

**Development in Learning: Psychosocial
Perspectives in Education
EEDUC 5122
Lesley University
March 15, 2004
Final Paper
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A student of color attends an affluent school that is mostly white where he is bussed to and from every day. This student was playing outside at recess with a child's golf set by himself. When the whistle blew as a signal to all students on the playground that it was time to line-up and go in from recess, this student moved very slowly. He didn't want to go in. Other students were running by telling him to clean up and that it was time to go in and some even volunteered to help him, but he didn't want their help. He displayed his unwillingness for help from others by yelling and threatening the other children. He screamed things like "Don't touch it!" and "I said leave it alone!" There were two Asian students who were older that tried to help him. He threw one of the students to the ground for touching his golf set and the other student who was about to touch the set, he ran over to him ready to face off. He got right into his chest and a teacher stepped in between. When the teacher tried to intervene by telling him to leave the other kids alone and to clean up, she put her hand gently on his shoulder this same student yelled, "Don't touch me! Keep your hands off me!" The teacher then threatened to bring him to the principal's office (control) if he kept up that behavior. He replied by saying he didn't care. The teacher continued to talk to the student by giving him other examples of ways in handling the situation with words rather than physical contact or violence, if he didn't want people touching his game. The teacher handed him his toys and then said "thank you" thinking this would encourage a kind word from the student in appreciation. He responded negatively by grabbing his toys from the teacher's hand and then proceeded indoors.

The psychoanalyst would say this young boy was experiencing a classic defense mechanism case of displacement and bullying. He felt too threatened that someone was going to take off with his toy, so he

decided he didn't want the other boys' help and started displaying bullying through physical harm and violence on others by throwing them down to the ground, yelling mean words and bucking up to them. The multiple intelligence theory would say this student exemplified good intrapersonal skills. He played with his golf set very well individually, but interpersonally, he needs more time to develop those skills. Socially he has to learn patience, cooperation and collaboration with his peers because he didn't want to share his game and yelled at the boys when they tried to assist him when cleaning up from recess.

Another male student was working on his writing research biography project with the computer. He was allowed to go to a search engine on the Internet to find pictures of his given person by typing in a few keywords. He inadvertently came across an inappropriate picture of a naked woman and began calling other children over to see it instead of click off the image and continuing his research. The teacher immediately reacted by making them return to their desks and that student was reprimanded and then lost all Internet privileges. The next day the teacher expressed that she'd received an email from this student's father stating that his son says he was not able to concentrate on any of his work and was being distracted by a fellow classmate adjacent to him. The father suggested that because of his son's disability and need for extra help in learning, that his son be removed from his arranged seating area if the other student continued to be a distraction. The teacher never called home to explain what took place with the Internet picture from the previous day in class because she has had many negative run-ins and demands with the father. The teacher expressed that the father was very controlling and was upset that this student lied to his father in order to divert trouble

from the prior day. This student blatantly lied to his father and accused another innocent peer of things that this student usually does to other students, such as joking around, making inappropriate sexual or way off comments like, "I eat pickle juice and pizza!"

This student craves attention and will do anything to get it. In this situation, systems theorists would say that the father has control and the boy feels threatened and intimidated by how his father would react to his behavior in school. Behaviorist would say this boy decided to displace the attention from his own situation and make up a story on a fellow classmate as a diversion. Reichians would say the boy is armoring himself by joking around because he felt threatened and didn't make a good choice when handling his situation. The psychoanalyst would say the boy was having a battle amongst his id and superegos. For some reason he needed that sexual gratification, but what he has learned from society and his conscious, it told him that he was making the wrong choice by staying on that picture from the Internet and that he shouldn't have called other students over to look. He didn't think ahead as to what the consequences would be for his actions. He didn't have control of his egos.

There was a female student, very bright and intelligent that has a medical issue of not being able to control her bladder. The teacher throughout intervals of the day, usually every hour, had to remind this student to take time out to use the girl's lavatory usually through a secret hand signal. Sometimes this student went willingly, most of the time she gave great resistance. The teacher appeared to mention it to her during inconspicuous times so her peers wouldn't take notice. Many times the teacher would just flash their sign language for bathroom and during those times of resistance or reinforcement, she would have to walk up to her and whisper to her in a firm but quiet

way that she needed to go use the lavatory. The teacher seemed to take notice of when this student needed to use the lav, by her body language and posture. Many times you could tell this student had to go, but for some reason, maybe embarrassment or fear of not making it to the lav, she wouldn't leave but rather stay in her seat or would walk toward the sink area within the classroom that was away from all her peers desks and just go on herself. The teacher pulled her aside and talked to her and gave her encouraging words on times she feels the need to go. She kept a change of clothes in her locker as a precaution.

This student seemed to start transitioning her frustration with an uncontrollable bladder and resistance with the teacher when asked to go to the lavatory to more and other arguments within the classroom outside of that particular situation. This student argued and was snappy with answers. She would over explain and continuously repeat her answer when we clearly should start the next topic. Basically she would "beat a dead horse."

One day I heard a classmate say really loud "Eewh, what's that smell!" when she was around. She didn't say anything but you knew she was embarrassed of her condition. You could tell this student's self-esteem was dwindling because she didn't really interact with her peers much within the classroom nor during outdoor recess. She stated that she hated recess and would often be found hanging out by herself, talking to teachers or leaning on the wall reading a book or drawing.

This student was dealing with a few defense mechanism issues such as regression and fixation. She may have felt stressed from not being able to make it to the lavatory on her own without being reminded and regressed back in development stages, or because of

her display of low self-esteem, she may not want to move on the next stage in growth. The constructivist Piaget would say she displayed withdrawals and signs of anxiety because she hid in the corner near the sink, her body posture and positioning tightened and she urinated on herself. Her self-esteem dwindled due to comments from fellow classmates even though they weren't aware of her condition. She also displayed self-seclusion during recess time and expressed that she didn't have any friends within the class, possibly because she was ashamed. The behaviorist would say she say in a state of disequilibria and was trying to re-establish equilibrium through accommodations. She was accommodating to her circumstances by having a change of clothes if she had an accident on herself.

In this school it is known that "no one is to be excluded" from any type of activity if they want to join into the group. At recess the boys love to play tag football, but it ended up with a huge argument and pushing and shoving because some students felt they were being excluded or not treated fairly during the game. Some boys yelled at one another, others ran over to their teacher screaming, "He cheated and now won't let us play with his football because we wouldn't agree with the call." The teacher sent the groups of boys back off to try and solve their disagreement in a civil matter amongst one another without the teacher's help, but the matter only got worse. The boys were yelling and screaming in each other's faces and no agreement could be made.

The teacher went to talk to the boys, but they only began yelling at the teacher, "It's not fair! He always gets his way when he gets mad or starts to cry! We never get to do what we want!" That teacher had no control so two more teachers intervened and spoke to a few of the students in pairs. They discussed what was bothering them individually

and also how they could negotiate the rules or the playing of the game fairly so no one would be excluded. The boys were all too mad to listen at first, but eventually began talking, but not positively because they were too upset that the one particular boy always got his way whenever he was angry.

The teachers encouraged the boys to come to a solution the way an existential humanists would by further discussing the matter indoors during an open circle meeting where they talked about appropriate behaviors at recess. The teachers wanted the students to communicate their opinions toward one another civilly. Students continued to discuss their grievances about their peers handling of the football game, but no resolution on the student's part was achieved, so the teacher proceeded to refrain the use of the football until further notice. Behaviorist would agree of the teacher's implementation for the modifications in this situation by taking away the football, because the boys couldn't come to a resolution. Gender development theorist like Gilligan would have said the boys were going through the achievement stage because they all wanted to win the football game. The boys always had to be on top and they must always get their way.

Another boy was always being really defensive, snappy and rude with his classmates. He sometimes picked on certain individuals that were more timid or less aggressive than him. One particular time, other students were "annoying" this student by passing an unwanted piece of paper back and forth around his desk. No one wanted to go recycle that piece of paper, but rather continued passing it saying, "It's not mine! It's not mine! It's not mine!" This student blew up and shouted, "Jesus Christ, stop putting it on my desk!" and grabbed the paper and put it in the recycling bin. In a low, moderate tone the teacher immediately called to this student several times, but he

continued to ignore her beckoning and walked back toward his seat grumbling. Other students reinforced to him that the teacher wanted to speak to him, but he kept walking away and slamming things down on his desk and mumbling. The teacher then approached the student and pulled him aside to talk. He totally shut down and insisted nothing was wrong though he clearly needed time to cool off his temper. The teacher expressed to him that she was not happy with the way he treated his tablemates by yelling. With his body language he hung his head and barely looked up at the teacher and was quick to answer back several times that nothing was wrong then quickly returned to his seat.

Again behaviorist and system theorists would say this boy needed to feel empowered and if he didn't have it then he would get very frustrated. His behavior is becoming cyclic and was learned somewhere. Erik Erikson would say he needed help establishing a healthy personality, because he has built up lots of anger and distrust amongst those he encounters. He was in the state of despair and needs to start over again in the stages because his experiences with conflict resolution are not positive and he needs to re-establish some ground rules.

I also observed with this same student again. When he takes math quizzes and gets something that he feels was simple incorrect he gets really upset almost to the point of tears. He is one of the best students in the class at math and he really challenges himself and a few other students that are at his level to excel. Erikson would have said this was a great representation of accomplishment versus inferiority. This student competes against himself and an elite few and has a very difficult time accepting when he gets a lesser grade than

those around him. He likes to be on top and succeed and gets very upset and has feelings of inadequacy if he achieves anything less.

This same boy on another occasion decided that he didn't like a fellow classmate's Yankee's book bag, so he spit on him. The teacher had the two boys talk about the incident between them alone with no teacher intervention and highlighted to the one whom did the spitting, what he would have felt like if the shoe were on the other foot. The teacher asked the boys to come up with a resolution to the matter and to continue discussions until the boy that was spat on was satisfied with the outcome. The teacher's ending moderation between the two was just checking in with the boys to make sure matters were settled.

This boy has some anger management issues when things don't go his way. The way in which the teacher allowed these two boys to solve their dispute was courageous and it allowed the boys to feel empowered and they had control of their own situation without adult intervention. Systems theorists would say they used a small open system and communicated their feelings about the situation then came to a resolution between each other that satisfied both parties.

My final observation was of a bright and gifted Chinese boy. He was really friendly, talkative and would carry on a conversation with whoever would listen. This particular day, he kept mumbling, "My mom was really mad at my sister," and he mentioned it again to the one of the teacher's in the classroom, "My mom was really angry with my sister last night." The teacher simply listened, but didn't give a verbal response. Later on during the day, the student mentioned again, "My mom was really mad at my sister," but to another teacher, and he explained a little further when the teacher responded, "Oh she was mad." He said "Yeah she was so mad she kept punching her in the stomach." The teacher repeated back the words of the student to him,

as to question that she heard him correctly. He confirmed that that's what he said. The teacher seemed stunned as to what she heard and waited until the class went to their specialist before mentioning it to the head classroom teacher. The head teacher was flabbergasted and immediately went to speak to the school psychologist for her opinion on the situation. When the head teacher returned, she stated to the other teacher that it was suggested that they watch for abuse signs, talk with the student to make sure he was okay physically and mentally from what he saw. When that same teacher pulled the student aside, to see how he was feeling, he didn't want to go into depth and just wanted to drop the conversation.

This teacher showed concern for the student and her motherly instincts were displayed. She wanted to console the student, and for him to feel safe, but he rejected her, shut down, disowned his feelings and an immediate guard went up to protect himself. He may have thought to himself that he gave too much information, or that he said the wrong thing, because in his culture, this type of punishment may be "normal." This student may have been trying to form an attachment or bond with his teacher by expressing his feelings and what he saw, but immediately felt betrayed as she pried further to try and understand the situation between his sister and mom and opted to avoid all questions. As B.F. Skinner believed, this young boy clearly was being shaped by reinforcement be it positive or negative, that depends on which cultures eyes this situation is viewed.

Bibliography

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