for fighting and cursing a teacher. He was probed to reveal why he fought; he said that the boy was pushing badness and he had to defend his self. The incident with the teacher wasn't probe. When asked about his educational goals, he had to be probed as to, the questions such as do you if he wants to improve your his reading and writing skills, he responded by saying yes. Another question was about passing the grade nine achievement test and his answer was yes. The interviewer had to point out that those where educational goals. After this he pointed out that he wanted to go to a technical school where he could get exposure to electrical engineering because he wanted to do something in that field. These questions concluded his school life section.

The next section was Career goals. The first question that was asked was about career goals. Louis* said that he wanted to go to Heart Trust NTA like a cousin who did electrical engineering there and then got a job at the power company. He also commented that the cousin migrated because he got a job overseas, because of his Heart certificate. When asked how he was preparing himself for this goal, his response was that he was not doing anything at the moment to fulfill this. He was probed to give suggestions of what he could do to achieve this goal. Hhe said that he wanted help with his reading so that he could pass his Grade Nine Achievement Test, so he could move on to a good technical high school. I then asked him if he had anyone to go to or a person that he could request this help from. He responded that his grandmother and the lady on his avenue could help him.

The last section was life goals. The interviewee was asked where he sees himself as an adult; he said that he was not looking that far ahead. I encouraged him that he needs to look to the future because it is expected to come and that we need to make plans for it because, if we didn't, it would make plans for us and sometimes we are likely not going to enjoy those plans. He then said that he wanted the certificate so that he could get a good job, where he could help out his mother. He was then asked how would he cope with setbacks in life. His response was that he does not know. I then asked him about the recent winner of The Voice, Tessanne Chin, and reminded him of the song that she auditioned with. This was Pink's "Try, Try". He also recited a few of the words. He then said when he has obstacles in life he would try to overcome them by trying over and over again until he can do it. When asked if he likes a challenge he said no, because challenges tend to show up his reading problem. When asked if he set goals for himself, he said not really, when asked why, he said that he has never gotten the opportunity to do so but now that he is due to sit the GSNAT exams he was going to do so now. When asked if he motivates himself his response was no, because no one around motivated him so he never felt motivated by himself. This concluded the interview.

My impression of the interview was that it brought me back to earth to let me see that there are many sides of this world, and sometimes I am guilty for judging people for staying in the scum and squalor. But when a child does not feel like they have nothing going in their favor they turn into adolescents who have just given up on life and it follows them through to adulthood. It pains my heart at times to hear teens being so negative, because I remember my years and these were not the mostly lovely or best years but I had a love for life and the wanting to achieve something if not everything. And now reflecting I can say that because I had positive people motivating me, I felt to be positive and also motivated myself. To tell the truth I was not the sharpest tool in the shed, but the motivation from teachers and family members led me to believe so that I could achieve.

Louis's overall mood just affected me so much because he was very shy and I could feel that he was somewhat uncomfortable speaking about himself. His answers were not solid. To me he felt hopeless and like no one cared. This interview shows me that as a teacher we are to sow good seeds and be there no matter what. We should show each child that they can he/she can achieve a place in this life and not just be leaves on tree that will quickly dry up and die, but to be roots that are firm and strong, no matter if there is a disability present. Each person should have the opportunity to fulfill his/her purpose in life, no matter how great or small, that purpose is. I was shocked at the fact that Louis had no goals or dream when he turns an adult. Even if it was to have a big house, shiny car and a whole lot of money would be acceptable to me. This whole interview just revealed to me that if an adolescent is not motivated, what can happen to them/him/her. They will just feel like

life is not for me them and good things are not for methem. He said that he feels alone, when it comes to his relationship with adults. His own parents are not in his life. The GSAT situation was an eye opener for me in that the teachers and administration saw it fit for him not to sit his exams because it would affect their good passes. His mother didn't even go and find out about what would happen if he didn't do his exams. When asked who he could go to for help with school issues he said his grandmother and the lady on his avenue. It wasn't his mother or a teacher at school. He felt that the teachers at his present school look at his disability rather than him, the individual. They let the disability become this person. I was glad when he found someone in his family that he really looked up to. I was happy when he quoted the verses of the Pink song and quickly picked up what he should do to overcome obstacles. Louis needs a lot of self-motivation training, because once an ounce of that is not there, it's hard for a person to move on and achieve a good life.

As a teacher, this has shown me that I must be on the lookout for students who are like Louis, who just feel like they are lost; no one cares and feel like they don't have a purpose in life. I must be that motivating factor in my classroom and also in my school, so that students like these are not left behind to the winds and tragedies of life. But to let them know that once you see your purpose and they weren't created just to be a "nobody" but to be someone. Even if it's by me creating strategies to get them involved, or getting other resource personnel to help them see their true potential. I think teachers signed up for a life of service in helping to mold the human race not by just only imparting the curriculum, but by making good social and emotional beings too.

Appendix
Questionnaire

Name:

Age:

Gender:

School:

Grade:

1. Do you like school? Why or why not?
2. Do you feel connected to your school? Do you feel as if you belong?
3. Do your teachers motivate you? Why or why not?
4. How can they motivate you?
5. Do your peers motivate you to come to school? Why or why not?
6. What is your best subject(s)? Why?
7. Do you like learning something new? Why or why not?
8. What is your worst subject(s)? Why?
9. Do you do homework? Why or why not?
10. Do you study for tests? Why or why not?
11. How are your grades?
12. What do you think you can do to improve your grades?
13. Do you feel like you have enough time for school? Why or why not?
14. In the last year, how many days of school have you missed? Why?
15. Have you ever had to repeat a year of school? Why?
16. Have you ever been suspended? Why?
17. What are your educational goals?
18. What do you want to do when you finish school? Why?
19. How are you preparing yourself for this right now?
20. Where do you see yourself as an adult?
21. If you have setbacks in life how do you plan to overcome these?
22. Do you like challenges? Why or why not?
23. Do set goals for yourself? Why or why not?
24. Do you motivate yourself? Why or why not?