

Contextual Information and Learning Environment

For some students, showing up to class with a positive attitude and the ability to concentrate comes naturally. For other students, this can be difficult, especially if that particular student's own mind is working against them. Students with mood disorders have a whole new set of difficulties to struggle with, along with the regular worries that students have to work with in a school setting. My cooperating school was a middle school, which can be the toughest school environment for children. The student that I chose to do my case study on is Student A, a seventh grade student, the age of 13, with a history of Parent Child Relationship Problems, and a diagnosis of ADHD, along with many different mood disorders.

On the outside, Student A seems to be your average seventh grader. Student A has many friends and is very talkative. But on the inside he is fighting a war against himself. Student A was diagnosed with Mood Disorder NOS (Not Otherwise Specified) very young. This classification is where a disturbance in the person's mood is theorized as the main feature. Student A was also diagnosed with GAD, ODD, and as mentioned above, Parent Child Relationship Problems and ADHD. (Linwood)

With the diagnoses of these mood disorders, Student A also has had the unfortunate situation of dealing with his parents' divorce and eventual remarriage. When talking to Student A in the classroom he mentioned how he has four siblings, two half siblings, and 3 step siblings. In any other situation I would look at this as a big family, but think nothing of it. But knowing that Student A has a background of ADHD and other mood disorders, this may attribute to the Parent Child Relationship Problems and mood disorders Student A has.

With relational disorders the dysfunction can be attributed to an individual being withdrawn from the other. In Student A's case, his mother being withdrawn from him, since this is the parent he has lived with since the divorce of his parents. This could be due to the fact that his parents went through a divorce, had many children in the house, or from the fact that Student A grew up in a lower class home where the parents were either working all the time or dealing with personal issues of their own. With this disorder, other disorders are usually linked with it. This makes sense with Student A's case. (Linwood)

When Student A was five he was put in speech therapy. His speech has improved immensely because of that. Coming into the classroom and talking to Student A, you can tell there is a little difficulty with enunciation. Talking with my cooperating teacher informed me that there is major improvement compared with how Student A's speech was when he first came to the middle school.

Along with Student A's speech improving, the grades of Student A have also improved. Starting middle school, Student A's grades were D's and F's. He had anger issues and would start fights with students. His emotions played a big part in his behavior. If he got frustrated, or didn't know how to act towards the other students, he would either freeze up and would become a completely different person, or he would lash out and get physical. Student A was assigned a probation officer at the age of 12 to work with and provide guidance to ever since a serious incident with another student during class.

With the ADHD and mood swings of Student A, medication is a must. Talking with my cooperating teacher I found out there were times when Student A would lose

total control in the classroom. This usually happened at the beginning of the sixth grade. The whole time I was observing the seventh grade I noticed Student A was almost always in a good mood and never withdrew into himself or lashed out. From the beginning of the sixth grade to his current situation in the seventh grade, he has changed drastically. He has also been on his medication regularly.

Student A has been doing much better with his grades as well. Currently he is getting more B's and C's than D's and F's. To make sure Student A stays on top of his medication and emotions, all of the teachers that he has during each quarter make sure to communicate with each other, including the main office, whenever he has had an episode during class. Whenever Student A has a problem, however minor, during class the teachers will allow him to stay behind with that specific teacher and have a "therapy" session. This is a safe environment for Student A to explain what he was feeling and him and the teacher can find solutions to his problems. My cooperating teacher said this has helped Student A to the point where he hardly ever has episodes during class anymore. The teachers know what he needs and how to accommodate him during lessons and in the classroom with the other students in general.

Alfred Bandura, a child psychologist who proposed the theory of social learning and the concept of self-efficacy, did not directly address children with ADHD, but offered guidance in how to help them in a school setting. He argued that social learning plays a large role with behavior in children. They observe what others do and mimic their behavior. Since they especially emulate what they see most often, parents and educators should take steps to model the behavior they want to see developed. For children with ADHD, this can be more challenging. Since these children have trouble

focusing and are hyper most of the time, achieving a sense of self-efficacy is almost impossible. Bandura recommended teaching these children basic skills and boosting independence to help them with their learning disorder. (Thompson)

I think at my cooperating school, the teachers of Student A helped him develop healthy coping mechanisms for his ADHD and mood swings remarkably. By allowing him to be excused from the classroom if he is anticipating an outburst, or by allowing him to work in the very back of the room to have the option of working alone and to be able to watch the other students, they are improving his self-awareness and mood. I think this is following Bandura's theory of social learning by creating options for Student A, and helping him to see that there are other ways of handling his emotions and thoughts as a troubled individual. With motivation to keep working hard on his schoolwork, and the guidance of his teachers and other professionals willing to help him, I think Student A has the ability to overcome his unfortunate situation.

Bibliography

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