

Integration of PPS Competencies

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### **A. Case Summary**

The following student I will be discussing has a history of behavioral problems. This student's identity will be protected by confidentiality and he has been assigned a fictitious name.

#### *Identifying Information*

Terrell Mitchell is a 14 year old 8<sup>th</sup> grader at West Fresno Middle School (WFMS). Terrell self identifies as Black. Terrell has been attending WFMS since the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Terrell was referred to me because of his behavioral problems. Terrell has a 2 year long behavioral history at his school and no one at the school wants to deal with him. Terrell is up for explosion and his mother is seeking out help because she doesn't know what else to do with him.

#### *Background Information*

Terrell has a 2 year long history of behavioral problems at WFMS. Terrell began getting into trouble in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. To date, he has 30 referrals, 4 suspensions, and has been recently been put up for explosion. The behaviors that have caused these referrals have been defiance, cussing out teachers/staff, arguments with peers, fighting, refusing to do class/homework and destroying school property. Terrell serves lunch and after school detention almost daily. There has been 6 SST's scheduled on the behalf of Terrell and his mother has not attended any of them due to her employment. Terrell is on a behavior contract with the school psychologist, which he receives rewards every Friday if he exhibits good behavior.

#### *School adjustment*

Terrell does not like school at all. He is failing in all of his subjects and he has a .5 GPA. Terrell does not like any of his teachers and has stated that he hates the principal. Terrell only gets along with the school security personnel and the guidance learning specialist; which

consequently all happen to be African American. Terrell does not listen to his teachers and refuses to follow their rules.

### *Peer Relationships*

Terrell has a few friends. He hangs out with other males who are on the basketball team. Terrell is mean to some of the female students and they do not like him. Terrell stated that some of the girls get on his nerves and he talks about them just to make them mad.

### *Family Information*

Terrell lives with his mother, who is a single parent of 5. Terrell has a different father than his other siblings. Terrell's father has been in prison since he was 5 and he visits him once a year. Terrell and his father write to each other frequently and he is able to talk to his father whenever his mother feels like accepting his phone calls. Terrell's mother is a nurse and works different shifts, which is one of the reasons she has not been able to make it to any meetings regarding Terrell. Terrell has a lot of family members and spends time with them when he is not in trouble.

## **B. Developmental Theory**

Every individual behaves differently depending on what stage of life they are in. Children behave differently from teens and teens behave differently from adults. The way that we develop determines how we are going to think, act, and speak. Behavior is a learned action, which can be both positive and negative; however, our stage of development contributes to which of these will take precedent in our lives. The 3 factors of development are: cognitive, psychosocial, and moral. Piaget explained cognitive development, Erickson explained psychosocial development, and Kohlberg explained moral development. Each of these factors contains a stage of development which will be applied to Terrell's case.

Piaget's cognitive development contains 3 stages: Pre-Operational (ages 2-7), Concrete Operational (ages 7-12), and Formal Operational (ages 12 and up). Terrell appears to be in the formal operational stage of cognitive development. According to Day (1981), "children within each of these stages think about the world and attempt to solve problems in similar ways." (p. 44). Terrell appears to have a clear thought process at times. At other times, he seems to have some distorted views which causes his acting out behaviors. Terrell believes that he doesn't have to follow the rules and he can do whatever he wants. According to Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman (2010), "cognition involves the ability to take information, process it, store it, and finally retrieve it and use it." (p. 111). Terrell is not exhibiting that he has the ability to take school information, process it, store it, retrieve and use it properly; however is able to think cognitively. Terrell knows the rules and is aware of the consequences of not following the rules. However, he continues to act opposite of the information and directives he is given at school. Shaffer & Kipp (2010) explain that in this stage, "adolescents can follow and formulate arguments from their premises to their conclusions and back once more, even if they do not believe them." (p. 214). Terrell believes that he can do whatever he wants to do although he knows he will get in trouble for it. Shaffer & Kipp (2010) explain that, "in formal-operational thought, adolescents discover the concept of "what might be". Adolescents can think ahead, systematically trying out various possibilities in their minds. They "conduct research" to see whether their hypotheses about themselves and their friends and their teachers are correct..." (p. 214). Terrell continues to get into trouble because that's what everyone expects him to do. The comments Terrell hears about his behaviors assist him to act out more. When Terrell walks by people say "he's bad" or "he's always and trouble", and usually Terrell will do something to prove them right. In the formal operational stage Terrell is able to think hypothetically which allows him to predict outcomes. At

this stage, Terrell is more concerned about what he is able to hypothesize than what is real.

Terrell knows that his behaviors are unacceptable, yet he continues to display them because he believes that he can do what he wants; and this is more important to him than the consequences he faces.

Erickson's psychosocial development has 8 stages. Terrell is currently in the Identity v. Role Confusion (12 to 20 years) stage. According to Erickson, as cited in (Shaffer, 2009), the identity v. role confusion stage is described as:

this is the crossroad between childhood and maturity. The adolescence grapples with the question "who am I?" Adolescents must establish basic social and occupational identities, or they will remain confused about the roles that they should play as adults. The key social agent is the society of peers. (p. 42).

Terrell has not shown that he is mature yet. He continues to get into trouble although he knows the consequences of his actions. Terrell is still trying to figure out who he is. This has been extremely difficult for him due to his father being incarcerated for the past 10 years. Parents play a big role in adolescents' role identity and his mother cannot do it alone. Ideally, men are supposed to teach boys how to mature as young men and eventually how to act as a man. Terrell is lacking this in his life and he is searching for a way to determine who he really is. As Erickson explained in the paragraph above, if Terrell does not establish basic social and occupational identities, he will remain confused about the role he should play as an adult.. Terrell has established an identity with these peers and acts the way that they do because they are the key social agents in his life at this time.

Lawrence Kohlberg explained moral development in different stages. Terrell is supposed to be in the conventional level which contains stages 3 and 4. Stage 3 is the good boy morality

and stage 4 is law and order. Kohlberg explained that you cannot get to a higher stage without first passing the one you are currently in. (Puka 1991). Therefore, Terrell appears to be in the pre-conventional development level which contains stages 1 and 2. Stage 1 is avoid punishment and stage 2 is seek rewards. According to Kohlberg, (as cited in Coon & Mitterer, 2007), “the pre-conventional moral reasoning is moral thinking based on the consequences of one’s choices or actions (punishment, reward, or an exchange of favors.” (p. 105). Terrell continues to display behaviors that result in punishment. He has not mastered this stage, although he does desire to please others (his friends). Terrell fights others, disrespects teachers, cusses constantly, argues with others, and destroys school property. Terrell does not follow the rules or authority and until he does he is not able to move to the next stage in moral development.

### **C. Learning Theory**

The way that humans behave is based on the ways in which they learn how to. There are ways to understand why individuals act the way that they do. Operant Conditioning will be explained to understand why Terrell behaves the way that he does. According to Coon and Mitterer (2007), operant conditioning, “explains much day-to-day behavior and can be used to alter the behavior of pets, children...”(p. 226). Terrell responds according to the consequences he is given. For example, if he is talking out of turn the teacher may give him a warning, which may not bother Terrell. However if Terrell continues talking out of turn the teacher may send him to the office which causes Terrell to cuss at the teacher. Terrell has responded to the consequence of being sent out of the class. Coon and Mitterer (2007), explain that operant condition’s “basic principle is simple: Acts that are reinforced tend to be repeated. Learning is strengthened each time a response is followed by a satisfying state of affairs.” (p. 226). Which simple means if Terrell’s goal is to get sent to the office he will continue to display negative behaviors and his

teachers will continue to give him what he wants; to get sent out of class. Therefore, there needs to be interventions implemented to get Terrell to behave the way he is desired to and to eliminate undesired behavior. As listed on Carlin's (2012) power point, there are 5 interventions that can be utilized to reinforce positive behaviors and decrease/eliminate Terrell's undesired behaviors which are: "contingency contracting, self monitoring, shaping, behavioral momentum, and token economies." (slide 7). The intervention that I have selected that appears to be most appropriate for Terrell is contingency contracting. A contingency contract for Terrell would be a behavior contract, which according to Carlin (2012) would consist of the following components: identifying the problem behavior, gather baseline data for undesired behavior, mutually set clear simple goals for changing undesired behavior, select specific contingencies (reinforces and consequences) to reach goals, monitor progress and apply contingencies, and evaluate progress. (slide 8). Terrell's contract would look something like the following:

Desired Behavior	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
I followed all school rules					
I did not cuss at my teachers					
I did not hit my peers					
I did not destroy school property					

If I receive at least 3 +'s a day I will receive an incentive of my choice. If I receive 15 +'s by Friday, I will receive an off school lunch. If I receive more than 2 -'s a day I will not receive an incentive for that day. If I receive more than 8 -'s for the week I will not receive an off campus lunch.

The problem behaviors are identified which are: following the rules, no cussing at teachers, not hitting others, and not destroying school property. The baseline data will be gathered by reviewing the cart for any –s Terrell receives. The goals were mutually set by Terrell and myself. Terrell was able to write down a list of incentives that he wished to receive if he follows his behavior contract. Progress will be monitored daily and contingencies will be given daily. Terrell's progress will be evaluated weekly during counseling. As stated earlier by Coon and Mitterer, if Terrell is successful at exhibiting desired behavior then he will repeat it. His learning will not only be strengthened but he will be satisfied with the consequences of his actions.

The evidence-based method that best supports this intervention is solution-focused therapy. Corcoran (1998) describes the first step of solution-focused therapy is "starting where the client is." (p. 233). This is the golden rule of social work and this is how we build rapport with our clients. In order to get Terrell to change his undesired behaviors he has to trust me and I have to be non judgmental, welcoming, and supportive. The next step is to focus on Terrell's strengths. According to Corcoran (1998), "the crux of the solution-focused approach involves a focus on client strengths and resources rather than what the student lacks." (p. 235). When you know what a person is good at the more you can build upon their skills and celebrate their success. It is important that both Terrell and I list his skills and build upon them. The next step is concrete goal setting. Corcoran explains that, "solution-focused therapy concerns itself with concrete goals that are achievable within a brief period of time." (p. 236). Terrell and I have set his goals, which are brief and achievable. Corcoran further explains that the therapist is to follow up with the family and teachers to ensure that future goals are achieved. (Corcoran, 1998). This has been and will continue to be a task that I will carry out to make sure Terrell is successful in modeling desired behaviors, achieving his goals, and being successful in life.

#### **D. Integration**

In order to provide school based services, the school social worker has to have a frame of reference for conducting the work that they do. It is not only required but also necessary to provide services that will bring about change in the life's of the clients and families in which we serve. The most effective services have been researched and utilized by professionals and are proven to produce the desired outcomes. Therefore, it is important that SSW's know the baseline of learning and development theories. If we do not have knowledge of what stages of development children are supposed to be in or do not know how to apply learning theories we are doing a dis-service to the individuals which we serve. Assessments are the # 1 key to determining how a person is developing and learning. These assessments change range from observations, various instruments, different tests e.c.t. Assessments allow us to get a better understanding of where the client is in his or her development and learning so that we can make appropriate interventions to increase growth in problematic areas; which is explained in competency 6. After conducting our assessment, we will be able to relay our findings to school personnel, family members, and other professionals. Collaboration precedes this step to ensure that proper interventions are in place and goals are being met; which is explained in competency 8. Once these interventions are in place, the worker will be able to work with the student more effectively and allow the student to take control of their learning; which is explained in competency 11. If the worker does not have knowledge of human development and does not have an understanding of learning theories the client will not change. Application of knowledge is the key in producing desired outcomes, the more we know the more we grow. When Terrell understands development and can make sense of his learning, his undesired behaviors will change and he will accomplish his goals. If I had no knowledge and understanding of learning

and developmental theories, and if I did not use evidence based practice, the majority of my work would be in vain because I would have no substance to back it up.

### Resources

- Carlin, A. (2012) Behavior Management and Social Skills. Power Point.
- Coon, D. & Mitterer, J. O. (2007). *Introduction to Psychology: Gateways to Mind and Behavior* (11th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Corcoran, J. (1998). Solution-focused practice with middle and high school at-risk youth. Social Work in Education, 20(4), p. 232-243.
- Day, M. (1981). Thinking at Piaget's Stage of Formal Operations. *Educational Leadership*, 39(1), 44.
- Puka, B. (1991). Reconstructing Kohlberg's theory: preserving essential structure and removing controversial content. New York:Earlbaum Associates
- Shaffer, D.R. (2005). Social and personality development. (5th Ed.) Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Shaffer, D.R. & Kipp, K. (2007). Developmental psychology: Childhood and adolescence. (6th Ed.) Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Zastrow, C. H & Kirst-Ashman, K.K. (2007). Understanding Human Behavior and the Social Environment (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole---Thomson Learning