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1.0 Introduction



Julie is a grade seven student who lives with her mother and siblings in what seems to be a hectic household. She often comes to school hungry, dirty and physically and academically unprepared for learning. She is described by her teacher as a loving but an emotionally needy child. Due to the obvious lack of attention, sound parenting and support at home, Julie is struggling at school both behaviourally and academically. Her father has a long history of violent behaviour and has recently been released from prison. As she now spends time with her dad on the weekends, the guidance officer has connected Julie's angry behaviour to her visits with him. This affects Julie's ability to interact well with her peers as she often becomes emotional and has angry outbursts toward them. The lack of help and support at home and the inability to manage her emotions and study time are main contributing factors to her poor school performance. Her teacher has helped her many times with some of the personal needs like washing up and breakfast, however her teacher on her own cannot help resolve the difficult personal issues Julie is facing. Therefore, the guidance officer has tried communicating with Julie's mother in order to provide help regarding her academic achievement as well as the non-academic support, but without success. Even though the guidance officer has a good relationship with Julie's family, she was not able to organise a meeting with her mother due to her work shifts. The teacher, the guidance officer and the principal must collaborate and find ways to establish communication with Julie's mother and create a plan whereby the school can help the family and assist Julie in improving her academic results.

2.0 Analysis and Diagnosis



The purpose of this report is to investigate and analyse the causes of Julie's poor school performance and offer solutions including an individualised education plan (IEP). There are a number of problems that appear to be impacting her learning including:

- motivation – evident through both academic and personal matters
- self-management – evident in poor control of emotions and appearance and
- changes in family structure/blended family as her mother now lives with a female partner and her children, which can be very confusing for a child (Holmes, Hughes & Julian, 2007).

However, all of these clearly stem from the two main issues both of which are closely tied to her family life. Firstly, Julie's mother seems to be too busy and unavailable to spend quality time with Julie, help her with the homework, assist her with time and study management methods and even help with some basic self-presentation and hygiene issues. Although Julie recently turned thirteen years old and should be able to take a shower by herself and make her own breakfast, she is not doing so. This may be her way of seeking attention or perhaps a sign of lack of motivation or even laziness. Many educational experts have proven that the lack of basic care at home including hygiene and nutrition impact on the student's ability to concentrate and perform well at school (Sorhaindo, Annik, Feinstein & Leon, 2006).

Secondly, the guidance counsellor has established a connection between Julie's visits to her dad and her anger issues. At this stage, there is no specific evidence of abuse by her dad so Julie's anger could be a behaviour she mimics, a reaction she has learned to resort to when she gets upset. Based on the case study, the school is not attempting to contact Julie's dad and at this stage the school staff are only trying to communicate with her mother. Although her dad was recently released from prison, he is now clearly in contact with Julie. He can be invited to participate in parenting program/s and be more involved in Julie's life by also providing the support she needs. However, this should not be a matter for the school to engage in but rather an issue that an organization like a family support centre could deal with. In summary, in order to help Julie deal with her personal and school issues, the following is recommended:

- that she takes diagnostic literacy and numeracy tests in order to determine the levels of knowledge and understanding as her progress to the next year level depends on it and
- that she participates in 'anger triggers' test to help identify the causes of her angry behaviour and the best way to manage them (Leutenberg & Liptak, 2011).

To best help the students and teach to the 'whole child', students need to be viewed not just in the context of learners at school but also in the socio-cultural context, that is, the context of their families. The families also must be meaningful participants and partners with the schools in helping children overcome their struggles (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzales, 1992). In the context of Christian worldview perspective, the Bible states that "if you as much as help one of these little ones (referring to children), you have helped Me" (NIV Study Bible, 2007). Helping and building up our children is

not just an equitable and socially just thing to do but a service to our God and wider communities as encouraging and building up the children, means building up the communities.

3.0 Investigation of Relevant Academic Literature

Based on the analysis of the case study it is obvious that Julie's school functioning and academic success is greatly affected by her home life. As Julie lives with her mother, the issues of motivation, self-management and the matters of blended family are all areas her mother must help her deal with. Due to the fact that Julie's mum works difficult shifts, time constraint and the lack of home-school communication are also contributing factors. Decades of study and research show that family involvement in a child's education has a positive effect on his/her education outcomes and the integration of the student into the learning community as it "...far exceeds in quality the rote like instruction these children commonly encounter in schools" (Moll et al., 2007). In this particular case, Julie's family has great support from the school staff such as the teacher, the guidance counsellor and the principal who are working together to establish a connection with her mother and help the family. This integration and partnership between the home and the school is of a crucial importance as a family's involvement is a powerful influence on the children's achievement in school (Funkhouser & Gonzales, 2016). In her interview, Julie's mother does express the desire to see Julie succeed at school but the issue of misunderstanding the school-home communication caused further problems; the teacher interpreted the mother's lack of communication as disinterest while the mother understood the lack of communication from the school as a sign that Julie is doing well. As, Julie's mother has been involved in school through voluntary work, has been reading to her kids and spending quality time with them in the past, it cannot be assumed that her children are abused or neglected. This family is experiencing hardship due to the breakdown in the family unit and the mother's difficult work situation. This issue can be described more as a maltreatment (Belsky, 1980) rather than abuse and for this reason would not be a reportable case. In this particular situation, the maltreatment occurred as a result of disturbances in the family interaction patterns (Burgess & Burgess, 2016) where the father was imprisoned for domestic and family violence causing the separation between the parents and the mother entering a relationship with a same sex partner. The fact is that the gay stepfamilies represent unique types of families and if children have lived in a traditional nuclear family prior to this, the change needs to be addressed in a timely and adequate manner (Lynch & Murray, 2008). The shift from a nuclear to 'unclear' family unit can be quite a confusing one for a child (Holmes et al., 2007).

In this particular case, the strategies for addressing the issues and helping the student are strongly dependant on the partnership between the school and home. After receiving the counsellor's letter, Julie's mother did change her work shifts, was more available for her children and able to attend the school meetings. At this point, the parent and the school need to agree on a flexible plan that would best suit Julie's family and her learning and behaviour needs as there is no 'one size fits all' approach simply because every family is different (Funkhouser & Gonzales, 2016). The school also needs to provide information and if necessary training to Julie's mother on ways of helping with homework as the school runs maths and reading information sessions for parents. At this point the wider community help needs to be drawn upon such as parenting program like 'Triple P' or on-line sessions such as 'Amy McCready Positive Parenting Free Webinars', if time is an issue. 'Hygiene and nutrition for Adolescents' by Raising Children Network is a strongly recommended program and it can be accessed on-line anytime by both teenagers and parents. Making contact with family support services such as 'We are Family Too' or 'ReachOut' can help children and parents work through the gay family changes in a safe and supportive environment, is also recommended. There are various anger management programs however the 'Teen Anger Workbook' is recommended for Julie as it is specifically developed to help children in her age bracket, filled with helpful calming techniques and contains a 'Diary Section' for recording her personal thoughts and feelings (Leutenberg & Liptak, 2011). It is also highly advisable to reach out to Julie's dad and involve him in the planning process too as he would be able to participate more positively in his daughter's life. Perhaps the inclusion as opposed to the alienation could help him see the need to change. However, this is not a matter for the school to be involved in but rather an issue that could be addressed by the family support services. Well-functioning and supportive family unit is extremely important in the lives of young children (Moll et al., 1992) not only in terms of socio-cultural construct but also spiritually. The Bible speaks very strongly of family values, in particular in Timothy 5:8 where it emphasises not only love but provision and care for one another.

4.0 Extension and Enrichment Proposal - IEP

Following is the proposed IEP developed to support Julie's participation in her classroom learning (see Appendix A). It is important to note that this IEP is formulated within the Bronfenbrenner's framework of micro, meso, exo and macro ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner's EST, 2016). This framework is purposely chosen as it places the learner, that is, the child at the centre of their learning and development (Putting Students at the Centre - Reference Guide, 2016). The learner's wellbeing

needs to be considered in the context of the entire educational community as the role of the school in addressing the 'whole child' is no longer limited to that of basic education but has assumed a much wider scope (Millis & McGregor, 2010).

Micro and Mesosystems

As previously mentioned, the student is at the centre of this framework and the microsystem addresses Julie's learning and personal needs. In terms of her learning needs, a diagnostic testing for literacy and numeracy needs to be conducted. Even though the case study report only specifies the declining maths grade, the problem may be in literacy and her ability to comprehend the mathematical concepts and understand the questions. To best address this issue the following tests are recommended: Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT) in comprehension and PAT in mathematical concepts for lower grades of high school (ACER, 2016). The attached tests are only suggestive and are provided as a guide. The numeracy test would preferably need to contain a variety of concepts like multiplication, division, trigonometry, number patterns, time and money concepts (see Appendix B). In terms of Julie's health and wellbeing, she could visit the website raisingchildren.net.au who offer a plethora of information about adolescent health, hygiene, nutrition and wellbeing. Also attached is the printed information found on this website to further assist (see Appendix C). Now that her mother has changed the shifts and has more time for Julie, she could help by talking to her and providing the relevant information, buying the necessary hygiene products and similar. It would be strongly recommended for Julie to join a local church youth group as peer connections and support can be quite valuable to young adolescents (Mills & McGregor, 2010). Moreover, it would be of utmost necessity for Julie to, perhaps with her mother at first, attend the 'Dealing with Trauma' sessions at the local family support centre as domestic violence and the father's arrest and imprisonment are traumatic experiences. In addition to this, the family needs to attend information and support sessions aimed at helping blended gay families. The school guidance counsellor needs to make the initial appointments trusting the family will follow through with the subsequent ones. This will be reviewed after the first month to ensure the family is receiving the type of help they need and are attending the sessions.

To best determine the causes of Julie's angry behaviour and establish the most appropriate ways of helping her succeed in managing her emotions, she needs to undertake the anger triggers diagnostic test (see Appendix D). The attached handbook is an excellent starting guide which will help Julie and her guidance counsellor start the

journey. This process will be revised on a regular basis with aim to monitor progress and ensure Julie's full participation.

Exosystem

The strongest influencing factor in Julie's life within this level of ecological system are the family decisions in which she had no participation: weekend visits to her father and the mother's gay relationship. Based on the case study, it seems that the mother has the main custody of Julie but she is still required to visit her father. Her anger may be stemming from the resentment she may hold against her dad for the things he did. However, she is required to spend time with him, perhaps without her consent, but may not have the ability to confront the issue. In addition, how has she handled the new parent figure in her life and her step siblings? Are there any relationship issues in the context of the blended family Julie now lives in? Has this been discussed with her and properly introduced from the start? These questions must be asked and any underlying problems must be addressed in order for Julie and her family to be wholly helped (Smoke, 2004). In order to address these issues properly, Julie and her family will be taking part in counselling through family support groups and social welfare services. The most suitable organisation will be determined by the school guidance officer upon discussing the matter with Julie's mother.

Macrosystem

As macrosystem encompasses the cultural environment in which the student lives, the affecting factors on this level are the cultural values and stigma associated with domestic violence, imprisonment, and in some communities, even gay and blended families. These factors are most likely causing low self-esteem in Julie, making her feel marginalised and alienated from the rest of the school community. The disintegration of a family unit has its implications on the wider community too "divorce (or separation) affects not only the men and women involved but also their children, their extended families and, ultimately, the wider society" (Holmes et al., 2007, p. 296). It is strongly recommended for Julie's mother to keep in regular contact, if possible, with extended family and other friends and relatives as this provides greater stability and connectedness to the family. There are many helpful resources that can be used to help Julie build her confidence and self-esteem and it is strongly suggested that the guidance counsellor discusses this with Julie during one of their meetings.

5.0 Conclusion

The outcomes expected to be achieved as a result of this IEP are:

- improvement in Julie's numeracy skills and her promotion to the next grade level
- improvement in her ability to manage her health and wellbeing more independently and taking initiative in self-care
- improvement in her ability to manage her angry emotions and behaviour
- evidence of receiving help and support at home (mainly through homework and reading/study time)
- improvement in confidence and self-esteem through suggested counselling and expert help.

The challenges that could be faced in terms of the plan implementations could be many: willingness to admit and face the problems, go through the process of change, overall lack of cooperation and continuance. Admitting problems usually has negative connotations such as shame and embarrassment. However, it is quite positive as it is an acknowledgement of the problem and the beginning of the journey to resolutions; a mentality change may be needed. Once this is achieved, the issue could be the commitment to change. Change can be a long and painful process and many quit. Outlining from the start that this plan is a part of the process and not a final destination may help Julie and her family. On the other hand, some families agree to receiving help but do not fully cooperate which only prolongs the process while others start the journey but give up with time (McMillan, 2004). The other challenge could be the cooperation on behalf of Julie's father. He may not be interested in involvement in the process, not because he does not care for his daughter but perhaps due to the embarrassment regarding his behaviour problem and imprisonment. It is therefore evident that helping Julie improve her behaviour and academic achievement must be a joint effort between the school and family. In order to teach to the 'whole child', the schools must take on the extended roles, roles contrary to the assumed traditional, instructional ones. Families also must commit to greater levels of participation in their children's school lives. Perhaps the greatest education revolution is coming to realisation that the school and the family are not separate, unintegrated entities. The gaps between them must be bridged and that bridge is the partnership between the two.

“Appendices”

Appendix A – Individual Education Plan (IEP) for Julie Smith

Appendix B – Sample Diagnostic Literacy and Numeracy Tests

Appendix C – Nutrition, Hygiene and Trauma Information Sheets

Appendix D – Teen Anger Workbook

Appendix E – Teen Daily Planner

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