Case study 1

Analysis and Synthesis

The subject of this case study is a 13-year-old seventh grade male at a large middle school in East Bakersfield. The student, which for confidentiality reasons will be referred to as “student” or “subject,” is African American and of relatively low economic status. School records and other information sources indicate a long history of discipline issues as well as low academic performance. Various means of data collection were used including school records (IEPs, referrals, etc.), observations, teacher interviews, and a pretest.

School records

The subject’s most recent IEP reports that the student has repeated occurrences of classroom disruption in addition to bullying tendencies and violent behavior on-campus. The student has been charged with several suspensions for various reasons including violence, classroom disturbance, and profanity. Most recent records indicate a 10-day suspension for using profanity and physical aggression on a female peer. Another recent suspension resulted from possession of a dangerous weapon. The IEP explicitly states that the student frequently challenges others, displays a short temper, and engages in aggressive behavior. The IEP also notes that the student’s teachers complain of recurrent outbursts of rage, disruption, and inability to stay seated. The student’s mother recently requested that her son be released from school at noon, as most of his discipline and aggression concerns are heightened after lunch (student’s behavior is described by teachers, parent, and IEP as “out of control” after this time of day). Despite the refusal of the school to comply with the parent’s request, the student has been seeing his counselor regularly, wherein it has been determined that the subject is very easily discouraged and has a low self-esteem in addition to a sense of low self-efficacy. The counselor
has also determined that the subject needs much encouragement and validation from both teachers and peers to be successful.

*Classroom and schoolyard observations*

When observed in the classroom, the subject immediately draws attention to himself by consistently fidgeting, whispering to his neighbor, gazing around the room at other students, and generally exhibiting off-task behavior. During the first classroom observation, the subject was drawing an elaborate concoction on his manila folder while the teacher read to the class. While everyone else was generally silent and focused on the teacher’s story, the subject repeatedly took pencils and other writing utensil from students around him, whispered and snickered to his neighbor, and although fidgety, focused intently on his drawing. The student also displayed great difficulty sitting still and was easily distracted by the things and people surrounding him. Once the activity switched to something more independent, the student had to be consistently reminded to stay on task, get on task, focus, etc. Although the subject displays signs of being relatively bright, he is much more interested in his peers and upholding the particular image he seems to be attempting to attain rather than any academic task at hand. The only time the subject’s interest seemed to peak is when the topic related to some sort of violence or danger. For example, he immediately stopped trying to get the attention of his neighbor next to him when the teacher began talking about the danger of snake venom. He even asked a question about how fast the venom actually could kill a person.

While the first classroom observation took place during the morning hours, the second was conducted in the afternoon immediately following lunch. The subject’s afternoon behavior was notably worse than in the morning and aggression was clearly more visible at times as well.
The subject danced in his seat, refused to take notes, was defiant toward the aide, and was consistent in heavy sighing and exerting his opinion about the class “sucking” and being “stupid.” Despite his clear desire to maintain an error of maturity amongst his peers on the yard, his immaturity becomes very apparent in the classroom when he is opposed to any task asked of him. Despite his primarily negative behavior, the student greatly responded to teacher focus and was easily on task when the teacher was paying attention to his work. He fed off of her praise but complained of inability to do the work the moment the teacher turned her attention to another student.

Out on the school yard during recess and lunch the student displays his desire and acquired success at being the appointed ring leader of his peers. He exhibits a “tough guy,” “Don’t mess with me” attitude, walking around tensely with clenched fists and stern facial expression. With his peers standing behind him at all times, he tends to stare other students down who walk past and happen to glance in his direction. The subject also denotes slight rebellion, evident in such instances as not going to class immediately when the bell rings but rather waiting until all other students have reported to class before starting in the direction of his appointed building, regardless of supervising adults’ prompting to “get to class.”

Teacher interviews

Through discussion with the subject’s teacher, it was revealed that although some teachers have an exceedingly difficult time dealing with the subject, teachers who have reached some success do see the behavior issues and aggression concerns, but believe that a positive, motivated, and well-behaved classroom atmosphere has a very positive effect on the student. The
subject’s current teacher believes that the behavior issue at hand can be overcome with structure and discipline and has seen the positive results of such so far on the subject.

**Pretest**

Pretest results on proper classroom behavior were given to both the student and the teacher to reveal individual viewpoints from both parties in addition to any discrepancies that may exist between the two. On a scale from 0-11, behavior is rated with 0-5 being review proper classroom etiquette, 6-8 signifying being aware of proper vs. improper classroom behavior, and 9-11 dictating outstanding student with excellent classroom manners. The items on the survey include such statements as “I finish and complete all class work assignments,” “I work quietly and to not disturb others while they are working”and“I carefully follow any directions that the teacher gives during class.” The subject and teacher’s responses did indeed indicate a discrepancy wherein the student believes that with a score of 8 he is aware of proper classroom behavior, whereas the teacher’s responses to the same survey scored a 2, indicating that the student displays poor classroom etiquette (See Figures A and B). However, the student was quite honest about areas where he could improve in the classroom, including keeping his hands to himself, raising his hand before speaking, and staying in his seat.

**Diagnosis**

All assessments conducted, IEP reports, teacher interviews, and observations are fairly consistent in results. It is clear from this data that the subject has anger management, low self-esteem, and attention problems. Through the various forms of data collection and discussion with his teacher it also became apparent that the subject has a definite reading disability. The student’s constant need to draw attention to himself in the classroom and on the school yard through
aggressive acts and outbursts indicates a desire to be seen, heard, and respected. Because the student seems to have a low self esteem and sense of self-efficacy, it is probable that he draws attention to himself in other, more elaborate ways to feel accepted and worthwhile. The subject does seem to be compensating for the ineptitudes he feels he possesses, doing so in the only way he knows how: through violence and aggression. The other reason for his outbursts of rage can also be attributed to simply anger resulting from a bad home situation or previous negative attention from teachers and/or peers. He is perhaps experiencing neglect from his parents or craves peer attention, feeling that the only way to attain such is through outbursts and other negative attention grabbers. Another reason for the subject’s behavior and performance can be credited to low academic ability. Through classroom observation the student exhibited his low self-efficacy through statements such as “My picture is so freaking retarded” and “I can’t do that well.” This could also be responsible for the low self-esteem and discouragement issues the student has proven to possess. However, it is difficult to assume whether the individual’s performance is affected by his attitude or whether his attitude is affected by his low performance.

Interventions

The interventions and strategies used with this student included weekly meetings, follow-ups with his teacher (student only had one summer school teacher for the entire day), progress reports, inclusion in an aggression/bullying group (led by myself), various assessments, and continuous random observations both in and out of the classroom. Although there are many items on which the student can improve—academic performance, anger management, self-esteem—the main goal of these interventions given the time constraints of summer school was to improve the student’s classroom behavior. By achieving this, the student is expected to begin to realize the positives of good behavior including better grades and more positive attention from
adults and peers, thus leading to a higher sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy. To gain knowledge of the student, I first observed him in his natural classroom and schoolyard environment, spoke with his current teacher, and reviewed his most current IEP in detail. From this point I was able to determine that the student needed to focus first and foremost on behavior improvement in the classroom.

The student was recommended to the aggression/bullying group to learn about the harms of bullying and how to avoid aggressive behavior that may damage others. The group, which took place on Tuesdays during lunch for three consecutive weeks, provided additional support and assistance to the student in dealing with his current concerns regarding anger management.

The first meeting focused upon introductions of group members and leaders and a short video which introduced the various types of bullying, facts and myths of bullying, how to not be a bully, and how to deal with a bully. The second meeting consisted of a bullying/aggression survey and a discussion of each item on the survey as a group. Items included “I often bully others” or “I feel that I am the victim of bullying.” The purpose of the survey was to increase awareness of bullying in general in addition to helping group members recognize one another’s struggles with the problem of bullying. Members were also asked to pair up and categorize bullying information cards into “Fact” or “Myth” piles. This activity was designed to ensure that students understood the common myths of bullying and how to avoid being an accomplice to such actions. The third and final group meeting was centered upon an evaluation of what group members actually learned from the short meetings. Students were first asked to pinpoint bullying “hot spots” on a map of the school campus. These maps were then given to school administration so that security could be heightened in some of the areas where students often see bullying occurring, areas in which security is often at a minimum. Students were also given several
bullying scenarios varying from deliberate physical aggression to acting as an accomplice by merely watching someone else being bullied. Scenarios were discussed as a group and included all members.

In addition to the group meetings, thirty-minute weekly meetings with the student took place which focused on the three major concerns: low self-esteem, anger, and poor behavior. The first session dealt solely with the issue of self-esteem. A self-esteem survey was given to the student to assess where he feels the weakest. This survey was discussed in detail with the student. Once the survey was completed, the student was asked to list on paper three things he is really good at. The purpose of this session was to illuminate the student’s positive attributes in addition to giving him some strategies to improve on one low-scored item on the list over the following week. The second session included an anger survey and discussion of each item on that survey. The ABC model was followed to determine possible reasons for outbursts and ways to deal with those times of anger. Some strategies for anger management improvement were discussed in detail, and the student was given a homework assignment which asked him to implement one or two of these strategies during the next week then to report back to the counselor on how he did. The final session focused upon an evaluation of how the student progressed over the few weeks in counseling. A posttest was filled out by the student and looked over in detail in order to determine whether progress was made in classroom behavior. Finally, additional thoughts and strategies were given to the student so that he could continue improving after the termination of sessions.

Evaluation
Through the various work done with this student it is apparent that he has some definite
concerns on which to work. While the subject was always respectful and open to the counseling
process, he revealed through sessions and group meetings that he has some explicit anger issues
that he himself was not aware of at the beginning of counseling. In the weekly meeting dealing
with anger, the subject admitted that he is easily frustrated and yells at whatever it is that is
annoying him at the time, which I presume more often than not comes off as angry and defiant.
In the classroom, he admitted to not always having the best behavior due to his peers “getting on
his nerves.” When asked what he does when this happens he responded by saying that he often
calls the perpetrators “stupid” and “annoying.” He is also easily disturbed when he is placed in
classes with more severely handicapped individuals with such disabilities as autism and cerebral
palsy, as was the case in summer school. This annoyance that the subject faces may be in part
due to the fact that he is a high functioning RSP student, primarily because of his behavior
issues, who does not fully understand the severity and nature of his peers’ disabilities. Other
times the subject admits to becoming frustrated are when at home with his younger cousins who
frequently join his household. He complained of them taking his things, running around
screaming when he is trying to do his homework, and breaking his valuables. After talking with
the student and giving him some tools to help him control his frustration, he seemed to improve
somewhat in terms of his short temper, exemplified by his using such strategies as counting to
ten to cool down before exploding when a lower-functioning classmate took his pencil or called
him a name. Despite some notable improvements, the subject repeatedly was sent to see his
counselor over the course of summer school for becoming angry in class for various reasons.

As far as self-esteem, the student displayed throughout intervention his low opinion of
himself. He often expressed his desire to be more successful and stop making poor decisions that
“keep him down.” He also stated in the self-esteem assessment that he gets angry at himself and feels like a “loser” when he does not meet his goals, in school and otherwise. Despite his clear self-consciousness, he does seem to perform best when his work is acknowledged and praised. During the self-esteem session we focused heavily on finding strengths, which he excitedly noted each time he realized another area in which he excels.

Since classroom behavior was the focus of intervention for the subject, the results of the posttest were especially noteworthy. While the student first scored himself on the classroom behavior inventory at an 8, the posttest revealed a slightly lower score of 6 (See Figure C). This score falls within the same category as the 8 score but does reveal that perhaps the subject is more aware of his poor classroom behavior. Even though there was no significant improvement in behavior made over the 5-week course of summer school, the fact that proper classroom behavior is better understood could be a step toward actual classroom behavior improvement. Interestingly, teacher response to the inventory scored a 4, a 2-point improvement from the pretest. Although this score still falls within the same category to review proper classroom etiquette, it does seem relevant that some progress was made according to the student’s classroom teacher in such a short amount of time.

Reflection

Although I have had substantial experience working with students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, working with this student did provide me with additional knowledge of his culture and how to deal with such. While the traditional Caucasian family supports education and values the benefits of respecting authority, many times the African American culture places less emphasis on establishing oneself as a respectful citizen and does not always highlight the
importance of an education. Because of this, I faced a few challenges when working with the subject in the areas of striving for academic success and being a mature and respectful student to both adults and his peers. The success came from the student’s willingness to please and his eventual understanding of the importance of getting good grades and having a good report with those around him. In one of our final sessions the student acknowledged that he is much happier when he does not get in trouble and feels good when he gets praise from his teacher and parents for a job well done. While the subject’s anger and classroom behavior still need work, over the past five weeks he has displayed signs of a significantly higher sense of self-esteem. This will hopefully help him in his journey in achieving his goals to become more successful in controlling his temper in addition to being mindful of his behavior in the classroom.
PROPER CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR SURVEY

Place a checkmark (✓) next to whichever statement that best applies to your behavior. Once you are done with the survey, you are to count up all the check marks. Based on the amount of check marks you obtain, you will be able to determine if you truly understand and demonstrate proper classroom behavior.

___ I keep my hands to myself at all times.
___ I finish and complete all class work assignments.
___ I listen to my teacher.
___ I respect my classmates by treating them with kindness in my words and actions.
___ I quietly raise my hand, and wait to be called on before speaking.
___ I stay in my seat unless my teacher gives me permission to move around.
___ I work quietly and do not disturb other while they are working.
___ Whenever the teacher is talking, I quietly listen and do not talk to other classmates.
___ I come to each class prepared with paper, pencil(s), and books.
___ I carefully follow any directions that the teacher gives during class.
___ I turn in any homework the teacher assigns us.

 açıkly 9 - 11 ✓: Outstanding Student with Excellent Classroom Manners

 Açıkly 6 - 8 ✓: You Are Aware of Proper vs. Improper Classroom Behavior

 Açıkly 5 - 0 ✓: Review Proper Classroom Etiquette

(Note: You could also give a survey like this to the student’s teacher as your pre/posttest)