

Running Head: "Case Study: Gonzalo"

The Gonzalo

Brigham Young University – Idaho

Education 410 – Literacy in the Content Area

Winter Semester, 2008

Meeting Gonzalo

When I first met Gonzalo during our first advisory class together, I greeted him thusly: “Hello, Gonzalo -----. I’m Jeffrey Jefferson.” Gonzalo immediately saw the humor in my greeting and he chuckled.

Gonzalo’s response was quick; he then asked, “What’s your real name?” I then properly introduced myself and we began our “courtship.” Gonzalo and I spent the next 18 minutes of the advisory period chatting and asking each other questions. (He was shy and I asked most of the questions.)

Gonzalo and I quickly built a relationship of trust. During our first meeting, we discovered that we both stem from hard-working parents and large families. We also discovered that we both share other non-academic similarities. Because of our similarities, Gonzalo and I shared a rapport.

Our relationship was equally friendly and professional. I treated Gonzalo as a friend and he treated me as a professional. Our conversations were never laborious and our time together was never unproductive. In short, Gonzalo and I edified and improved one another throughout the trimester.

Understanding Gonzalo, the Person

Gonzalo was born in Mexico. His parents immigrated to the United States many years ago. Gonzalo speaks fluent Spanish and English. His verbal and nonverbal communication skills are only lacking because English is not his first language. He speaks Spanish at home and English at school. He loves his parents, his siblings, his many close associates, and his schoolyard friends. He enjoys playing soccer and he listens to rap music and Mexican orchestral music.

While I tutored Gonzalo, his parents worked in order to support their large family. His father cut lumber at a lumberyard (or for a contractor) and his mother raised his siblings at home. Gonzalo was employed at a potato farm (or a potato processing plant).

Like many Mexican-Americans, Gonzalo believes employment is more valuable than education or graduation. In his mind, a job bagging potatoes yields a paycheck and a job at school yields a headache. Although his employment is important, his grades (and his ISAT scores) suffer as a result. His attendance also suffered, perhaps because of employment and other family obligations.

Understanding Gonzalo, the Student

During our trimester together, Gonzalo was a ninth-grade student at Madison Junior High.

Gonzalo dreaded coming to school, attending his classes, and completing most of his homework assignments. He would rather stay home or spend time with his friends than come to school. For Gonzalo, school is an obstacle and higher learning is an impossible consideration. He expressed a diminutive desire to finish school and no desire to attend a college or a university. Without proper guidance and without a positive, scholastic role model, Gonzalo may be classified as a “child at risk.”

Fortunately, he was neither aggressive nor disruptive; rather, he was often soft-spoken and passive. Conceivably, if he was bullied or provoked, he would fight rather than flee. In our time together, I never witnessed behavioral disabilities or social disorders.

Gonzalo was often lethargic and sluggish (most likely because he dreaded class). He was not intrinsically motivated to begin or complete his work. He preferred to remain idle, often excusing himself from his schoolwork. Without encouragement or motivation, he will not begin or finish most of his assignments.

With encouragement and supervision, Gonzalo was willing to work (even when he felt indolent). He accepted my assistance and he was grateful when I helped him begin or complete his assignments (although he never expressed his gratitude in words). I believe Gonzalo enjoyed my tuition more than his regular teachers' instruction.*

Approximately two weeks before our first introductions, I reviewed a copy of Gonzalo's ISAT scores. His scores were lower than average, but almost "proficient" for the subjects of reading, language arts, and math. In other words, according to his ISAT scores, Gonzalo's academic abilities were slightly below average. Without seeing his report cards or other assessments, one could estimate that Gonzalo earned average grades (C grades) or even below average grades (D grades).

According to his ISAT scores, Gonzalo's strength is mathematics—more specifically, visual mathematics, such as geometry. His reading skills were lacking and as a result, his language arts skills were lacking. Again, without proper guidance, and without a positive, scholastic role model, he may be classified as a "child at risk."

My Contributions and Tuition

I spent several weeks coaching and tutoring Gonzalo. The following list and explanations will briefly summarize what we accomplished together during these several weeks:

- We finished research assignments
- We worked through several algebraic expressions
- We finalized his notes for an upcoming speech
- We read magazine articles
- We discussed possibilities for his future

Gonzalo and I worked together in the library in order to finish a research assignment for his biology class. He needed to find some research materials and some online sources concerning the animal he had chosen for a research subject. Together, we searched the library shelves and searched the internet; then he finished his assignment. We finished a similar research assignment later in the trimester.

Throughout the trimester, Gonzalo often needed help completing his math homework.

We read from the assigned chapters of his math textbook and then worked through the assigned algebra problems. He was surprised when he realized that I too struggled to solve algebraic expressions.

Gonzalo and I finalized his notes for an upcoming speech. He had written his thoughts on paper and he was planning on simply reading this paper in order to “speak.” I encouraged him to reorganize his thoughts and rewrite his notes on a cleaner sheet of paper and also practice his delivery. After finalizing his notes, we stepped outside into the hall and practiced. Because a practiced speech is usually a better speech, he earned a B grade for his speech.

Gonzalo and I read many magazine articles. He avoided reading and he preferred to look at the pictures and ask, “What’s that?” I would often reply, “Well, I dunno. Look at the caption. What’s it say?” He even avoided reading the captions. Reading out loud was difficult for Gonzalo and he often avoided reading by showing his disinterest.

More and more, Gonzalo and I discussed the possibilities for his future. “The sky’s the limit,” I would counsel.

He often laughed with disbelief and replied, “I can’t do that,” or “I can’t go there.”

I repeated the best advice I could offer: “Dude, don’t belittle yourself. Don’t have a self-defeatist attitude.” I also repeated the words of my father: “*Can’t* can’t do anything. *Can’t* can’t build a bridge or run a marathon or fly a plane.”

I believe Gonzalo is capable of anything *if* he believes that he can accomplish his dreams. He is not predestined for mediocrity simply because he is not an “above average” or “superior” student.

Conclusions

I knew many students like Gonzalo in Woodburn, Oregon, where I attended elementary school, middle school, and high school. Many of my friends were Mexican-American students. I understand their culture. I understand the values and the sensibilities existing in the Mexican-American culture.

Gonzalo ----- is a good man, but a struggling student. He is morally stable, but scholastically unstable. He values his family and his friends, but he cares less for academics. If Gonzalo began to value his education as much as he values his loved ones, he would begin to enjoy academic success. Resultantly, he would complete his assignments and homework on time, his grades would recover, and his ISAT scores would improve. With the proper guidance of a positive, scholastic role model, Gonzalo is capable of success.

* Because I was not a full-time teacher at Madison Junior High, I was more friend than foe; I did not require assignments or appropriate grades; I was younger than his teachers and therefore more approachable; I was not a disciplinarian; and I was not confrontational.