

Case Study Assignment: ECED 7200

This case study exercise is provided as a practice for the case study exercise that will occur for the qualifying exam in the spring of 2015. The case study follows.

In your response to the case study, students should identify the problem, examine the issue from multiple perspectives, and develop strategies to address the problem that are based in a relevant theoretical framework (describe one or more theories learned in Dr. Davis' course), utilize important leadership strategies learned in Dr. Fulmer's course, and address issues of social equity learned in Dr. Zion's course. Students should also reference approaches learned in the Interventions course (ECED 7200) as well as special education law and policy as it relates to preschoolers with disabilities.

Students will first submit a draft of their response to the case study on 10/24/14.

Case Study:

The Humphrey School District includes five elementary schools. Two of the elementary schools have a preschool classroom that includes young children with identified disabilities. One of the preschool classrooms is housed at Valmont Elementary School. Valmont includes one preschool classroom, and four classrooms each in kindergarten through fifth grade. Valmont's principal, Lucy Hagar has been working in education for 14 years. She was a high school science teacher (chemistry and physics) at Humphrey High School for 8 years and demonstrated leadership (e.g., committee chair, professional development, science program leader) at the high school prior to becoming a principal. Ms. Hagar has a preschool to 12th grade teaching license, secondary teaching license in science education, and her principal's license.

Valmont's preschool classroom holds a morning class from 8:30-11:30am; it does not have an afternoon class. The preschool classroom has 2 teachers who have bachelor's degrees'; Britta has a bachelor's degree in Child and Family Studies and her assistant teacher, Ivan has a bachelor's degree in Psychology. Licensure in early childhood education (ECE) or early childhood special education (ECSE) is not required for preschool teachers in this district; none of the current preschool teachers hold a teaching certification. The preschool classroom includes eight children who are typically developing and eight children who are eligible for special education services under Part 619. The eight children with disabilities placed in Valmont's preschool classroom were placed there to meet least restrictive environment (LRE) and free and appropriate public education (FAPE) on their Individual Education Program (IEP). An ECSE consultant from the district visits Valmont about once every three months to talk to the preschool teachers about how things are going with the children who have IEPs in their classrooms. The ECSE consultant's name is Gretchen and she has three years of experience in this position.

She has her ECSE license and a Masters degree in early childhood education. She has yet to visit Valmont preschool this school year.

There are currently 10 boys and 2 girls in Valmont's preschool classroom. Since the school year started, Britta, the lead teacher, has verbally complained to Ivan and other early childhood teachers (Kindergarten and 1st grade) and to the principal about the number of boys in her classroom. She perceives that the activity level in the classroom is too high and leads to increased physical aggression and peer conflicts throughout the morning. Britta's stress level is high in and out of work.

Ivan doesn't agree with Britta's assessment that the children's behavioral issues come from "having too many boys" in the classroom. Ivan is concerned about Britta's effectiveness as a teacher. He feels as if they are responding to behavioral issues all day long and there are few opportunities to proactively teach during their morning session.

Mathaniel is a four-year-old boy who is black and has a diagnosis of developmental delay. He is included in Britta and Ivan's preschool classroom at Valmont Elementary, his first classroom environment outside of his home. Mathaniel lives with his mother, father, grandmother, and three siblings (two older and one infant). Mathaniel has significant delays in receptive and expressive language and some delays in cognitive and fine motor skills. He frequently initiates social interactions with adults and peers, but often lacks language to do so effectively.

Mathaniel attends Valmont's preschool program each morning at no cost to his family, since it is his placement for special education services. He attends Apple Cove Child Development Center each afternoon for childcare that his family pays for since both of his parents work and his grandmother is not physically capable of extended care of her grandchildren. Mathaniel's grandmother transports him to and from Valmont, Apple Cove CDC, and home each day. Mathaniel's family is not very happy with this arrangement. It is hard on them logistically and they don't feel as if he is getting sufficient services to meet his developmental needs. They have had little communication with the teachers at Valmont. They get more information about how Mathaniel is doing at Apple Cove. The teachers there are from Mathaniel's community of middle-class African American families; they love Mathaniel. He has a particular friend, Erika, who plays with Mathaniel and helps him with his language and motor skills across routines.

One morning during center time at Valmont preschool, Mathaniel is playing at the sand table with two typically developing peers. One of the peers takes Mathaniel's shovel from him and Mathaniel pinches a bit of sand between his two fingers and throws it in the boy's face. The boy appears okay, but yells, "hey!". Britta declares, "that's it!", goes over to Mathaniel and says, "we don't do that in our classroom. Come with me." Britta takes Mathaniel gruffly by the arm out of the classroom and down the hall to the Ms. Hagar's principal office.

Britta explains that Mathaniel threw sand in a boy's face and that she's had enough. She tells Ms. Hagar that he is dangerous and that Ms. Hagar needs to figure out what to do with him; she can't take it anymore. Ms. Hagar listens and then tells Mathaniel to take a seat. She says that she is going to call Mathaniel's mother and that Britta may return to her classroom.

While Mathaniel listens, Ms. Hagar calls Mathaniel's mother and tells her that she needs to come pick him up from school as soon as she can. His mother, after making sure that he's okay, says that she can leave work in 45 minutes. Ms. Hagar says that's fine and that they will have a short conference with Mathaniel's teachers when she comes to pick him up. Ms. Hagar has Mathaniel wait in a chair in her office and does not speak to him; he remains quiet for the 45 minutes it takes his mother to arrive.

When Justine, Mathaniel's mother arrives to the principal's office, Mathaniel immediately gets up from his chair and gives his mom a hug and starts to cry and say, "Mommy, I sorry." Justine hugs him and whispers calming words to him and sits down in front of Ms. Hagar. Ms. Hagar greets her and then calls Britta and Ivan to her office. When everyone is settled, Ms. Hagar tells Justine that Mathaniel is too aggressive for this inclusive preschool and that they are not able to meet his needs. They are going to request a change in placement and a new IEP meeting immediately. Ms. Hagar informs them that Mathaniel will not be able to return to Valmont preschool and that they will let her know when the new IEP meeting is scheduled to discuss the placement change. Justine is quiet, taking in the information and then says, "I wasn't aware that Mathaniel was having any behavioral issue. Can you please tell me more about the aggression you're talking about? We don't see that at home." Ms. Hagar tells Justine that there have been a lot of incidents and that the teachers have run out of options. Justine nods and puts her head down quietly. Britta and Ivan remain quiet, each in their own thoughts. Britta is silently questioning how Justine could be in so much denial about Mathaniel's problem behavior and then wonders if they baby him at home; it would explain a lot, she thinks. Ivan is secretly fuming that Mathaniel is getting kicked out, feels sick to his stomach, and doesn't know what to do. After a moment, Justine says, "Okay. I apologize for my son's behavior and appreciate your time and what you have done for my son." She shakes hands with Ms. Hagar and then Britta and Ivan and then takes Mathaniel's hand, says goodbye, and goes to the car to take her son home.