

Handout 1

Behavioral Health Scenario

Boubacar Sanogo is a 15 year old male who has been in the United States for about 8 months. He came to the U.S. from Mali with his parents and older brother who is attending the university. Boubacar is handsome, was very outgoing in his native country with a great many friends, but since arriving in the U.S., he has become increasingly withdrawn, moody and angry and has exhibited aggressive behavior in school, which has been described by his teacher as becoming “progressively worse each week”. His outbursts in the classroom are more frequent and other students are frightened by his seemingly “out-of-control” behavior.

Boubacar’s behavior wasn’t always like this. It began shortly after students at his new school started teasing him and calling him names like “stupid” and “mental retard.” He was placed several grade levels below his age due to his poor performance on the initial academic assessments. They laughed at him and said that he was a dumb African because he never responded to the teacher when she would call on him to answer questions about the lesson in class. A few times she asked him to read out loud and he just hung his head and did not answer. After he did this a few more times, she yelled at him in front of everyone, which was embarrassing, and then sent him to the principal’s office for being disrespectful. When the principal, Mr. Taylor, asked him to explain what happened, Boubacar refused to make eye contact and again did not answer. After the third visit to his office for the same infraction, Mr. Taylor gave Boubacar a 3-day suspension and told him that he could not return to school until he brought his parents with him for a conference.

Mrs. Sanogo (Boubacar’s mother) attended the conference with Boubacar but without her older son Mohamed who speaks English, but was unavailable due to an exam at his university. Her husband was working. She sat quietly as Principal Taylor explained the situation, but she didn’t understand a word that he said. Boubacar understood very little as well. It never occurred to the principal that there may be a language barrier, so Mrs. Sanogo was never informed that language assistance may be available and no language assistance was ever offered. At the end of the meeting, Mr. Taylor handed Mrs. Sanogo a slip of paper (that neither she nor her son could read) and everyone parted company.

Discussion Questions:

1. How did you see implicit bias play out in the scenario?
2. What are some strategies that could be implemented to address the implicit biases identified?
3. What are your takeaways?

Handout 2

Behavioral Health Scenario

Discussion Points

This situation is indicative of similar situations that other families have faced at this school, an absence of language assistance despite the fact that the school has a very high enrollment of students and their parents who are limited English proficient.

Boubacar's brother, Mohamed made inquiries at the university and was able to find a solution to his little brother's problems. By relaying his story regarding the cultural incompetence of the school system, he was able to persuade three individuals to form a "treatment team" to meet Boubacar's mental health needs. Dr. Harold Ramsey, a behavioral psychologist at the university was willing to work with him on the behavioral and mental health issues. Dr. Amadou Sacko, a linguist, native of Mali, agreed to interpret during the sessions, as well as translate all written materials into the preferred language of the family, and Ms. Ida B. Wilson, MSW, was willing to work with the family. Mohamed had succeeded in assembling a culturally competent, mental health "dream team" to support the Sanogos in their adjustment to this new way of life.

Conferring with Boubacar's school counselor, Dr. Ramsey learned that neither the counselor, nor Boubacar's teachers or his principal knew that he had extremely limited English language skills, which prevented his participation in class. As a result, he felt overwhelmed, embarrassed and isolated most of the time. Boubacar told Dr. Ramsey, through the interpreter, that he thought being quiet would keep him out of trouble, but it caused problems with his teachers every single day. In Mali, you must raise your hand to respond to teachers and you never make eye contact – that is disrespectful. Even though he did not really understand the names that the other students were calling him, he knew that they were poking fun and that infuriated him. Dr. Ramsey also discovered that the school personnel did not understand that Boubacar's failure to make eye contact was cultural and not a sign of disrespect. Moreover, during the conference with the principal, Mrs. Sangoro was not offered any language assistance services. There was no one present who could advocate on their behalf.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are your impressions of the strategies implemented to address the situation with Boubacar?
2. What else could/should be done?
3. What are your takeaways?

Strategies for Implementation

At the Individual/Family Level

In an effort to be responsive to the cultural and linguistic needs of the Sanogo family, it would have been beneficial if the school had implemented the following strategies to minimize the existing communication barriers:

1. Conduct an analysis of student records and other available family information paying particular attention to communication preferences and literacy levels in the individuals' native language(s) and English.
2. Solicit the assistance of a "cultural broker" who can not only provide translation and interpretive services to the family, but who also understands Mali culture and possibly conduct CLC training and/or develop cultural fact sheets/briefs for school personnel, as well as students. Universities and cultural community organizations may be able to recommend individuals who can provide those services.
3. Assure the family that the school will provide language assistance whenever it is needed to insure their full participation in the educational process and all services associated with it.
4. Provide socialization activities at school for Boubacar and other children from Mali, or that spoke his language, to encourage prosocial skill development, networking and positive peer development and to decrease the isolation that immigrant families feel.

At the School/District Level

1. At the beginning of the school year, the district should conduct demographic and language analyses of its student population to determine what language assistance services may be needed on a school by school basis. Once that has been determined, each school should develop its own communications plan to determine how any language assistance service needs will be addressed. It may also be helpful to have a district-wide plan as a blue print.
2. Since the provision of language assistance services is critical for improved educational outcomes, community resource mapping can yield valuable information regarding organizations and individuals with whom the district and school could partner to offer language assistance services.
3. Schools and districts should also consider using bilingual staff, as well as other digital technologies to accommodate those needing language assistance services.
4. In collaboration with community partners, schools can determine the most effective media/modes of communication, as well as the cultural appropriateness of the content (literacy level) and the best location(s) to place notices to inform parents regarding the availability of language assistance.
5. Several formal and/or informal community "cultural brokers" can serve as initial points of contact and ongoing liaisons with information about the available services and how they can be accessed.
6. School districts should consider developing a master list of qualified individuals who can provide language assistance services based on the languages, hearing and visually impaired, etc. represented in that district. These individuals should

meet the standards set forth by the American Translators Association or in American Sign Language.

7. The school district may also consider partnering with the foreign language departments of local colleges and universities who may be able to provide faculty members and or advanced/graduate students who can serve as interpreters and translators for independent study credits thereby reducing the cost to the district.