ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

Kevin S. Koett
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The Graduate School
Morehead State University
July 19, 2013
THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE: LOST IN TRANSITION

Abstract of capstone

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the College of Education At Morehead State University

By

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Morehead, Kentucky

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Committee Chair: Dr. Carol Christian, EdD
Morehead, Kentucky

July 19, 2013

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ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE
THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE: LOST IN TRANSITION

This capstone project examines the research of school transition activities, coupled with a basic understanding of human growth and development to assist educators and parents in helping students have more successful educational transitions. This capstone project seeks to address how the creation of a manuscript, written in non-fiction vignettes, impacts teacher thinking and practice with regard to addressing student needs through the implementation of articulation activities.

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from three public school districts and one post-secondary institution in Eastern Kentucky. Participants read the manuscript and completed a survey to provide feedback on the benefits of this project. The survey data collected demonstrates the impact of connecting research with practitioner developed vignettes regarding what happens in schools and what needs to occur to help students during key school transitions.

KEYWORDS: transitions, articulation activities, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, vignette, intervention strategies

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7-19-13
THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE: LOST IN TRANSITION

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to our loving and supportive families.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The doctoral candidates would like to acknowledge the untiring efforts of Dr. David Barnett whose commitment to higher education saw the first doctoral program at Morehead State University, from conception to implementation. We also wish to acknowledge Dr. Rocky Wallace who has served as both a mentor and an inspiration to each of us. Lastly we wish to thank Dr. Carol Christian whose dedication and unwavering support to her students far exceeds the professional standard.
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Executive Summary

What is the core of the capstone?

This capstone is developed with a two-fold premise: one, that educators and parents understand the role they play in meeting the basic needs of individual students during times of transition; and two, that school leaders understand how critically important it is for organizations to create structured transition processes to better ensure student success before, during and after transitions that supports the growth and development of students.

Transition success does not happen by chance. Schools must intentionally develop activities that make it easier for students to have an effective transition experience. As students navigate each move through the K-12 and post secondary school systems, multiple transitions occur that include moving to different and unfamiliar school buildings, going from self contained classrooms with one teacher to departmentalized schools with numerous teachers. Most transitions require a move to larger, more impersonal school environments. It is during these periods of transition that students can become lost in the shuffle as they move through multiple period days, various teacher routines and expectations with more complex schedules and increased academic rigor. Each of these transitions can pose barriers to ensuring student success. Many students who lack the support structures from school and home that help ensure a seamless transition become lost in transition. These students many times begin to experience an increase in failing grades and an increase in inappropriately behaviors. As a result of frustration, fear and the inability to cope with
the stresses that come with each transition, many students increase their risk of becoming a drop-out statistic.

The research that served as the foundational structure for this study centered on transition research with an understanding of the human growth and basic developmental needs of students. The literature support of this research serves to assist educators and parents in understanding why it is important to intervene with a purposeful set of transition plans and activities that are intentionally developed to help students during each move from; grade to grade, school to school or high school to post secondary (Table I). This study elected to create a book that would be both practitioner based and parent friendly with authentic scenarios and researched transition interventions to help combat the barriers associated with the transitional moves students navigate throughout the K-12 and post secondary experience. It is a goal of this work that school organizations will work collectively to strategically develop district-wide transition plans to help students with these transitions.

In understanding human growth and basic levels of human need, educators come to better understand the total child; physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually. In this era of high stakes accountability, educators must not lose sight of reaching out to students at a deeper, more basic level than mere content alone. Educators and parents would serve students well in being reminded of the inner, human developmental needs of our students and what schools can intentionally do to ensure successful transitions while addressing student needs by implementing transition activities that prepare them for these moves.
Educators often study in college the theory of learning. It is a goal of the authors of this work that in using real life stories, the connection can be made in bridging theory with practice while providing suggestions for interventions that can be strategically embedded in individualized transition plans.

Table 1 Bermuda Triangle: Lost in Transition Conceptual Framework

Human Growth and Development

Numerous theorists have studied human growth and development. This study examined the work of: Maslow, Levinson, Vygotsky, Erikson, and Keniston.

Abraham Maslow developed what would become the Humanistic Theory of Psychology. Maslow studied the healthier side of human behavior by studying the
qualities and characteristics of successful people. The results of his life’s work laid
the foundation for what is known as a hierarchy of needs. His work theorized that as
an individual’s basic needs are met at a given level they were then enabled to move
forward in development. Teachers serve in a unique position in watching students
grow and many times evolve through these basic need levels during periods of
transition. Educators and parents can work collaboratively to help students during
these critical formative years in implementing transition activities. This awareness,
combined with transition activities can meet the physiological needs of human beings
and catapult them on the journey toward Maslow’s highest level of personal growth;
self-actualization.

As with students transitioning from one level of schooling to the next,
educators must not lose sight of the basic needs of students as they struggle to grow
into fully developed, self-actualized and productive members of society. Each level
of educational transition marks a predominant change in a student’s life. Maslow’s
hierarchy of needs model illustrates how students are launched into action by diverse
and often sequential transition events. Factors impacting successful transition for
students include the students’ self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as physical
security and academic achievement. Maslow himself stated that human motivation is
based on seeking fulfillment and change through personal growth (Maslow, 1973).
Maslow depicts these needs as: Physiological / Basic Needs, Safety / Physical
Security, Belonging / Social, Esteem / Emotional, and Self-Actualization /
Completeness. Educators and parents cannot assume that student needs remain
constant as the travel the K-12 system. Life changing events such as: divorce, displaced families, change in family income and changes in student physical and emotional development all impact healthy growth and development from pre-adolescence through young adulthood (Vitz, 1998). It would behoove educators to implement developmentally appropriate transition plans to better ensure a smooth transition.

Table 2: The Pyramid of Needs:

*Illustration from www.commons.wikimedia.org

**Level 1 - Basic / Physiological Needs:**

Level 1 defines the most basic of human needs that are essential to sustain human existence. These needs include: oxygen, food, water, shelter, warmth, sleep, and sex. Maslow’s theory clearly states that these most basic needs must be met
before one can focus on higher needs such as self-esteem, relationships, or social interaction with peers (McLeod, 2007). Once these needs are met the individual is then prepared to move to level two.

In today’s schools, as educators are pressured to reach high levels of accountability on state and national standards, the push for improved test scores can cause educators to overlook many of the root causes to low student achievement. Students who sit in classrooms daily, who have no safe place to rest their head at night or enough food in their stomach to allow them the ability to concentrate are rarely able to perform at their highest levels. If a student’s basic needs are not being met, schools with high numbers of students of poverty are challenged to meet high levels of academic attainment. Teachers and school leaders must be vigilant in creating processes for identifying students whose basic needs are not being met. With systems of support in place to intervene, especially during times of transitions, greater opportunities for success exist.

**Level 2 - Safety Needs:**

The second level of humanistic needs encompass safety, security, stability, and natural order (Maslow, 1973). Also included in this level of needs is autonomy from danger, violence, and the fear of threatening events.

The United States Census Bureau (1980) report found, 85% of school age students came to school from two parent family structure homes. Divorce was not as common. Today, nearly one in every four students is being raised by a single parent. Another staggering phenomena impacting today’s student states one in every fourteen
students are being raised by grandparents. In 2010-2011, over a million students were registered as homeless (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2011). Many children today leave home never knowing what address they will return home to. Some students leave home each morning, or some semblance of what is called home, only to be alerted over the intercom or with a note from the office as to what bus to get on and where the student is to land that evening. More students that we care to admit are living in far from stable and secure living environments. In many violent inner city communities, some student lay their head down to the sound of gun shots in the streets while their counter-parts go to bed mentally reviewing class notes from the previous day’s lecture in preparation for the next day’s test. Schools expect students to follow order and rules when there is little order and very few rules in some students’ lives. Transition plans and transition courses that teach organization and ordering could perhaps, in some small way, help students in meeting this basic need. Schools that offer transition activities that provide resources for parents/guardians of these identified populations can provide support during times of transition.

During educational transitions, communication between schools often begins to break down. In many schools, little to no communication exists to prepare students for the next level or to inform teachers of the level two needs of individual students. Without transition plans in place, many students become an educational fatality during these transitional periods. Transition plans that provide time and opportunity for the sending and receiving schools to collaborate better ensure student success.
Activities that enable teachers to discuss the specific needs of transitioning students allow educators the opportunity to create a more safe and secure learning environment.

**Level 3 – Love / Belonging Needs:**

The third level of need represents the social needs of the individual and the innate need for affiliation with others (Maslow, 1943). At this level, individuals long for acceptance from family and friends, intimate relationships, and the desire to belong to a group, team, or organizations (McLeod, 2007). At this level, the need is strong to connect, to have a sense of community in which the individual lives. This level of need tends to emerge during later childhood and the pre-teen years.

Transition plans that are mindful of students’ desires to be connected to a group or an organization intentionally plan more ways for students to become involved. At each transition level, competition increases. Many students who were once actively involved at the elementary level find themselves being cut and unable to find their niche. It is here that many students begin to become disconnected from school (Lorain, 2011, & Eccles, 2003). This disconnect can begin to impact attendance, grades and behavior in a negative manner. Transition plans that work to develop multiple opportunities for student engagement and involvement through clubs, intramural activities and teams could benefit student human growth and development in nurturing their sense of belonging (Eccles, 2003).
Level 4 – Self-Esteem Needs:

The fourth level of need is the development of self-esteem. Having gained the sense of belonging from the previous level, one is now motivated to seek recognition and admiration from others. This level is characterized by internal and external motives or drives (Kleinwort, 2012). Internal motivation comes from the development of self-respect and achievement. External motivations come from the social status of the individual, focused attention from peers and co-workers, and personal recognition for achievement within an organization or group (Maslow, 1970). Individuals at this level begin to develop the need to identify their worth as an individual. At this level individuals seek recognition of others such as colleagues, employers, community, or even family and friends. The advent of self-esteem typically occurs during the late adolescent stage of development but for most it is predominate in adulthood (Maslow 1970). Once our need for self-worth and recognition have been met, individuals ascend to the pinnacle of human existence, self-actualization.

Transition plans that provide student recognition opportunities that build confidence can help students during this developmental phase. According to Hertzog & Morgan (1999), teachers and counselors play a critical role in developing transition initiatives that recognize student talents and assist in the development of the adolescent and young adult during the transition from middle school to high school and high school and beyond. Schools must be mindful that such recognitions should
not be limited to recognizing athletic accomplishments but include the arts, academics and vocational talents to name a few.

**Level 5 – Self-Actualization Needs:**

Maslow’s theory proposes that as an individual ascends upward, moving from one level of need to the next, the individual will reach the “apex” of growth and fulfillment reaching the self-actualization level. Maslow noted the goal of an individual should be to, “become to everything one is capable of becoming” (Maslow, 1973 p. 163). The self-actualized individual typically seeks truth, wisdom, and meaning in life, enabling him/her to reach their fullest potential as a human being.

**Transition Research**

Life is filled with a variety of transitions. Though the scope and number of transitions we experience in a lifetime are countless, the educational transitions we encounter are critical in ensuring the successful transition of students at each educational juncture.

A transition is defined as the passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another. Transition can be a movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another (Hussey & Smith, 2010). Educational transitions can be thought of from an intellectual as well as the physical perspective (Hussey & Smith, 2010). Intellectually, individuals transition from being thoughtless to being thoughtful. At the same time, physical transitions in education involve moving from one building to another or a new environment (Hussey & Smith, 2010).
One of the functions of schooling is to help prepare students to reach their fullest potential as a developing human being. Schools should provide opportunities for students to explore self and their talents by creating a safe and orderly learning environment for individual growth to occur. Systemically developed research based transition plans at the elementary, middle, high and post-secondary school levels can better ensure student success during times of transition (Lorain, 2011). Transition plans that include exploratory courses, dual credit opportunities at the high school, summer transition jump start programs and counseling support services to name a few are examples of things schools can implement to create a safe learning environment that maximizes learning.

**Transition Theories**

Similar to the work of Maslow, Levinson’s research focused upon personal development through stages of growth. According to Minter and Samuels (1998), Levinson placed parameters on development in an age-dependent manner. Specifically, Levinson broke his developmental stages into several different age categories based upon transitions across the life of a person. His categories include Early Adult Transition, Entry Life Structure for Early Adulthood, Age Thirty Transition, Culminating Life Structure for Early Adulthood, Early Adult Era, and Midlife Transition (Minter & Samuels, 1998, p. 32). The work of Levinson identifies that individuals have unique needs as they move through different transitional periods.
Instead of transitions occurring based upon having previous needs met, Levinson suggests that development occurs based upon the age of an individual. A person in the Early Adult Transition stage of development attempts to apply what he has been taught by his parents, mentors, clergy, coaches, peers, and life experiences and begins to develop his own unique beliefs (Minter & Samuels, 1998). Schools that implement developmentally appropriate articulation activities at each transition stage can better ensure a more seamless transition to the next school level. Transition plans may be similar in content but different in method of delivery at the various transition stages. Activities that make students aware of the classroom the student transitions to might be important at the elementary level, but familiarity of surroundings combined with a walk through with a mock schedule in the transition from middle school to high would be more suited for this age learner. In the transition from high school to college, a campus visit, copies of course syllabi and tour of support services would be more developmentally appropriate to prepare them for this transition.

With a foundation in social development theory, Vygotsky held the opinion that interactions and experiences were paramount to individual development and not based on specific stages of human growth and development, a perspective shared by other theorists. Kritt (2000) supported Vygotsky’s perspective on the critical nature of experiences. Kritt noted “play serves as a catalyst for development” (p. 4). At the same time, Crafter and Maunder (2012) stated that prior experience is a significant factor in transitional development, and growth does not happen in a vacuum. Vygotsky, theorized transitions are connected and cannot occur in isolation. Whether
growth occurs in stages or through age appropriate experiences, educators that understand the growth and development processes of students can create transition activities that better prepare students for the transition. This understanding of the basic developmental needs of our students is many times forgotten as educators focus on common core and accountability measures. This understanding must be at the core of our thinking when developing transition activities.

Gredler (2011) summarizes the work of Vygotsky with the statement that “the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with help” (p. 117). Successful transitions are made when a person moves from needing assistance to complete a task to performing the task autonomously. Transition activities, when implemented, can assist students in their quest of becoming independent learners. The work of Erikson can be summarized as a combination of Levinson and Maslow. Tokuno (1983) determined Erikson incorporates the importance of age-specific development (similar to Levinson) while suggesting that certain transitions in human growth cannot occur before others (similar to Maslow).

Similar to Levinson, Keniston highlights human growth and transformation in terms of age while focusing upon youth. According to Tokuno (1983), Keniston placed emphasis upon “values, preferences, and long-term goals” (p. 210).

The authors of this work hope this book serves to bridge theory with practice in allowing educators to make the connections to the theoretical understanding of human growth and development with and understanding of why we need to create a system of transition processes through reading the real life examples of the why. The
vignettes and strategies provided in each chapter remind us that at the center of
decision making processes are students whose developmental needs must be met as
we teach them. We must know and understand our “subjects” before we teach them
the “subjects”.

Articulation Activities

The main pillar of this capstone project focuses on transition research and
research on suggested articulation activities that schools can implement to better
ensure a successful transition. Though there has been a significant amount of
research conducted on the topic of transitions, there is no one path a person can take
that will guarantee “success”. To promote effectiveness and efficiency during times
of transition, schools must include intentionally planned articulation activities. Just
and Adams (1997) stated that articulation activities “facilitate a smooth transition” (p.
30). Similarly, Hviid and Zittoun (2008) shared that intentional planned articulation
activities enhance the educational process for students in and out of the classroom
using trial and error and experimentation as essential components of navigating
educational transitions.

Demott (1999) emphasized being intentional about helping students make
successful educational transitions. His work highlights the need to 1) find the leaders
and different levels; 2) create and support an articulation committee; 3) determine
what should be articulated; 4) draft a scope and sequence paper; 5) review and
compare the exit objectives/competencies 6) adopt courses and adapt programs to
ensure success; and 7) review, revise, and update the systems (p. 47-49). Demott
attempted to create educational systems that lower student anxiety during educational transitions. If students are anxious about the new environment, the new teacher expectations, and opportunities for extra-curricular involvement and increased academic rigor, then schools should develop transition activities to help alleviate these anxieties.

It is important that effective schools create systemic transition plans to aid students during the various school transitions of their career. Many similarities are shared among elementary, middle, high and college bound students. Anxieties are the same that center on concerns in being able reach higher standards, of being comfortable with the new and larger learning environment, of being able to fit in and find one’s worth. Parents as well share many of the same concerns during times of transition that encompass questions on parental involvement at the school, systems of communication from school to home, familiarity with the new surroundings, teacher expectations and the support systems available to them. Parental concerns can also be addressed through intentionally planned transition articulation activities.

A review of literature is provided on three of the transitions most students experience; elementary to middle school, middle school to high school and high school to post-secondary.

**Elementary to Middle School Transition**

Transitions are just as challenging for elementary students as they are for higher grade levels. Students experience many of the same anxieties as other grade levels that come with having a new teacher, a new classroom, perhaps a new building
and differing expectations as they move to the middle level grades. Combine the worries associated with transition with the onset of puberty and one can easily see why the preadolescent student’s world is often one of chaos and confusion. Mullins and Irvin (2000) proposed that the physical changes brought about with the onset of puberty, and the cognitive and social emotional changes of pre-adolescence, combined with transitioning to a new school environment are often “overwhelming” for many students. Blyth, Simmons & Bush (1978) noted the varied changes that follow students during this transition include; varied classroom routines and rituals, larger class sizes and higher academic standards.

Schools need to develop transition activities in preparation for the transition but also continue with a more systemic approach that encompasses the transition before, during and after while monitoring student progress along the way (Schumacher, 1998). The Schumacher (1998) research also indicates the importance of attending to the physical, social and emotional aspects of the transitioning student and not focusing on academics alone. The research of Waggoner (1994) suggested schools incorporate activities or more opportunities for upper elementary students to rotate through classes in preparation for changing classes numerous times and therefore mirroring what occurs in the middle school. The National Middle School Association and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, (2002) further encourages schools to make the planning, and evaluation of transition activities an annual focus, beginning as early as the intermediate grades. Thus assuring an environment that promotes a confident transition from a self-contained
classroom setting to the more diverse team structure found in the middle school. Many schools do this through team teaching, departmentalization, or advanced scheduling of core classes utilizing an interdisciplinary team of teachers (NMSA & NAESP, 2002).

Transition researchers, Hertzog & Morgan (1998), noted having a well-planned and systematic approach in the transition from elementary school to middle school is paramount to the overall success of students. Research indicates, “schools with extensive transition programs have significantly lower dropout and failure rates than schools that ignore these important stages” (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998, p. 96). These transition plans include activities that implement counseling opportunities for students and parents, school visits, and special summer courses aimed at allowing students to identify with the new school’s culture that assist in the transition process (Morgan & Hertzog, 1998).

The National Middle School Association (2006) concludes that when schools develop strong transition programs at the elementary and middle levels that engage parents and keep families involved in their children’s education they experience higher student achievement and are able to reduce dropout and retention rates. Transition plans must serve to encourage the collaboration among elementary and middle school teachers, students, and parents (NMSA & NAESP, 2002). School leaders should schedule meetings that will bring together the student, parents, teachers, and other key staff members for the purpose of transition planning (NMSA & NAESP, 2002). Articulation activities such as “Return Day” where middle school
students are allowed to return to their respective elementary school to meet with elementary students and discuss their experiences during their transition to the middle school are both beneficial and rewarding for both groups (2002). Other suggested transition activities include permitting middle school teachers and counselors the opportunity to spend a day or two in the elementary school getting to know their future students. Additional ideas include scheduled middle school tours that allows the upcoming transitioning students to walk the halls, become familiar with the academic programs, and review school rules and procedures (NMSA & NAESP, 2002).

According to research of Midgley & Maehr (1998), schools and districts that focus on developing strong interpersonal relationships among their students and staff greatly increases the sense of school belonging. This in turn reduces the detrimental effects of negative attitudes about school, self-esteem, self-deprecation, and feelings of anger (1998). Therefore it becomes evident that schools must implement transition plans combined with support structures that provide fair and equitable learning opportunities for all students. Midley and Maehr (1998) research also notes that preadolescent children are overly concerned with how they compare to their peers and suggests that schools not place emphasis on this appraisal in the classroom environment because it can be detrimental to academic progress. Stating also that such comparisons of relative ability in the classroom can cause the preadolescent student to develop negative attitudes towards school, become less likely to ask for help, and more likely to create excuses for not completing assignments or engaging in classroom discussion (Midley & Maehr, 1998).
Middle to High School Transition

With each advancing grade level, the transition become more complex and requires the collaborative efforts of teachers and leaders within and between schools. Mizelle (2005) provided detailed information on the transition between middle school and high school with the goal of lowering drop-out rates. Mizelle (2005) shared the importance of 1) regular, meaningful communication with students; 2) intentional opportunities for parent participation; 3) formal and informal encouragement of students in and out of the classroom; and 4) strong collaboration between middle and high school administrators and teachers.

Hertzog and Morgan (1998) provided insight into the importance of: familiarizing students with the new building they will transition to; introducing students to the new teachers they will have at the high school, providing a list of resources and extra-curricular activities available and support service offerings in place. The National Middle School Association (2006) noted transitioning freshman are more concerned with the anxiety that comes with this transition with regard to peer acceptance, fitting in, of feeling a sense of belonging (Oakes, 2009). Mizelle (1995) noted grade nine students are pre-occupied with meeting new friends and the freedoms that come with this transition like course selection. These same things that cause them excitement also cause anxiety for some who are not prepared to handle these changes as they enter schools with no structured transition plans. Transition activities that prepare students in advance of this move can help student outcomes of grades, positive socialization and acceptable behavior choices, factors that are
paramount to high school student success (Oakes, 2009). Hertzog and Morgan (1999) researched five categorical areas that successful transition programs align their transition activities to: curriculum, safety and discipline, facilities, teachers and counselors and general. Developing transition activities that fit these categorical areas can ease the transition from middle school to high school. In addition, this same body of research found most schools incorporate less than three transition activities therefor noting a need to do more in preparing students for this transition. Findings from their research suggested implementing activities from five or more transition areas to create a more seamless transition. In the area of curriculum included are activities to familiarize students of the increase in academic rigor, homework requirements, grading scale, make-up work policies and course offerings to name a few. Activities designed to address safety and discipline includes behavior expectations and dress code policies and procedures for reporting harassment and bullying. Facility transition activities include tours of the new building students will transition and locational of key offices such as the principal’s office, attendance clerk and school counselor’s office. Teachers and counselor activities are critical to building relationship between students, teachers and support personnel such as school counselors. General transition activities include extra-curricular activities and summer transition programs.

High School to Post-Secondary Transition

One of the final transitions students face during their educational career is the transition from high school to post-secondary settings. According to Malone (2009),
high school students need structured transition activities similar to those necessary for the middle school to high school transition. A quality articulation activity must have 1) a purpose that is easily understood, 2) committed leaders, 3) appropriate financial support, 4) effective collaboration among constituents, 5) a holistic approach, and 6) an emphasis upon long-term impact (Malone, 2009).

Malone (2009) provides two examples of articulation activities which demonstrate the aforementioned tenants. Specifically, summer term programs and intentional activities for students while they are still in high school are outlined as effective articulation activities (Malone, 2009). Both require more than a one day, hit-or-miss approach to helping students better prepare for the transition from high school to post-secondary institutions.

One example of a summer transition program is a program being implemented at a mid-sized, 4-year, public institution in the southern region of the United States. The program is six weeks in length, and provides raising first-year students the opportunity to live on campus and earn up to 9 credit hours before the beginning of the fall semester. The program is offered to students at a reduced cost, provides one-on-one interactions with faculty, peers, and staff, and requires participants to engage in meetings with mentors, attend study sessions, and experience campus dining services. Participants experience transitional issues and concerns in a more personalized environment than their peers who will arrive in August.

An example of an intentional activity for high school students is a program sponsored by a community chamber of commerce in a small, southern city in the
United States. Members of the chamber of commerce created and implemented a presentation in a local high school which allowed students to interact with individuals from community colleges, traditional colleges, and the military in an effort to learn about educational opportunities after high school graduation.

Alexson and Kemniz (2004) identified 1) structure, 2) study skills, 3) family support, 4) peer support, and 5) interactions with mentors as the basis for effective articulation activities for high school and post-secondary students. They specifically stated that “through formal articulation [activities], transition becomes a reality for students” (Alexson & Kemniz, 2004, p. 20). Common examples of the perspective outlined by Alexson and Kemniz (2004) are orientation programs and classes.

Orientation programs are typically one or two day sessions which occur in the summer. Students and their families are exposed to an extensive amount of information with their primary goal being the attainment of a course schedule. On the other hand, orientation classes typically occur during the course of an academic semester and meet on a regular basis to educate students about institutional culture, resources, study skills, other matters associated with acclimating to a post-secondary environment.

Walker, Downey, & Cox-Henderson (2010) acknowledge the importance of 1) engagement, 2) sense of belonging, 3) academic success, 4) individual motivation, and 5) personal expectations as an individual makes educational transitions. Specifically, they stress the importance of hands-on experience and collaboration with faculty, peers, and staff (Walker, Downey, & Cox-Henderson, 2010). Examples
of this philosophy include involvement with student organizations and community service activities. As a result, it is important to expose students to avenues to become involved on campus and off campus early in their post-secondary careers.

Articulation activities which involve interacting with, and learning from, others promote successful transitions.

In the transition from high school to post-secondary institutions, students are equally concerned with their ability to keep up with the academic rigor as well as the social aspect of fitting in, the desire to attain a sense of belonging, achievement and respect from peers and others. Through the development of intentional, structured, experiential articulation activities that expose individuals to diverse populations and experiences, educators can best prepare students to successfully transition from high-school to post-secondary institutions.

**Problem Statement**

Many students become lost during times of transition. Increased failure rates, higher absenteeism, increased behavior incidences and increased dropout statistics go hand in hand in the absence of effective transitions plans at all levels.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study examined the impact of providing educators and parents with authentic vignettes that emotionally connect research with everyday practice on the importance of developing and implementing transition plans. Feedback from the sample population will provide the researchers with evidence as to the usefulness of this manuscript on improving educator practice and transition planning.
**Context: Inception of the Bermuda Triangle**

Development of the The Bermuda Triangle transition work began in the spring, 2011. The authors of his study who were multi-level, experienced school leaders that realized a common barrier to student success was ineffective transition planning. These educators realized that effective transition planning was a critical component of student success at all levels.

Year after year across the nation, parents voice concern of the negative changes they see in their children following the move from elementary to middle school. Teachers at the high school level analyze alarming freshman failure rates following the move from grade eight to grade nine. Post secondary colleges are presented the task of addressing increased freshman drop-out rates and the need for remediation courses following the move from high school to post secondary institutions. Research supports that clearly defined, well developed and implemented transition plans can improve these outcomes through transition plans that improve communication among parents and between schools that better prepare students for the changes ahead and positively impacts student outcome data.

**Research Question**

This study addressed the one research question of this project:

*How has the creation of a manuscript, written in real life stories impacted practice with regard to meeting student needs through the development of transition activities?*
Summary

Transitions activities should take place before, during and after the transition to different levels. These activities are not just a one time activity. Educators must continually implement, plan and make adjustments to transition activities at each and every level to better ensure student success. Schools may implement numerous activities to assist students in the transition, however, without fully understanding the basic needs of students when developing these activities, educators fall short of the mark (Lorain 2011). Therefore, this capstone intends to combine an understanding of human developmental needs with transition activities in order to increase educator and parent awareness of the critical importance for developing transition plans to impact student success.

Who is the capstone meant to impact?

The targeted audiences of this capstone project are K-12 educators, post secondary educators and parents. It is a goal of this capstone that educators, school leaders and decision makers gain a better understanding for the need to implement transition plans. The ultimate goal of schools implementing transition plans will result in improved outcomes in the form of better grades, attendance, behavior and graduation rates. Results that improve the organization and ultimately improve individual student performance outcomes.

How was the capstone project implemented?

Practitioner experiences informed the authors of this work on need to study the impact of transitions on students as they move through the K-12 system and
beyond as some students enter post secondary institutions. From educational theory to practice, the researchers of this work reflected on the work of Maslow and others in the study of human growth in levels and stages and the quest to meet student needs during these periods of growth and transition. To teach students effectively, educators must know and understand them at a basic level. Kids cannot learn in the classroom if they are hungry, do not feel safe or are not connected to anyone or anything. To become all that students are capable of becoming, educators must start from the inside out. Understanding individual growth and developmental needs enables educators to better develop transition plans that provide effective articulation activities. More importantly, this work can help educators to understand WHY such activities are so critical to student and school success.

This capstone elected to survey teachers, administrators and parents in three rural, Eastern Kentucky school districts including one post secondary institution. The organizations involved included a total of twelve schools. The grade levels participating in this capstone encompassed elementary, middle school, high school and post secondary levels. Surveys administered and collected totaled 55 participants; 11 administrators, 5 parents, 39 educators/instructors. An eighty six percent return rate of surveys were collected.

This capstone incorporated a mixed methods approach using descriptive quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected using a Likert scale of 1-5 that demonstrated the depth of connection the chapter vignette made as an example of human growth and development. Qualitative data were collected using a
survey administered in April, 2013 to teachers, administrators and parents at the elementary, middle, high school and post secondary levels. Qualitative information was provided through open response questions and comments on the impact the manuscript had on changing teacher and parent practices and understanding of the importance of implementing transition activities.

Chapters were uniformly developed following the structure of: chapter title, lead in/hook, vignette, research and interventions. Survey questions were developed with the intent of inquiring about the connection of the chapter to human growth and development with an emphasis on Maslow’s Hierarchy, the interventions and the research. The surveys used a Likert scale of 1-5 with one showing little to no connection, two showing minimal connection, three showing the connection was made but lost focus, four somewhat compelling with clear connection and five demonstrating a clear and compelling connection to human growth and development in the vignette, the research and the intervention.

Why were this capstone and related strategies selected?

Strategies shared at the end of each of the chapters were based on researched best practices. The catalyst for this capstone was based on the premise and supporting research that demonstrates with each transitions, students become lost in the educational system during these transition periods and that loss increases at each advancing level. This capstone came to fruition as a result of a shared understanding that students, especially those from lower socio-economic status, high school freshman and first generation college bound students were lost in higher numbers
during periods of transition. This capstone project proceeded with the goal of providing a book that would serve as a guide to connect the research with the intervention options with the effective vignettes that would emotionally tie the reader to the need for developing these transition activities in schools.

When was the capstone implemented?

Work on this capstone began during the fall, 2010. Chapters were individually developed by the authors. Twelve chapters were developed at each level by the authors of this research. The introduction provided the basis for the research that underpins this project.

Impact of the Capstone

Quantitative data collected from the authors determined educators, administrators and parents perceived the manuscript to be of above average value. Chapter averages ranged from 4.36-4.94. The elementary was 4.94, the middle school 4.36 and the high school 4.45. Written comments provided data on strengths of the chapters and suggestions and recommendations for improvement.

Qualitative data collected provided the most powerful data in support of this project. Below are some of the comments as to the impact of this pending manuscript. (E = educator, A = administrator, P = parent).

Elementary School

E: This manuscript would be very beneficial for any school system. Reading this has definitely caused me to reflect on how I interact and react with students.
E: I feel the evidence provided in this manuscript to be right on! Our school should take this resource and use it to provide our students with a smooth transition. This book should be shared with all administrators in order to help us do what is right for children.

E: I knew transitions were hard...but I did not know how hard they were on students. It has made me feel like I need to personally interact with students. It provided several great transition activities to implement.

E: I was surprised at how compelling I found this manuscript and the emotions it brought.

A: This has raised my awareness of the need for professional development in the area of transitions. Our parents could benefit from workshops on this as well.

A: I liked the researched based interventions provided! The interventions suggested could be put in place to address areas of need.

A: This is right on target. Lots of valuable information for teachers and parents.

P: I did not realize there were so many resources and tips for parents.

P: This provided me with things to think about as my child gets older and closer to transitioning to the middle school.

P: This has helped me in my role as a parent in assisting and preparing my child for the move to the middle school.

Middle School:

E: This could help our school develop, implement and measure appropriate transition plans.
E: I have never thought of transitioning in depth before reading this.

E: This is an eye opener! I love the interventions that accompany each chapter.

Every single vignette brought a face to mind of a student I have had.

E: Excellent connections to vignettes and next steps with Maslow!

A: This manuscript could easily be used as a whole staff book study.

A: In particular, the questions at the end of the chapter provided provocative ground for teachers and administrators to improve achievement at all levels.

A: Reading through the manuscript offered me contemplation about how often I take time to view the holistic child.

P: My daughter has not struggled with transitioning between classes or schools.

However, reading this manuscript has given me important insight into issues other families face, and the need for all parents to become more involved with their children and schools.

P: I could not put it down! As a parent, I know teachers have tough jobs, but I never imagined some of this could be true. After reading this, I will be having many conversations with my child in an effort to help with issues that might come up for him at each transition.

High School:

E: This manuscript gave me new insights into Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. This manuscript gave me many great ideas to help students prepare for college.
E: I think we should take the time to observe the cues our students present when they are struggling. We need to make a conscious effort to make students feel safe and comfortable in approaching us with their concerns or problems.

E: I am now more aware of the vast amount of transition activities that can be implemented at the high school level. Our school needs to be more diligent in developing transitional activities.

A: Too often I only get to know the students assigned to me. I need to do a better job at reaching out to all students.

A: I believe transition activity discussion would impact my school greatly.

A: Transition is a bigger issue that I previously thought.

P: Transition is undoubtably one of the most difficult times for many students and many do get lost in the transition.

P: This book offers a variety of experiences to overcome transition difficulties. As both a parent and an educator, I would really appreciate a book such as this.

Post Secondary:

Instructor: Professionals can benefit by reviewing the research provided in this study and implement some of the strategies suggested.

Instructor: I was pleased to see a relevant connection between Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the student experience.

Instructor: The vignettes would be great to use to facilitate small group discussion in trainings in the classroom.
Summary

In summary, evidence provided clearly indicated the perceived benefits of this manuscript. This work has the potential to change practice and policies that impact children. It has moved educators, administrators and parents to reflect upon their action and possible inaction and develop transition activities that may serve to initiative a positive transition of students to the next level. Furthermore, this manuscript enabled teachers to make the connections to the innermost/basic needs of students and develop appropriate transition activities.

Delineation of work (for capstones with more than one person)

Chapters were divided equally among the authors at each level. The introduction was divided between the two EDD candidates. The research at each level was conducted individually and shared collectively.

Reflections

This manuscript, when published could be used in professional development trainings, parent workshops, book studies, teacher training programs and college induction programs to inform institutions of the powerful impact that well developed transition activities can have on student outcomes and student transition success.

Limitations

Limitations of the capstone:

1. Sample size was limited to rural Appalachian schools with limited diversity.
2. Fewer parents than educators and administrators participated in the study.
3. Limited number of post secondary educators participated the study.
Capstone Project

The following are twenty-four chapters that serve as the main component of this capstone project.
Chapter 1

The Plight of Ricky Wright

The transition from elementary to middle school is one of the toughest educational transitions that students make. Therefore it is paramount that school districts begin to acknowledge this and put into action transition plans designed to provide adequate support for their transitioning students. This is a time in a youngster’s life when their world is seemingly turned upside down. Elementary students go from self-contained, one teacher classrooms to multiple teachers in larger, more impersonal school environments (Stoffner & Williamson, 2000).

This is a time when pre-adolescent children need the support of parents/guardians, teachers, and school counselors even more (Mac Iver, 1990), though they often push away any such effort during these times of great growth, development and change. Parents and school staff need to be prepared to help children navigate the challenges and turmoil that are a part of this transitional period.

Vignette

During Ricky’s fifth grade year in elementary school, he was at the top of his class. He was voted Mr. Hometown Elementary by his peers. Ricky was very much the outgoing, well-mannered and well behaved student teachers loved. He was a very personable child that portrayed a harmonious sense of compassion for others. Ricky loved school, or as his mother once put it, “He just can’t wait for that bus to stop down at the mouth of the holler to pack him off to that school”.

Ricky came from a split home. His biological father was in prison and had terminated all parental rights. His mother was a hard worker with little education. Though she tried to keep food on the table for Ricky, his two sisters and younger brother, it often became a struggle for her. Ricky actually had two younger brothers; one half-brother and, a brother who shared the same mother and father as Ricky. His
mother’s poor taste in men only compounded the struggles at home for Ricky and his siblings as she met and quickly married another uneducated, morally questionable character who worked in the local hills as a logger and general laborer.

One morning Ricky’s teachers came storming into the principal’s office, outraged that the younger of Ricky’s brothers (a half-brother) had managed to bring to school a pocketful of dollars to squander on trinkets and supplies at the annual book fair while Ricky and the others seldom ever had snack money. Upon calling home to inquire about the unusual sum of money that the younger one had brought to school, the mother said simply, “I told him not to take that damn money to school, that he’d lose it or get it took by somebody a lookin’ for a free meal”. The principal then asked, “So the money is his?” She replied, “Yep it’s his, his daddy gave it to ‘em”. The principal pointed out that Ricky and the other siblings hardly ever had snack money, and she replied, “Well that’s cause they ain’t got no daddy and Jr. does”.

Although Ricky could have been the poster child for the HP2 Kids (High Performing / High Poverty), he always smiled. His teachers always seemed to gravitate toward him because he sought to please them, always complying with their wishes. Whenever they needed a “go to person” to handle such tasks as returning the snack cart to the front office or transporting ticket sales from the classroom to the office, Ricky was their guy. He was trustworthy and very dependable. Ricky had many friends throughout the building.
When Ricky hit the middle school in August of his 6th grade year, life as he had known it all but ceased to exist. Four elementary schools were feeder schools to the middle school. Ricky's peer group was increased from 34 students to over 220 students in grade six. Ricky had always been in a self-contained classroom with only one teacher. He suddenly found himself assigned to six different teachers on a team with 220 other students. Though his 5th grade teacher, Mrs. Watkins, frequently attempted to communicate with some of Ricky's new middle school teachers, more often than not she was met with disappointment as phone calls were never returned and emails went unanswered.

Ricky's former principal at Hometown Elementary school couldn't help but reflect on Ricky's time spent at his elementary school. He began to question if his school had made too much of a fuss over him, always ensuring that he had everything he needed for school such as day to day supplies, paper and pencils, notebooks, and other necessities. Did the school prepare him or cripple him in the transition to the middle school? Often teachers would take money out of their own pockets to ensure that he had snacks, or supplies. On more than one occasion the family resource coordinator had provided him with new clothing from local discount stores as she secured sponsorship for Ricky and his siblings. The staff of Hometown Elementary had assumed the role of surrogate parent for this child.

It was October of Ricky's first year at the middle school when Ricky’s former elementary principal ran into his mother at a home basketball game and asked about Ricky and how he was doing. She informed him that Ricky was depressed, he hated
school and he was failing. She indicated that he was not doing too well with making new friends and that all of his elementary friends were in different homerooms. Ricky had commented that he never saw any of them. She continued to share that Ricky was experiencing uncontrollable bouts of crying and did not want to go to school. She said he repeatedly shunned her requests to discuss his issues and that he refused to do his homework even with her persistence in the matter. She indicated that the harder she tried, the more distant he became. She further shared Ricky once lashed out at her because she couldn’t afford to buy him new clothes like the other students wore. He also had indicated that he felt like an outcast and that his tattered hand-me-downs made him feel different in a negative way.

The principal’s heart sank as he stood listening about Ricky’s struggles. He felt a sense of guilt at not having done more to help Ricky to ensure his successful transition to the middle school. The principal questioned what he had done or not done. It was at that moment the elementary principal realized that the system had failed this child.

Ricky’s plight causes educators to realize the powerful impact that the social influences, a sense of belonging and fitting in with peers have on transition success. For Ricky and many others like him, the effects of poverty combined with the challenges that come with transitioning to a new school had a negative impact on his academic performance. Multiple teachers, differing teacher expectations, keeping up with various teachers’ routines and the awareness of social class that became evident through student clothing and brand names seemed to be too much for Ricky. Coming
from a school where teachers knew Ricky’s parents, where he was from and his barriers to getting out of poverty to entering a school where Ricky was just a number provided Ricky the opportunity to become lost in the crowd and fall through the cracks.

For the first time Ricky realized at the new middle school that he did not quite dress like the others. It was the first time that he realized that he had less than the other students. It was at the middle school that Ricky realized he was poor. Ricky became subjected to the world of middle school fashion courtesy of such brand names as Hollister, Aéropostale, American Eagle, and Abercrombie & Finch, to name a few. This was Ricky’s first exposure to the world of “the haves and have-nots”. He realized for the first time that he did not have the trendy clothes and expensive tennis shoes that many of his classmates wore. Ricky became preoccupied with wanting to fit in and quickly blamed his family’s financial shape for his lack of personal items that would be his entry into the “in crowd”.

At the middle school, Ricky was on unfamiliar grounds and without a support net like the one the staff and resource center had provided at his old school his, chances for success were threatened. Nobody played “mother hen” for him by giving him the support he needed. Middle school teachers did not provide Ricky with gift boxes of clothing, no backpacks full of paper and pencils, nor did he have anyone around to ensure that he even had snack money. It appeared that his old school’s approach for ensuring his success was not the same approach the new middle school believed in. Ricky was ultimately fed to the wolves.
As Ricky’s self-esteem plummeted with nobody around to pick him up and put him back on track, he became increasingly withdrawn as despair took hold. Ricky’s future was headed down the drain along with his hopes and dreams.

Unfortunately, Ricky’s plight occurs daily in schools across the country. School districts boast “it’s all about kids” when perhaps what they really should be saying is, “it’s all about all kids.” No child should be left to navigate this treacherous course of transitioning to a new school environment without support nets and teachers who work collaboratively to create a seamless transition to ensure the likelihood of student success.

Research

“During the middle grades, students in high-poverty environments are either launched on the path towards high school graduation or are knocked off-track.” (Balfanz 2009, p.13)

Transition researchers, Hertzog & Morgan (1998), noted having a well-planned and systematic approach in the transition from elementary school to middle school is paramount to the overall success of students. Research indicates, “schools with extensive transition programs have significantly lower dropout and failure rates than schools that ignore these important stages” (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998, p. 96). These transition plans include activities that implement counseling opportunities for students and parents, school visits, and special summer courses aimed at allowing students to identify with the new school’s culture that assist in the transition process (Morgan & Hertzog, 1998).
The Kentucky Department of Education’s webpage reminds us that “Schools that pay attention to transitions and schools that have an intentional transition plan see more success in increasing achievement and reducing retentions” (as retrieved from http://education.ky.gov). Stoffner & Williamson (2002) acknowledge the importance of having sound transition programs aimed at assisting transitioning students to enter “their new school confident and knowledgeable” (Stoffner & Williamson, 2002, p. 48).

According to research of Midgley & Maehr (1998), schools and districts that focus on developing strong interpersonal relationships among their students and staff greatly increases the sense of school belonging. This in turn reduces the detrimental effects of negative attitudes about school, self-esteem, self-deprecation, and feelings of anger (1998). Schools must implement transition plans combined with support structures that provide students fair and equitable learning opportunities if “all students” like Ricky are to receive a fighting chance.

**Interventions**

Schools need to have transition plans in place that focus on the physical, emotional, academic, and social needs of the elementary student moving to the middle school. Many school districts tend to focus only on academic and procedural issues of transition and fail to acknowledge perhaps the most critical part, the social and emotional issues (Diemert, 1992). As students move from the self-contained class settings at the elementary level to the departmentalized class schedules of the middle school they need an abundance of ongoing support and assistance during this
often stressful transition (Stoffner & Williamson, 2000). A key element in assuring students of this ongoing support and assistance before, during, and after the transition is providing adequate counseling and support by school staff (Stoffner & Williamson, 2000, & Allen, 2001).

The following intervention strategies and suggestions were developed from the research of Mullins & Irvin (2000); Shonffner & Williamson (2000); Akos, Creamer & Masina (2004) and Campbell & Jacobson (2008). These articles were published by the Middle School Journal and Middle Ground: The Magazine of Middle Level Education.

Strategies and suggestions:

- Prepare both the student and the parents for transitioning from the elementary school to the middle school.
  - Parent orientation to review schedules and procedures
  - Organize a student orientation to familiarize students with the building, rules, and expectations of the middle school.
  - Allow students to move through their daily routines / class schedules for the upcoming year.

- Initiate Student Handoff Programs – designed to bring teachers and staff from both the incoming and receiving schools together to focus on meeting the needs of every child.

- Provide direct communication with parents of transitioning students.
  - Host a parent night at the school site prior to classes beginning
  - Encourage parents to utilize school and district webpages to acquire information pertaining to upcoming events
  - Involve PTO organizations in transition activities
    - Membership drive to enlist new parents
    - Share PTO newsletters
    - Prepare handouts for parents about fundraising information, and educational opportunities for their children.
• Develop school newsletters notifying parents of summer transitioning events such as:
  o Jump Start Programs
  o Middle School Open House Events
  o Building tours for parents and incoming students

• Develop Peer Mentor Programs that allow older students to directly communicate with pre-transitioning students.

• Plan school site visits the year prior to transition.
• Encourage middle school counselors to visit the elementary school prior to the transition to discuss the middle school’s curriculum, homework policies, and social events.

• Develop adult mentor programs to acquaint incoming students with the middle school staff.

• Develop effective transition plans that focus on:
  o Increasing the communication between elementary and middle school teachers.
  o Involving parents in the transition process.
  o Identify the physical, emotional, academic, and social needs of the individual students.

• Be actively engaged with your child’s new school
  o Attend orientation meetings
  o Attend parent teacher conferences
  o Join the middle school PTO
  o Consider becoming a school volunteer

• Arrange an appointment with your child’s school guidance counselor and teachers as early as possible.
  o Be proactive and establish early dialogue with teachers, administrators and staff
  o Communicate with other parents
  o Consider developing a support group for parents

• Research and review literature pertaining to educational transitions.
  o Increase your knowledge of adolescent development.
  o Take time to review information and materials that relate to middle level issues.
• Review school policy and procedure prior to school starting
  o Lead discussion with your child about policy and procedure
  o Attend SBDM meetings at school
References


Kentucky Department of Education. Webpage. [http://education.ky.gov](http://education.ky.gov)


For most students, leaving elementary school and moving on to the middle school is just another experience on the journey through a student’s educational career. However, for some, this transition marks a rather significant milestone in their life that brings about feelings of great anxiety.

In late spring of each school year, many elementary teachers and principals across the country stand before departing students during the 5th Grade Promotion Ceremony. These ceremonies are planned to honor student achievement and commemorate what is hoped to be the first of many key educational attainment levels. Educators reassure each of them that transitions are simply changes...and that change is merely a part of living...and then we let them go...

It is quite common for most transitioning students to have numerous fears and concerns pertaining to the changes that lie ahead and about what to expect at the next level. In many intermediate classrooms across the country, the minds of students at this age are all consumed with the social issues that are a part of this transition. Students are more concerned about making new friends, fitting in, being safe from harassment and being able to just survive middle school life in general. It is not uncommon to hear stories from students who claimed they felt safe and secure in elementary school but fear the move to the larger middle schools. They experience anxiety in the thought of leaving a place where everybody knows your name...to enter a place where you are likely to be a more of a number where no one remembers your name.

If educators know what students feel and fear during this transition, why do we not have activities in place to lessen these fears? How can educators and parents stop the negative effects of becoming “lost in transition” that are associated with movement from one school level to the next?

Vignette

In the spring before David was enrolled in kindergarten, the Family Resource Coordinator and principal worked tirelessly registering local children for the coming fall’s kindergarten class. It was during this time frame that the principal first met David and his mother, Rita. David was a small framed, bright eyed child with a hint
of mischievousness hidden inside his demeanor. His inquisitive nature and fond attraction to anything in the wild that crawled, hopped, or slithered marked him as unforgettable by nearly anyone who knew him.

David lived with his mother, who had very little formal education and for all intents and purposes was illiterate. They lived in a dilapidated run down trailer at the head of a hollow where part of the road to his home was the creek bed. On numerous occasions when the weather was bad or raining he would not be at school because they could not get out to the main road to catch the bus. His principal had indicated that David’s living conditions were subpar, perhaps the worse of any child in school. This principal had seen subpar throughout his career. To say David’s living conditions were some of the worst he had ever seen spoke volumes of the deplorable conditions this child endured. As a school administrator in rural Eastern Kentucky, with an annual free and reduced lunch rate of 85% or higher each year, the principal had visited some pretty poor living conditions.

Regardless of the senseless shootings in schools from Kentucky to Virginia Tech to Connecticut over the past twenty years, schools are still a safe place for children (Dinkes, Kemp, & Baum, 2009). For some parents however who daily live in survival mode, there are questions that need to be answered in order for them to allow their child to attend school. Educators many times say parents are ignorant who chose to keep their child at home. Perhaps educators have never taken the time to get at the root cause of stay at home kids.
David's mom lived in constant turmoil brought on by a nasty divorce. The Family Resource Center had worked with David and his mother Rita to get him enrolled in kindergarten. It took quite a bit of prodding to convince her that the boy would not be snatched from school by his estranged father whom David had never met. The school reassured Rita that David would be safe, and that if she so wished, nobody could sign him out without her permission. The school gave her a tour of the building pointing out the safety procedures the school enforces and the process for checking a child out of school. Somewhat assured but still uncertain, the first day of school Rita was spotted in tears standing beside the double doors exiting the gymnasium as the new kindergarten class marched off to their classroom. Rita called out down the hallway in a piercing voice, "don't lose David"! The principal quickly returned to her and gave her his word that David would be fine and once again promised her that nobody would take him. Rita wanted her son to learn and get a good education. She just needed reassurance that he would come home safely to her each night. Rita's inability to read and write never diminished her ability to love and care for her son.

Like all adolescents, David wanted to be able to fit in at his new school. He wanted to be noticed for something positive to hang his hat on. Through his years in elementary school David was nurtured by his teachers. Each of them seemed determined to strip him of his legacy of illiteracy. One time when David was in 1st grade, his teacher Mrs. Deaton had asked the principal to come to her room to listen to David read. It was during this time that David was nicknamed "The Reading
Machine.” It became a commonly shared goal of the teachers who had David that they each pay particular attention to this youngster. David’s teachers not only wanted him to read well, but they wanted him to be the first in his family to graduate high school. By the end of fifth grade the elementary teachers were steadfast in the belief that they had given David a strong foundation to go forth and be successful and ultimately graduate from high school.

As David entered middle school his interest in school began to fade. By the time he reached the end of the first grading period he was failing and his problems began to manifest. He ate alone in the cafeteria, he had no friends with whom he associated with and he appeared to be a misfit to the few who knew him by name. As well, few middle school teachers could put a face with his name when the elementary teachers inquired as to David’s progress. David’s former teachers from elementary school periodically attempted to touch base with his middle school teachers to see how he was doing only to be discouraged by the lack of follow-up from David’s middle school teachers in retuning calls. It seemed as though David had washed up on a deserted island lost and alone with no provisions or support. One of David’s former teachers ran into his mom and to her dismay Rita informed the teacher, “well David just don’t like school no more.” He does not trust those middle school teachers and they don’t seem very willing to help her him.” Rita also shared that she attended a team meeting only to feel like she too was being put down. “They used all of these high falooten words...they made me feel so dumb. I can relate to what David must feel if that is the way they are.” Rita’s reason for her disconnect with the staff was
heard loud and clear when she shared, “them teachers over there think they are better than everyone”.

As David continued his downward spiral he was consumed with feelings of inadequacy and despair. He became increasingly critical of himself and his surroundings. In addition, he felt that he was constantly being compared to his peers in how they dressed the clubs they were in, where they lived and the talents they were able to showcase. David once felt good about reading...but who cared about reading at the middle school? He began to focus more on his inability to fit in academically and socially. He frequently made comments such as, “The other kids are smarter than I am”, “Nobody cares what I think” or, “My teachers think I am stupid”.

What David needed most was a support structure much like the one he had in his old elementary school. He needed an intervention plan in place to assist him with his transition. He needed a teacher to connect to and David’s mom needed guidance as well on how to provide support for David at home. Without these transition supports, David was on a crash course for becoming a high school dropout.

Research

Research from the American Educational Research Association 2010 noted schools are safer than the streets and many of the communities in which our students live in and that violent crimes in schools have actually been on the decline since the 1990’s. The AERA also points out that the most common form of violence at school comes from bullying and disruptive behavior (AERA, 2010).
The following is an excerpt from a report from the National Middle School Association. Success in the Middle: A Policymaker’s Guide to Achieving Quality Middle Level Education: 2006.

Sometimes schools unwittingly erect barriers to family involvement by failing to recognize how intimidated many parents feel in settings where they did not achieve success during their own adolescence. Language difficulties, economic disparities, and work responsibilities can cause further estrangements. But other times schools and school districts actively discourage parents’ participation such as focusing only on negative, one-way communications with families or excluding low-income and minority parents and guardians from important decisions that affect their children’s education. By contrast, educators who strengthen home-school connections not only accelerate students’ learning and development; they build support for middle level reform (NMSA, 2006, p. 27).

The NMSA research suggested that strong transition programs at the middle level can reduce dropout and retention rates by developing transition programs that engage parents and keeps families involved in their children’s education throughout high school, which leads to higher student achievement (2006).

According to Midgley & Mcahr (1998) middle schools that over emphasize the relative ability of their students tend to create negative outcomes for many students transitioning from elementary schools. The emphasis on relative ability in the classroom causes the early adolescent child to develop a negative attitude towards school, become less likely to ask for help, and more likely to create excuses for not completing assignments or engaging in discussion during class (Midgley, 1998). Their research concludes that pre-adolescent students are naturally overly concerned with how they compare to their peers and that for schools to place emphasis on this comparison in the classroom environment can be detrimental to academic progress of
the student. Schools that tend to focus on relative ability rather than individual effort of each student will create a host of less than desirable outcomes. The good news is that when schools focus less on a student’s relative abilities and place more importance on effort and attitude they are able to create a positive or growth mindset for the child.

**Interventions**

Children like David require effective transition plans combined with numerous articulation activities before, during and after the transition. Many educators ask where do we start or how do you create a plan for a child such as this?

“Start by doing what’s necessary; then do what’s possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.” - St. Francis of Assisi

The National Middle School Association and the National Association of Elementary School Principals studies noted that the elementary and middle school’s leadership, faculty and staff should work together to address the student’s concerns and to ease the transition to middle school (NMSA & NAESP, 2010).

**Strategies and suggestions:**

- Employ a “Transition Coach” such as a counselor or other staff member designated to track student’s social interaction with peer groups as they transition to middle school.
  - “Transition Coaches” work with students to reduce barriers and ensure that they are involved in extracurricular activities and events at school.
  - Assist students in making new friends.
  - Track student progress and support academic goals established by the school.
Provide transitioning students with mini-classes on a variety of school related issues such as: Bell / Class Schedule, Locker navigation, Organization techniques and strategies, and Social intervention.

- Summer orientations such as “Jump Start” designed to assist transitioning students and parents with the building orientation and layout.

- Middle School Scavenger Hunt held prior to the opening of school to assist the transitioning students and parents with their new school. Provides an excellent avenue for incoming students to meet and spend time with new teachers and staff.

- “Early Bird Days” - allow for incoming students to start and attend classes 2 – 3 days prior to the rest of the students starting school.

- Host “Orientation Nights” to allow transitioning students to communicate with middle school staff so that they can learn about school routines and expectations.

- School Site Visits whereby students tour the middle school prior to exiting the elementary school.

- Assign a middle school “Pen Pal” and encourage written communication between the elementary student and a middle school student.

- Target “At Risk Students” and assign peer or staff mentors the year prior to the transition.

The following transition ideas and activities for leaders, teachers, counselor and parents come from a joint position paper adopted by the National Middle School Association and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NMSA & NAESP, 2002).


- Make the planning, implementation, and evaluation of transition activities an annual focus, beginning in the intermediate grades of the elementary school.

- Begin as early as grade five to create an environment that promotes a confident transition from a self-contained classroom structure to the larger team structure of the middle school by enabling students to change classes throughout the day during their last year in elementary school. Many schools
do this through Team Teaching, Departmentalization, or advanced scheduling of core classes utilizing an interdisciplinary team of teachers.

- Encourage collaboration among elementary and middle school teachers, students, and parents.
  - Schedule meetings that will bring together the student, parents, teachers, and other essential staff members together for the purpose of transition planning.
  - Schools could host “Return Day” where students return to their respective elementary school for the day to discuss their transition to middle school.
  - Permit middle school teachers and counselors to spend a day or two in the elementary school to meet future students.
  - Middle School Tours to allow students to walk the halls, become familiar with the academic program, review school rules and procedures, meet the staff.

- Provide comprehensive orientation programs for teachers, students and families, including older siblings, who strongly influence attitudes and perceptions of transitioning students.

- Become knowledgeable about the needs and concerns of young adolescents in transition.

- Support teachers' efforts to address students' social, developmental, and academic needs.

- Provide leadership in creating a climate that values and supports effective home/school communications.


- Engage in collaborative planning with their counterparts at the elementary and middle levels to ensure a smooth academic transition that recognizes and accommodates variations in curricula across feeder schools.
  - Schools could allow the elementary staff and the middle school teachers to “Trade Places for a Day”. This would allow the newly transitioned students to have direct contact with some of their old teachers as well as allowing the students preparing for upcoming transitions to become familiar with their new teachers.
• Become knowledgeable about the needs and concerns of young adolescents in transition.

• Keep parents informed, help them become skilled in dealing with issues related to transition, and welcome their participation in their children's education.

• Provide counseling at both the elementary and middle levels to address transition concerns and assure students of the availability of ongoing support.

• Provide programs, activities, and curricula to help students understand and cope successfully with the challenges of transition.

• Use a variety of developmentally appropriate instructional practices that will enable each child to experience academic success.

• Employ strategies such as cooperative learning that provide opportunities for peer interaction.

• Consider organizational structures such as team teaching that ensure teachers have meaningful knowledge and understanding of each child.

Retrieved from http://www.teachersandfamilies.com/member/parent/ms-t4.cfm

• Provide young children with manageable tasks that will help them develop organizational skills and responsibility.

• Encourage children to try new things and to regard failure as a necessary part of learning and growing.

• Become knowledgeable about the needs and concerns of young adolescents in transition.

• Help children turn their anxieties into positive action by learning about school rules, schedules, locker procedures and the availability of counseling.

• Attend school functions and stay involved in children's schooling.

• Support children in their efforts to become independent.

• Maintain strong family connections with young adolescents.
• Be alert to signs of depression or anxiety in their children and seek help.
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Chapter 3

Becky’s Story

Kids are kids right? They are pretty much the same...or so educators sometimes think. Boys and girls DO learn differently. They react to things differently and respond differently to situations they are presented with. Educators must be cautious to revert to a “one size fits all” mentality. During the transition from elementary school to middle school teachers and parents need to recognize and respond to the differences between boys and girls to ensure they each have a seamless and successful transition to their new school environment.

Vignette

The transition to middle school seemed easy for Tyler. Several years earlier his older brother Trevor adjusted to middle school routines and expectations with little fan-fare. It was a different story for their younger sister, Rebecca. The seven period school day and different teachers for each content area posed a number of challenges for Rebecca. She was never the most organized child. A view of her former elementary school desk revealed the tell-tale signs of a budding pre-adolescent. Papers were not organized or in any particular order. Books were heaped to one side and she had to root for a pencil and paper on which to take notes. “All she ever needed for grade 5 was right there in that desk that she sat at day after day...all year long. Her homework was in there. Just give her a few minutes to find it! Some teachers required homework on a daily basis. Some gave a quiz every week on a designated day, while other teachers surprised students with a “pop” quiz. All of the teachers had targets on the board that, if Rebecca were prepared enough to write
them down in her daily planner...she would have noticed a connection between the posted targets, the daily learning checks and the formative assessment questions.

For the first time in her young scholastic career, Rebecca began to complain about school. She frequently voiced her frustration with regard to the different teacher expectations from one class to the next and she complained at having to keep up with the various assignments in each one. As the days went by Rebecca grew increasingly upset with school in general as she began acting out on a regular basis. Her attitude and behavior started to change as she went from a happy-go-lucky child to a hormonal adolescent on a roller coaster ride of emotions. It wasn’t until Rebecca’s parents received a phone call one afternoon from her Principal, Mrs. Smith did they (teachers and parents) realize they had to do something different.

No one could assume that Rebecca, just like all of the other incoming sixth graders and her siblings that transitioned before her would make the transition in the same manner. How quickly educators and parents forget the physiological changes that follow an adolescent into middle school; hormones kick in, braces come on, zits pop out and some kids develop more...or less than their grade level peers. Rebecca by all means seemed unprepared for the changes physically, emotionally, academically, and logistically.

Research

According to Waggoner (1994), multiple transitions or class changes from teacher to teacher and content to content throughout the instructional day pose a degree of difficulty for many children coming from a self-contained classroom with
only one teacher. Schools that structure their elementary schools with some degree of class changes better prepare students for the transition to the middle school than those coming from fully self-contained school settings. This same study demonstrated students who transition from elementary schools that rotate students between classes at least part of the day reported that their students were better prepared to enter middle school. Sixty-six percent of all students surveyed believed they would be better prepared for seventh grade if they had more than one sixth-grade teacher (Waggoner, 1994).

A study of 171 sixth-graders (Waggoner, 1994) found students entering middle school from schools that provide a team setting emulating smaller learning communities (SLC’s) demonstrated a stronger affiliation in school activities and fewer concerns about the transition than students in self-contained sixth-grade classrooms. Teachers in teamed settings felt their students exhibited fewer indicators of stress related to progressing to junior high school than teachers of students in self-contained sixth-grade classrooms.

Interventions

*How can parents help alleviate the powerful concerns children often have about transitioning to a new school?*

The National Middle School Association (NMSA) suggests that parents of transitioning students can alleviate much of the stress commonly associated with the transition to a new school and increase the possibility of a successful transition for their child provided they are willing to communicate openly and effectively with
school officials, teachers, and principals. The list below was organized by the NMSA and suggests what parents can do to help with transitions (NMSA, 2011).

**Strategies and suggestions:**

- Be alert to signs of depression or anxiety in their children and seek help.
- Encourage children to try new things and to regard failure as a necessary part of learning.
- Become knowledgeable about the needs and concerns of young adolescents.
- Open direct lines of communication with teachers, administrators, and other parents.
- Help children turn their anxieties into positive action by learning about school rules, schedules, locker procedures and the availability of counseling.
- Attend school functions and stay involved in your child’s education.
- Become good listeners.
- Provide support for children in their effort to become independent.
- Maintain strong family connections with young adolescents.
- Encourage student participation and involvement in classroom activities and school functions.
- Realize that the more connected the child is to their school the greater the possibility of a successful transition.
- Be Proactive whenever possible.

Schools, especially those that foster the self-contained class schedules, can work collaboratively to modify school schedules to allow students some means of a rotation that emulates what students will experience at the middle school.
Schools and parents must work together to address the concerns associated with the transition from one school to the next. Peter Lorain, a retired middle school principal, from Oregon, believes that, “a well-planned, systematic transition program that involves all stakeholders” may just be the key to easing the anxiety associated with transitions (Lorain, 2011). Effective transition plans focus on a holistic approach and are geared toward meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of the child. Schumacher (1998) illustrates that effective and comprehensive transition plans include numerous activities geared toward easing many of the concerns children have pertaining to attending a new school environment. The list below summarizes a few things schools can do to help with transitions (Lorain, 2011).

Retrieved from:
http://www.nmsa.org/Advocacy/PressRoom/MiddleSchoolEducationNews/Article1/Tips/tabid/394/Default.asp

- Develop comprehensive transition plans that identify the physical, emotional, academic, and social needs of the student. Differentiate instruction to meet individual needs.

- Support communication between teachers of transitioning students and encourage the new teacher to communicate frequently with the student’s previous teachers.

- Ensure a positive and successful first impression of your school for the new students.

- Work to ensure that curriculum and programs across the district are aligned to assist transient students at acquiring a better chance of being successful.
• Encourage adequate communication between the school and parents of horizontally transitioning students.

• Assign a school counselor or other staff members to shadow incoming students to provide any needed support especially for the first few weeks or months following the transition.

• Structure the elementary school and the middle school in teams or smaller learning communities where teachers can forge personal relationships with each student by managing a smaller number of students.

• Become more knowledgeable on the differences between boys and girls and adjust teaching styles and structures to address these differences (Gurian, Stevens, Henley & Trueman, 2010).

*I like a teacher who gives you something to take home to think about besides homework.* ~Lily Tomlin as "Edith Ann"
References


Chapter 4

"Top Dog Effect"

Each year hundreds of thousands of school children leave the safe and secure confines of the elementary school into the unknown territory known as "the middle school". Many of these transitioning students are left to face this period of adjustment, the peer competition, struggles with social acceptance and the physical and emotional changes associated with preadolescence on their own. It is not uncommon to hear stories of students who excelled in their perspective elementary school only to fall to the wayside upon entering the middle school level. High performing and subsequently high achieving students are not immune to the effects of being top dog in elementary schools who become lost in the abyss of the middle school transition where the stage becomes more competitive as students vie for athletic, academic and band positions to name a few.

The top dog effect applies to individuals who have risen to the top in their respective field by hard work or raw talent only to be downtrodden by the negative and sometimes even damaging effects of competition following their transition to middle school. The typical middle school setting combines multiple top students from each elementary school. It is at this point that many students experience their first level of real competition for academic, social, and athletic superiority. For many students this will be their first contact with others just like them; for instance, the former star athlete at the elementary level quickly realizes that there are four or five others just like them. It is not uncommon to find the former "star athlete" sitting on the bench during the middle school basketball games because the other five players were also stars and perhaps more talented.

Competition is a part of life.... But how can we as educators better prepare students for this during this critical transition?

Vignette

Tyler was a good looking kid who had the loving support of his mother, grandparents and a host of relatives. Though his mother and father had divorced when he was three years old he did manage to spend considerable time with his biological father who still lived in a nearby community. Tyler’s story is not one of academic failure or poverty. His is one of social adjustment and the difficulties
associated with the transition from a relatively small elementary school into the larger, more impersonal middle school.

During his elementary school years Tyler was quite "the man" at school. He was a star on his elementary school's basketball team, quarterback on the little league football team and one of the top academic students in his class. Life was good for Tyler at the elementary level. It was not until he started middle school that things began crashing down around him.

Like many kids his age, Tyler felt the pressures of social acceptance and fitting in with his new surroundings, he began to withdraw from many of the things he used to love. He had started trying to ditch school by pretending to be sick, so that he could spend the day at home alone, with the X-box and computer to keep him company. Tyler's long line of successes athletically and academically had hit a bump in the road. His frustrations became apparent during the end of the first month of middle school as he began football practice. It was this point that he became depressed with his fall from being leader to a second string player. He realized for the first time he had real competition for the coveted position he had always held as quarterback. Tyler's attitude and happy go lucky demeanor began to change.

His frustrations and negative attitude towards his new coach and his new surroundings marked the first time Tyler had ever not wanted to play ball. Tyler began to lose interest in his grades and he seldom completed his homework. He could also care less whether he was on time to practice or even if he played football at all.
It is here at this critical juncture in the life of an adolescent child that educators can have a great impact on a student’s life. If a teacher or school develops transition strategies that identify with what students experience and provide strategies that help them find and develop their talents they can better ensure transition success for students like Tyler. Left addressed, it is here that we lose them to failing grades, increased negative behavior, and drop-out statistics. Everyone senses a need to belong to something. For kids like Tyler...educators need to be prepared to help students like him find another open door when one closes. As students advance into higher grade levels, most students find competition increases. One by one the students who were once engaged fall to the wayside. For others, their closed door will come later as they transition into high school, as they are faced with the cold reality that they will not be playing college ball or that their dream of playing in the NBA or NFL has all but diminished.

In whatever transition a student experiences closed doors...those who are prepared with plan “B” and those who have alternative ways to cope with the reality of the closed doors will persevere, explore and develop their hidden talents and successfully navigate this transition. For students who have no parent to help them cope, educators become their life-line. Educators can better prepare students on how to cope with these “bumps in the road” during their transition. Educators can also work to provide more opportunities for student participation and have processes that help teachers build relationships with students so they know when doors are closing for students and help find alternative ways to be involved.
Research

Weiss (1993), suggests that middle school athletic competition can have both a positive and negative effect on the pre-adolescent child. The positive aspects include improvement in the student’s individual level of physical fitness and their self-esteem while the negative aspects are increased anxiety and stress on the student athlete (Weiss, 1993).

Many of these negative stressors could be eliminated provided schools focus on keeping competition in perspective by creating more opportunities for involvement that allow children to have fun, enjoy skill development, and physical activity beyond competitive sports. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2001), and the National Middle School Association (1999), suggest that too often the coaches, teachers, or other staff members assigned to supervise athletic events may stray from the “program’s educational purposes” and that many of these athletic events were not created nor designed with the child’s the best interest in mind (NMSA, 1997).

The Association for Middle Level Education (2012) encourages schools to strongly consider the types of interscholastic sports offered to their middle school students. Suggesting that schools seeking to offer sports focused on individual improvement such as track and field, swimming, or perhaps archery. Studies have found that student participation in these events increase; and should take precedence over other forms of contact sports such as football, basketball and soccer (AMLE, 2012).
Schools that have middle school advisory programs can assist in developing relationships between students and teachers (AMLE, 2012). Teachers who are assigned a small number of students within well-developed advisory programs can monitor student academic, behavior and social progress in the transition from elementary school to middle school. These smaller learning communities of teachers and students allow teachers to be on top of things, noticing when a student is no longer an active participant. School counseling programs cannot possibly serve the needs of all students in a school. Advisory programs can serve as the systemic process for keeping a watchful eye on each and every student. The outcome of advisory programs are that all students are more connected to the whole school program and have a mentor or coach to lend support and advice along the way.

**Interventions**

Interventions for many students need to begin as early as fourth grade (AMLE, 2012). Elementary schools should strive to provide as many interactions designed to introduce friendly competition with students from other schools in the same district. This could be done by conducting academic team competitions, spelling bees, or through a variety of athletic competitions and intraural programs. Many districts are able to place many of these children on combined teams to compete with other districts.

Most of us are familiar with a variety of “All-Star Teams” usually associated with the combined talents of many children across a variety of sports. The positive aspect of the all-star teams allows for the most talented students to develop
relationships with one another and to play on the same team prior to being pitted against one another, competing for the same position upon entering the middle school.

Strategies and suggestions:

- Ensure the educational focus of all athletic competition is designed to ensure that adolescent child's needs are being met by laying the ground work for a healthy lifestyle involving physical activity (AMLE, 2012).
  - increasing the physical fitness level of the child
  - developing the fine motor skills
  - development of leadership skills, socialization skills, and self-esteem

- Ensure that all extracurricular activities focus less on competition and more on skill development and allow all students interested in the activity to participate.

- Ensure that all coaches and assistants receive adequate training such as:
  - coaching certification training
  - safety and first-aid training
  - competency based training to include rules clinics for all activities being supervised

- Ensure that all activities and athletic sports provide each individual student the opportunity to develop skills, improve self-esteem, gain leadership experience, and how to become a member of a team (Weis, 1993).

- Focus on team building skills.
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Chapter 5

Afraid to Take a Chance

Not all students negatively impacted in the transition from elementary school to middle school come from rural, low income homes. Struggles during the transition from elementary school to middle school are common to kids from all walks of life albeit rural, inner city, suburban and affluent alike. Their stories differ somewhat from others. These children may have nice homes, warm clothing to wear, plenty of food to eat, and possibly even two parents residing in their home but, they struggle none the less. Many of these kids are suffocating from the middle class pressures and expectations from parents and pressure from peers in either appearing too smart or too dumb.

Regardless of the demographics, children from middle and upper class households have similar experiences, concerns and needs as their peers. These pre-adolescent/adolescent children feel anger, despair, and a sense of losing control of themselves. Combined with the onset of puberty, fear of rejection, and the uncertainty of transitioning to middle school, many of these students begin to develop a fixed mindset and begin to regress from challenging learning opportunities that could potentially allow them to excel. A fixed mindset causes students to take the easy route to success for fear of failure in more challenging opportunities. Often students will begin to refrain from asking questions in class or participating in class discussion for fear of saying something wrong or looking dumb in front of their peers. Even worse...this age student begins to fear looking smart...when smart is not always “cool”.

Vignette

Kathy is 12 years old and comes from a good home. Her Dad is an engineer and Mom is an account manager at a local bank. She is the middle child from a loving and supportive household. Her younger brother is 7 and attends the suburban elementary school she just left. Her older sister is 17, a junior in high school and contender for class valedictorian. She has the agonizing task of deciding which Ivy League School she will attend upon graduation.
Kathy has always been a very bright and pleasant child. She loved school and could not wait to see her peers every morning. During the first weeks following her transition to middle school, Kathy’s teachers began to notice a change in her behavior. She no longer wished to participate in classroom discussions and seldom ever raised her hand to ask questions or provide input during classroom activities. A few of her teachers even attempted to praise her intelligence and encouraged her to become more involved in class discussions. Unfortunately for Kathy, even though her teachers made numerous attempts to engage her more fully, she withdrew at every opportunity.

This once bright and often outspoken student had now retreated into a world of silence. When asked why she had suddenly become so shy she exclaimed, “I do not want to look stupid and yet...I do not want to look smart either”. Kathy had become obsessed with the fear that her friends would laugh at her if she was wrong or laugh at her for appearing too intellectual. It was more important to Kathy at this given time in her growth and development to “fit in” rather than be perceived as smart or stupid. Either of those made you an outcast. Coupled with the pressure from home to live up to her older sister’s ambition and intellectual gifts further complicated life in middle school for Kathy. Her parents had even greater expectations for Kathy to be even better than her sister. Her teachers in the first few weeks of middle school all commented that “If you are anything like your sister...we have great expectations for you!”
The new students at the middle school had an additional opportunity to enroll in experimental, elite honors English class. Kathy chose not to take this class. She did not want to run the risk of being labeled “smart” nor run the risk of getting any letter grade lower than an “A”. So, she played it safe and once again preferred blending in rather than being out front and on top like her sister. Kathy always saw her sister leading the class while receiving all kinds of awards and accolades. But... Kathy also noticed her sister never went on dates, did not belong with the “in crowd” and never went to prom. She saw her sister concentrating so much on grades that it seemed she never had time for doing what kids do. Kathy did not want to emulate this same behavior. Kathy wanted her own identity. She wanted to find her own way. She wanted to develop her own gifts and not become what her sister was.

During the first parent teacher conference Kathy’s homeroom teacher, Mrs. Salyers discussed with Kathy’s parents her growing concerns with Kathy. The teacher explained that several of Kathy’s other teachers assigned participation grades in their classes and that as a result, a couple grades in Kathy’s core classes were lower due to her lack of participation. Both of her parents were dismayed by what they were hearing. They reacted by grounding Kathy until they witnessed marked improvement in her grades and participation. Kathy’s parents had always set high expectations for their children and it was difficult for them to accept that she would receive anything less than an “A” in every subject. They immediately signed Kathy up for the honors class.
Research

Dweck (2010), noted author and psychologist spent three decades studying the factors of student motivation. Most of her research centers on the question of why some students display resilience, persistence, and enjoyment of learning even though the subject matter may pose a degree of difficulty; whereas others will tend to shut down, turn off, and shy away from any intellectual material found to be challenging. Dweck suggests that students have either a “fixed” or “growth” mindset or that their ability to be successful with challenging learning experiences depends upon their individual mindset (Dweck, 2010). Students that have a fixed mindset are more inclined to shy away from any pursuits that tend to be challenging, difficult, or possess a degree of failure thus limiting their ability to take risks. Students that possess a “growth mindset” will often seek out and gravitate toward academic pursuits that offer the greatest degree of difficulty and potentially the greatest degree of knowledge or learning and are more likely to take calculated risks pertaining to learning experiences (2010).

Students with a “fixed mindset” will potentially have greater difficulty with transitions and dealing with failure (Dweck, 2010). They will be less willing to take a risk and therefore shy away from harder, more challenging classes in fear of a lesser grade. Add this to the complexities of adolescence and one begins to see why so many first year middle school students have such difficulty with the transition to the middle school.
Dweck (2010) proposes that students develop their mindset largely due to the type of classroom assignments that they are given and the kind of praise they receive from their teachers, parents, and peers. She asserts that the wrong kind of praise can actually be damaging to students, cautioning educators to never praise a student’s intelligence. Instead, educators should praise a student’s work ethics or willingness to stick with it when the going gets tough. According to Dweck (2008), “educators commonly hold two beliefs that are false or even harmful”: The first is that by praising students’ intelligence builds motivation to learn and the second is that students’ inherent intelligence is the major cause of their achievement in school. Dweck says, “Our research has shown the first belief to be false, and the second can be harmful – even for the most competent students because praise is intricately connected to how students view their intelligence” (Dweck, 2008, p. 34).

If we praise students for their intelligence they will develop a fixed mindset and will “become excessively concerned with how smart they are, seeking tasks that will prove their intelligence and avoiding ones that might not” (Dweck 2006). A student who possesses this mindset will shy away from any learning opportunity that could result in them making a mistake or being perceived as a failure. As a result “The desire to learn takes a back seat” (2006). In short, “praising students’ intelligence gives them a short burst of pride, followed by a long string of negative consequences” (Mueller & Dweck 1998).

Students with a growth mindset tend to be less concerned with how smart they might appear to others and are better prepared to bounce back after life’s little
setbacks. Dwecks states that her “research has followed students through challenging school transitions and tough classes and found that, students with growth mind-sets outperform their classmates with fixed mind-sets even when they entered with equal skills and knowledge” (2006).

Schools would benefit from offering transition plan activities that encourage students to take risks that provide systems of support.

**Interventions**

Assisting the pre-adolescent child in developing a positive self-image, age appropriate academic skills, a positive growth mindset, and an overall interest in learning should be a priority focus for all schools. Learning how to achieve this for the middle school aged student sometimes becomes a challenge. Mullins and Irwin (2000) suggested that the physical, social, and emotional changes often triggered by puberty added to the stresses of transitioning to a new school environment are tremendous obstacles facing many pre-adolescent students. The following suggestions are geared towards meeting the needs of these children.

**Strategies and suggestions:**

- Establish early on that failing is part of growing and learning (Maxwell, 2000). Teachers need to ensure that students are presented with challenging instructional practices geared for their instructional level.

- Parents, teachers, and school counselors need to communicate with pre-adolescent children to ensure that they understand that failure is part of progress. Explain that it is not imperative that they know all the answers all the time and that learning is often derived from failed attempts to get it right.
• Ensure that children understand the difference between positive and negative risk taking.

• Teachers and parents should refrain from feedback that focuses on a child’s perceived intelligence because it causes them to withdraw from tasks that may present a degree of challenge (Dweck, 2008). Thus preventing learning experiences from occurring.

• Consider consultation with a counselor at the onset of student withdrawal from class discussion, answering direct questions, or at the first sign of fear or anxiety pertaining to participation in class.

• Parents should be in constant communication with teachers and guidance counselor pertaining to their child’s progress in school especially during the transition year (AMLE, 2012).

• Praise a student’s attempts at answering questions, participation in class, and hard work and effort put into the assignment (Dweck, 2008).

• Help students discover and develop a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006).

• Provide support structures and encourage students to be willing to give 100% every day.

• Discuss the positive outcomes of taking calculated or positive risks and embrace their willingness to do so.
References


Chapter 6

Self-Actualization

This story is about the effects of transition on a “teacher’s kid”. Surprisingly many of these children experience many of the same issues pertaining to transitions that other children from different households experience. For most children whose parents are teachers the pressures applied to them to excel in academics is often greatly increased.

In cases where educators have had very little experience or opportunity to work with students at this level, understanding the physiological, social, and cognitive changes these children are going through only compounds the problem. As most middle school teachers will confess, middle school is truly a different world. The lessons learned in a far removed “Human Growth & Development” class taken years earlier when the educator/parent was a student in college preparing for a career in the educational field, seem vaguely familiar.

Vignette

Johnny was often hazed by some of his peers because he was a teacher's child. Other students often taunted him by telling him he received special privileges as a result. This made Johnny, who had previously been a studious boy, hesitant to apply himself. After already being teased for getting “special privileges”, he worried that it would only add to the problem if he was viewed as being a straight “A” student. He, like many other middle school children, only wanted to fit in with the crowd, even if that meant being non-studious. He didn't want to be labeled a “nerd”. With the stress of trying to be popular, he began to fall behind on his schoolwork. He ultimately fell further behind with each passing assignment. When the first grading period ended, neither of Johnny's parents was pleased. His father, who had set high expectations for him, was severely disappointed. After attending the parent teacher conference held at
his school and upon reviewing his son's report card, Johnny's father began to blame
the other students he hung out with as to why Johnny was doing so poorly. His father
was determined to have some of his classes switched and grounded him from many of
the after school events he often attended. As a result, Johnny began to resent school
even more.

As the year progressed Johnny's difficulties in school seemed to heighten. As
he struggled to find himself and connect with his peers, he began to resent that his
father was a teacher. On one occasion his rebellious behavior had nearly landed him
in ISS (In-School Suspension) for lashing out at his pre-algebra teacher, Mr. Stiggins,
who had questioned him about his unfinished homework and his threats to contact his
father. This infuriated Johnny and his verbal reaction to the teacher placed him in the
principal's office for the first time since he had started school.

The school principal sat Johnny down and asked him why he had
misbehaved. "I don't like this place" was his only reply. After a serious talk with his
principal, Johnny began to understand why he was in this predicament. He confessed
that he didn't appreciate the other kids teasing him because of his father's position,
and that he was purposely rebelling because of it. Instead of punishing him, the
principal instead was determined to help Johnny in his situation. He posed the
questioned that when Johnny was older, would he rather be successful and viewed as
a man who'd accomplished his goals in life, or viewed as an unsuccessful man who'd
accomplished nothing? As Mr. Jackson began mentoring to Johnny his worry and
apprehension began to subside. During this process mentoring turned to intervention
and more importantly, Johnny began to develop a connection with his principal Mr. Jackson. Luckily for Johnny, Mr. Jackson had three sons of his own and could relate to Johnny's struggle. Mr. Jackson shared with him a similar situation that one of his sons had experienced when he was about Johnny's age.

As a result of his mentoring session with Mr. Jackson, Johnny began to question his own motives for success. Had the overrated status of being one of the "cool kids" really been more important to him than doing well in school? This mentorship Johnny experienced with his principal caused him to reevaluate his scholastic goals as he began to realize his true potential and the importance of his education.

Research

The research indicates the impact of positive adult mentors typically have successful developmental outcomes for many adolescent children. Mentoring relationships often serve to positively impact adolescents' self-perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Walker & Freedman 1996). Evidence also suggest that the mentor/mentee relationship is thought to indirectly improve communications between the parent and child for many troubled adolescents by providing support with communication skills, conflict mediation, and age appropriate coping skills (Rhodes, Haight, & Briggs, 1999).

Further research conducted by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) suggests that community based and school based mentoring programs reduce many barriers for school age children. Keoki Hansen the Director of Research and
Evaluation for BBBSA suggest in her research findings that mentoring programs such as these can effectively increase: academic performance, create and support an improved attitude toward school, improve peer and parental relationships, that help to ensure high school graduation (BBBSA, Hansen 2007).

Many schools across the country find success in easing the fears and anxiety for incoming middle school students through the use of peer mentors as a transition activity. Most often the peer mentors are chosen from the upper classman particularly 8th graders and are assigned an incoming 6th grader to mentor throughout the transitional year. Child psychologist agree that most transitioning students have difficulty with many of the changes experienced by adolescent children as they transition from elementary to middle school. Some of these changes include meeting new friends, peer pressure, and an increasing dependence on peers for self-concept and personal identity not to mention the change in environment, teachers, assignments / homework, and differences in educational practices of the new school. These anxieties can be significantly reduced according to the findings published by the Mentoring Resource Center based out of Folsom, CA. According to their 2008 report “cross-age peer mentoring programs take advantage of adolescents’ increasing interest in peer friendships as they enter the teenage years, often building new relationships beyond their normal circle of friends” (Mentoring Resource Center, 2008, p. 7).

Another notable point in support of implementing peer mentoring programs during the transition is that peer mentoring programs select students from within their
own schools. The costs often associated with recruitment and retention of adult mentors is nonexistent, making peer mentoring programs not only productive but cost effective as well. (Mentoring Resource Center, 2008).

Interventions

The research and information provided by organizations such as the Big Brothers & Big Sisters of America, Mentoring Resource Center, and independent research conducted by Walker & Freedman, (1996), Rhodes, Haight, & Briggs, (1999) establishes the importance of the powerful impact that a mentor can have on the adolescent student. Mentors serve to provide a personal and nonjudgmental connection to the mentee that parents and peer groups often do not. The following suggestions offer food for thought for schools considering developing a mentor programs to assist with transitions:

Strategies and suggestions:

- Schools and educators must realize the importance of positive adult role models and adult mentor programs and seek to establish those connections within their schools.

- Develop comprehensive transition and mentoring programs that: assist students in adapting to their new environment, establish reachable and realistic goals, and clarify expectations.

- Plan for and include transition activities in the school and district improvement plans.

- Middle School Prep Camp
  - A two day event held in the summer prior to opening of school.
    - Goals of the Middle School Prep Camp
    - Aids in reducing stress
    - Allows students to begin making new friends
• Reduces anxiety commonly associated with opening day

• Utilize Peer Mentoring Programs.
  o Assign each incoming student an upperclassman to serve as a peer mentor for the upcoming year. Training and supervision is paramount. This should start in late summer prior to opening day. Host a meeting with the two groups in the summer invite parents to join their children (Rhodes & Briggs, 1999).
    ▪ Allow mentors to take the incoming students on a tour of the building
    ▪ Incorporate time for dialogue to ensure student success
    ▪ Have “Locker Relays” to allow students to navigate the lockers as well as practice unlocking the combination locks.
References


Chapter 7
So Each May Learn

The data, research, and vignettes in this book present substantiating evidence that the social and emotional impact associated with transitions for pre-adolescent children are immense. Even our best and brightest often have a degree of difficulty as they are propelled into this world of transition uncertainty. Even for the well-adjusted students, pre-adolescence combined with the onset of puberty, and an internal drive to seek independence often poses a challenge. Most children have positive support structures in place to assist them with this difficult time in their young lives; while others do not. Imagine then the impact of transition for a special needs child. More specifically a child diagnosed with Autism, Autism Spectrum Disorders or Asperger Syndrome.

In recent years educators have only begun to better understand the social, emotional, and physiological needs of the autistic child. In the past decade schools across the state have begun to focus on these needs as workshops and trainings have developed from the regional learning centers and the Kentucky Department of Education perhaps due in part to the rising number of identified cases. Having a better understanding of autism, teachers are now better prepared to meet the needs of these children and are better equipped to assist in acclimatizing them to the world in which they live and the new school environments they transition to.

Vignette

Rebecca is an amazing 11 year old young lady who in recent years was diagnosed with “Autism Spectrum Disorders” also referred to as “Pervasive Developmental Disorders – PDD”. She is described as a “high functioning special needs student” with below average social skills as compared to her peer group. She is somewhat aloof and is often much slower to engage in social interactions. Her interests include music, animals - particularly horses, watching movies and popular TV sitcoms. Rebecca frequently quotes lines from movies and sitcoms she has seen. Although her reaction sometimes seems to others as being “out of context” the quotes usually have a direct connection to the events surrounding her. Rebecca also exhibits
frequent repetitive movements such as rocking back and forth and excessive ringing and shaking of her hands and fingers as if trying to shake water from them. She also displays a high level of muffled conversation with herself combined with high excitability and anxiety especially during assemblies, lunch, and recess as a result of the loud noise and movement of other children during these events. Rebecca will often take literally the comments or statements of others and becomes easily upset when other children are arguing or engaged in heated debate.

Rebecca’s elementary principal, Mrs. Williams, described her as being fairly successful in elementary school. She reads on a 4th grade level, interacted positively with her peers, and loved watching movies, frequently reciting tag lines and dialogue from movies she had seen. She categorized Rebecca’s experience in her school. Mrs. Williams stated she had many friends around her which were always anxious to assist her; noting specifically that these children had gone to school with Rebecca since kindergarten and were very receptive of her.

Mrs. Williams pointed out that, in many respects Rebecca was much like her peers for the most part. She indicated that her staff had received numerous hours of training in order to better meet her academic and physiological needs. Mrs. Williams felt strongly that the professional development in which she and her staff attended “opened the door to possibilities for Rebecca and other special needs children like her”.

One anecdotal story shared by Mrs. Williams during her time with Rebecca centered on a minor discipline issue where one of Rebecca’s teachers had asked Mrs.
Williams to speak with her regarding an inappropriate comment made by the child to a male peer. The teacher overhearing the comment wasn’t exactly sure how to handle it and thought it best to share with the principal. The comment made by Rebecca allegedly came from a popular movie and though she perhaps never intended it to be communicated inaptnly it had landed her in the principal’s office. Per protocol, the principal began discussion with Rebecca by explaining about acceptable behaviors at school as they pertain to comments and statements made by students to one another. She continued by reminding Rebecca of the discipline code of acceptable behavior pointing out that such actions could warrant detention or even suspension from school. Rebecca had inquired as to what suspension was. Mrs. Williams explained and gave her a related example that if a teacher does or says something unacceptable they could be sent home or fired. The child then asked, “So are you going to fire me?” Before the principal could further explain, Rebecca crossed her arms leaned back in her chair and piped out, “well you can’t fire me, because I quit”!

When Rebecca entered middle school at the beginning of 6th grade she found herself in not only a new “school” setting but in a different world altogether. The middle school staff worked collaboratively with the elementary teachers to develop transition activities for Rebecca making numerous phone contacts and site visits to the elementary school she had attended, communicating with her parents, teachers, and former principal. These actions were duly annotated in her IEP Transition Plan and were part of the transition requirements as they pertain to special education students in her school district. Even though many attempts had been made to aid this
For Rebecca this meant she was no longer surrounded by the peer group she had started school with. In fact she had very little contact with many of her former classmates due to the middle school’s schedule and the vast population of students also transitioning to the middle school from one of the districts five elementary schools. Though she was under the watchful eye of the special education teacher and the aid assigned to assist her, adjustment came slow for Rebecca. Many of her new classmates were not as accepting of her or as tolerant to her sensory issues and behaviors. Obviously, this only added to the complexities of her transition to middle school. At one point her parents even considered other educational options for their child.

As the year progressed so did her adjustment to middle school life. Slowly she began to develop new friendships and daily routines. Her teachers assisted her with transition activities that fostered social interaction with other peers. Counselors developed transition activities that provided information on how to handle and respond appropriately to autism spectrum disorders and the importance of creating routines and rituals. Though there were most certainly bumps along the way, Rebecca managed in time to acclimate herself to her new environment. She joined the band and developed a passion for art class. Luckily, for Rebecca, her successful transition to middle school did materialize with the collaborative efforts of the school staff, resources available, planned interventions and modifications aimed at helping
guide her as she adjusted; thus enabling her to stay in “public school” together with her peers.

**Research**

It is estimated that well over one million people in the United States suffers from Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) also commonly referred to as Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) making Autism and its subgroups one of the largest and fastest growing developmental disorders in our country (Simpson, et al., 2005). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) webpage indicates that ASD effects 1 in every 88 children and boys are 5 times more likely to be effected than girls (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010).

Early diagnosis of ASD is essential to reduce the negative impact of this disease and to ensure the child receives the needed interventions (2010). Willis (2009) articulates the importance of “early intervention offering behavioral, social, and skill-building training” for children afflicted with ASD; noting, that “most children with ASD need an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individual Education Plan (IEP) in place by the time they enter the classroom” as this is critical to their prognosis (Willis, 2009). These plans will often differ significantly as they pertain to treatment and care; because they are designed for the individual child and symptoms. Willis (2009) suggest, that educators and family members of children with ASD should “view the child as a person with talents, strengths, and potential” reminding us that educators should focus on what the child can learn as opposed to what he/she cannot (2009).
The work compiled by Simpson et al., suggests that, “there is no single method or intervention that should be exclusively used to meet the varied needs of the individuals with ASD”, recommending instead that caregivers utilize a variety of “best practice” methods in delivery of interventions (2005). As stated previously in this chapter our knowledge and understanding of autism and ASD has in the past two decades grown dramatically as more children than ever before are being diagnosed with this developmental disorder. Specific research is still indistinguishable as to how to decrease the impact associated with transition from one level of schooling to the next. It does however, advocate focusing on developing routines and strategies that serve to treat the individual symptoms of the child rather than the transition itself.

Interventions

Effective interim interventions for most special needs children are considered a critical part of the successful transition between schools. For children like Rebecca with Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorders these interventions are often a lifeline in assisting them in adapting to a new school environment. Staff development training and professional development are a must if educators are to stay abreast of the new treatments and interventions for children with Autism and any of its subcategories.

Strategies and suggestions:

Retrieved from www.autism-society.org)

- Role Modeling

- Peer Mediation Instruction
• Video Self Modeling – short video segments modeling correct procedures. Provides students with visual support. Ideal for common areas with established routines such as cafeteria, hallway, and playground.

• Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
  • Provides student with an illustrative example using pictures of procedures and activities to be targeted.
  • Serves as a “Quick Visual Reference” for the student.

• Discrete Trail Teaching – Gentle on the spot correction of improper behavior.

• Picture Labels – Place photograph along with the written word on classroom items such as desks, tables, computers, etc.

• Plan for and develop smooth transitions from one activity to another. Children with Autism or ASD typically experience symptomatic anxiety and difficulty transitioning from one activity to another.
  • Use music to notify the child when switching from one event to another.
  • Use a timer or hourglass to signify when it is time to change activities.
  • Utilize proximity or a gentle tap on the shoulder to signify to the child that it is time to transition to another class or activity.

• Provide age appropriate Social Skills Training for children with ASD. Develop social skills that support positive peer interaction. Stichter & Conroy (2006) suggest that these interventions should begin as early as possible and continue throughout the child’s education.

• Create learning centers in various locations throughout the classroom. Centers should include cooperative learning situations as well as “Pair Share” and small group activities. This will support positive social interactions with other group members.


• Early diagnosis and treatment is critical. If you notice developmental symptoms seek medical evaluation immediately.
• Assist in the development of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP).

• Seek membership in organizations focused on current research practices such as the Autism Society of America, National Association for the Education of Young Children, or more regional organizations such as the Autism Society of the Bluegrass. Networking and researching are critical.

• Stay abreast of new research and interventions for children with autism or ASD.

• Ensure two-way communications between parents, teachers, and doctors of children with ASD.
References


Chapter 8

Sight Unseen

The common goal for parents and educators is to see the child grow to become a self-sufficient, knowledgeable, and independent adult. Navigation of this course begins at birth and directly involves the public school as the child enters pre-school or kindergarten and culminates as he/she graduates high school. The need for effective transition plans prepared and in place for students as they navigate through our schools becomes imperative to their success.

Most students and adults possess the ability to physically see the world as they try to navigate their way through it. Many however have the gift of sight yet never fully come to appreciate that gift and what it has to offer. For the Visually Impaired (VI) student, navigating transitions becomes even more difficult and requires a more comprehensive type of transition plan. The Transition Plans for special needs children transcends the routine school to school transitions often associated with a student’s movement from one school to the next such as they transition from elementary to middle school. The implementation of federal mandates, the Individualized Education Program (IEP), and transition planning services level the playing field for many students with disabilities. Once the student reaches 16 years of age, transition services begin to take on a whole new meaning beyond improving classroom instruction to meet their needs but in also providing the student with authentic, real world learning experiences within the community.

The American Foundation for the Blind describes these services as a “coordinated set of activities based on students’ needs, taking into account individual preferences and interests” (American Foundation for the Blind [AFB] 2012, Individual Emphasis sect., para 1).

The transition plan is designed to be a results-oriented process, focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of students with disabilities, and facilitating students’ movement from school to post-school activities (AFB, 2012).

Vignette

Luke is a talented young man who possesses a sharp mind and keen sense of awareness. He was born with a rare form of optic atrophy causing blindness. He has never had the opportunities that many of his peers often take for granted such as: watching the sunrise and set, seeing the faces of his mom and dad, or sitting in the
classroom staring at the plastered walls full of visual aids. Luke suffers from genetic glaucoma and cannot see the world as other kids do. Because of his visual impairment, Luke has developed his other senses to the point of knowing what something “looks like” by the way it smells, sounds, or feels. In many respects, Luke sees life more clearly than many others who have possessed the gift of sight all their life.

When Luke started primary school he had an instructional assistant assigned to help him adjust to his new school environment. Frequently his assistant would consult with his teachers and transfer his work into Braille. Though Luke was fortunate to have two very supportive parents, neither of them could entertain the thought of “sending him off” to the state school for the blind which was 150 miles from home. They were determined that he could learn and achieve alongside his peers. They provided a loving and nurturing home for Luke and advocated on his behalf to ensure that he received a quality education in the public school setting. Both parents attended all school meetings scheduled and played an active role in designing his Individualized Education Plan (IEP). His parents expected that Luke would grow and mature into an independent man, graduate college, and hold a job someday. Luke’s parents encouraged him to use a cane for mobility both at home and at school. They encouraged him to “help himself” and not rely solely on the assistance of others to guide him around. Luke’s self-esteem was always very high. He never wanted pity nor did he expect it from others. Academically, Luke was a very bright student. He had well above average math skills and could read and
decipher braille faster than many of his peers could read text. Cognitively, Luke experienced very little difficulty learning with the exception of sight. He was always eager to learn new things and he loved to be challenged.

Transitioning Luke from elementary school to middle school posed some challenges and required more strategic planning from his teachers. The move from elementary school to middle school proved to be one of Luke’s most challenging transitions at this stage of his development. Luke’s positive attitude and willingness to steer through whatever obstacles life put in his way enabled him to persevere.

Luke came from a small elementary environment with a family atmosphere that was nurturing and very supportive. At the old elementary school, Luke only had one teacher who taught all disciplines and very little movement from one class to the next with the exception of art and P.E. His small class sizes also enabled him to become very secure within this setting. In the move to the middle school environment he found it somewhat less nurturing and more focused on independence. In addition he had a more demanding and rigorous schedule with seven different teachers each day. Fortunately for Luke, he had a strong transition plan in place that included several site visits to the middle school during his last year in the elementary grades. These visits enabled Luke to become familiarized with the building layout and travel routines. Braille room numbers were posted throughout the building and he was introduced to what would be his “new teachers” during each transition activity visit.
Just prior to Luke’s arrival at the middle school, the staff received training and professional development to ensure they were prepared to meet the challenges Luke was likely to face as he transitioned into their school. Each of his teachers reviewed his IEP and provided input for the implementation of his individual transition plan. This training made them mindful of how to plan for instruction, provide feedback specifically to Luke, and how to effectively ask questions of him in class. Teachers were trained on how to integrate more auditory learning into each lesson, how to effectively deliver tactile learning experiences in classroom instruction, and to be careful about asking questions such as, “What do you see?” or “What does this look like?”, to Luke which required sight to answer.

Middle School Teachers were a bit apprehensive about receiving Luke and their ability to meet his learning needs; but as school began and the days turned to weeks, Luke transitioned smoothly to the new middle school environment. His teachers realized their fears were unfounded as they collectively worked together to find solutions to any obstacles they faced in helping Luke. The key to Luke’s ability to effectively make the transition to middle school was primarily due to the efforts of his teachers, administrators, and parents who spent many hours planning, training, and developing his transition plan in advance.

Research

The terms “blind” and “visually impaired” are often used synonymously. It is important however to acknowledge that all individuals who are blind are visually
impaired, but not all visually impaired students are blind (American Foundation for the Blind, 2012).

For parents and educators of visually impaired children, the old adage “seeing is believing” should be replaced with “achieving is believing”. An article printed on the National Federation of the Blind’s website argues just that, stating that “the value parents place on their child’s independent movement and travel has a great deal to do with how he or she will move in the world” (Cutter, 1997, p. 1). Parents and teachers that support and even encourage the independent mobility of blind children will greatly impact the development of the child’s self-esteem and sense of autonomy (Cutter, 1997). If the goal for the blind child is to mature and grow into a competent, self-sufficient, independent adult, they must be encouraged to navigate their own path. According to Cutter (1997) proper support and training is essential for students and teachers working with students with disabilities. Too many visually impaired children do not succeed in achieving independence. The majority of these identified students never hold legitimate employment and remain dependent upon parents or others for support the remainder of their life. This cycle of dependence could be minimized if schools would develop transition plans designed to promote and teach independence.

According to Cameto & Nagle (2007), currently only about 28% of visually impaired individuals having completed high school are employed in this country. If our goal is to ensure that these young people are able to become productive and independent members of society, specific attention must be given to address their
transitional needs into the post "school" phase of their life. Visually impaired students, under current federal guidelines have transition plans built into their Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students receiving special educational services. The transition planning process not only assists the visually impaired student with effective school to school transitions but also focuses more on the long term goals, ensuring these students are prepared for life after school. The IEP planning process brings together community service providers, family members, and the student to create a roadmap for success by providing information about postsecondary training options and community resources available (American Foundation for the Blind, 2012).

Any individual who is made to feel, different, incompetent, or inadequate will more than likely suffer from a negative self-esteem. For many visually impaired children these feelings will have a negative impact on how they fit in the world around them. Often this negative impact will have a direct correlation to their educational achievement (Bowen, 2010). When comparing the individual's self-perception and academic achievement level, it becomes apparent that if the two are in sync, the student's self-esteem will remain high. The visually impaired child that possesses a high self-esteem will often push themselves to excel in other academic pursuits and obtain a higher level of independence (Cameto & Nagle, 2007).
Interventions for the Visually Impaired Student

A common goal for organizations such as the National Foundation for the Blind, and the National Federation of the Blind is to educate and inform others of the natural abilities and talents that the blind possess. Anyone who has worked with a visually impaired student quickly realizes their instinctive abilities and personal drive to be both mobile and included in daily routines.

Tips for classroom teachers and caregivers for visually impaired students as key transition activities from elementary school to middle school: from *Future Reflection* by Carol Castellano (2007).

**Strategies and suggestions:**

- **Establish a goal of independence:**
  - Realize that the visually impaired child needs the same information, education, and life experiences that others do.
  - Realize that the visually impaired child will use alternative techniques other than eyesight to achieve these goals.
- **Develop the skill sets of the visually impaired child:**
  - Utilize and teach Braille reading and writing.
  - Encourage and teach use of the cane for mobility.
  - Incorporate tactile learning experiences during instruction.
  - Utilize auditory aids and encourage students to examine by touch versus seeing.
  - Develop memory skills.
  - Develop sound localization skills.
  - Teach the visually impaired student to ask questions such as, “Who is speaking” or “Who is walking down the hallway”.
- **Communicate Effectively:**
  - Teachers should use clear directions such as “Fold the paper lengthwise” instead of “fold the paper in half” be more specific.
  - Explain illustrations in the reading material.
Clearly discuss and explain the expected routines.

- Provide assistance but do not do it for them:
  
  - Encourage support staff i.e., teachers aids and volunteers, to assist but to not do it for them.
  - Give information needed to allow the child to do it themselves instead of doing it for them.
  - Support and encourage alternative techniques.
References


http://www.blindchildren.org/textonl/to_edu_dev/3_5_4.html

National Federation of the Blind. Retrieved from:
The onset of puberty brings on physical and hormonal changes in adolescent children. Many have referred to this as an awkward stage of human development; stating simply that this is one period of life that they would never want to repeat. Others simply associate this period of life with “growing pains.” Nonetheless, it is a trying time in the life of young people.

To make things worse, most students experience puberty as they are faced with one of the most challenging educational transitions; the move from the elementary school into the middle school. Vernon (1993) points out that this is an especially difficult time for young females as they struggle with the onset of puberty, a period of growth and development, marked by a roller coaster of hormonal and physical changes. Interestingly, though many of their same age male counterparts tend to fair better during this period of development, males are often praised for manly attributes and characteristics such as athleticism, facial hair, and muscle development (Vernon, 1993).

Vignette

Rachael always persevered through many of life’s setbacks. Her parents divorced about the time she entered school, an older sibling was killed in a car wreck when she was in second grade, and her mother had moved back east about the time she entered the intermediate grades. She was an average to above average student though she had been retained in kindergarten because of her inability to stay focused in class. The next year she was diagnosed with ADHD and placed on medication by her family doctor. She remained on meds throughout her years in elementary school. Through time she developed the skills needed to succeed in the classroom and performed at the benchmark level by the time she transitioned to middle school.
Rachael had lived with her father and paternal grandmother since the divorce of her parents up until she started middle school. It was this point that she moved to Kentucky to live with her mother and her stepfather. Upon moving to her mother’s home Rachael spent most of the summer at home alone. She had no friends or peers in her neighborhood and longed for someone her age to hang out with. Making new friends always seemed difficult for her causing her to often wonder “what is it that was so different about me?” For Rachael, moving to another state and starting a new school where she literally knew nobody was worrisome to say the least.

By the time Rachael enrolled at middle school that fall her body had gone through a metamorphosis. She had matured physically. Rachael had gained weight, grew three inches seemingly overnight and was a buxom thirteen year old girl. For Rachael, she was uneasy with this noticeable change in her appearance. She tried to hide her adult figure by wearing lose fitting and baggy clothing. Rachael hated her body and was terribly conscientious about her mature features. She often wore dark makeup, dyed her hair black and had several body piercings on her face. Rachael had one in particular in her eyebrows pierced and a smaller stud in her nostril to distract attention from her upper torso.

On more than one occasion she had reported to the principal inappropriate comments pertaining to her figure made to her by some of the boys in her class. This frustrated Rachael greatly and only added to the difficulties of her transition. Though the staff was put on alert by the principal to watch for harassing comments, many of
the students continued to poke fun at her or make her feel uncomfortable at school. Her attendance began to suffer as did her grades.

What could schools and educators intentionally do to help students achieve a better acceptance and respect of their developing bodies?

Research

For young girls the impact of both hormonal changes and physical changes they are experiencing combined with their efforts to maintain a positive self-image are nearly overwhelming (Vernon, 1993). Vernon studied the impact of these changes and how they affect adolescent / preadolescent females as they transition to middle school. Because the rate at which adolescent children enter puberty varies, there exists no preset timetable for this event (1993). For many young females the onset of puberty also brings about their first menstrual period, changes in physical appearance such as weight gain, and the development of breasts.

Akos, Queen, and Lineberry (2005) suggests that “early adolescents require time and energy to get accustomed to their new bodies” (2005, p. 19). Reminding us that puberty is a state of “awkwardness” often having a negative impact on self-esteem as they attempt to maintain a “positive self-image” while feeling as though they are constantly being scrutinized about their appearance by their peers (Akos, Queen, & Lineberry, 2005).

The emotional rollercoaster often associated with this period in a young girl’s life awakens their innate need for acceptance from their peer group to include members of the opposite sex. It is also a time when adolescents are reminded of
issues such as sexual harassment. The American Association of University Women (2001) survey of 1,965 students in grades 7-12 found that 48% of the students reported experiencing some kind of sexual harassment during 2010 – 2011 school year. The AAUW study further discovered that:

Girls are more likely than boys to be sexually harassed, by a significant margin (56 percent versus 40 percent). Girls were more likely than boys to be sexually harassed both in person (52 percent versus 35 percent) and via text, e-mail, Facebook, or other electronic Media (The American Association of University Women, Executive Summary, 2011, p. 2).

**Intervention**

Pre-adolescent students generally seek peer approval. Often they are overly concerned about what peers think and how they are viewed by others. Unfortunately, our society often causes adolescent females to seek acceptance through their physical appearance (Akos, Queen, and Lineberry, 2005). Consequently it is during the same period of pre-adolescence when the onset of period puberty occurs; which is associated with physical growth and hormonal change and is often linked with periods of depression, feelings of despair, and constant self-evaluation. Children need the support and assistance of parents and teachers during this period of life more than ever as the issues of making friends, dealing with harassment, and fitting in are paramount for many students. Schools must have systems of support in place and intentionally developed transition activities that further inform teachers and students on procedures for reporting harassment and teaching coping skills.
The following intervention strategies are posted on the GoLocalProvHealth website at http://www.golocalprov.com/health/sexual-harassment-in-middle-school-on-the-rise:

**Strategies and suggestions:**

- Communicate with your child.
- Encourage them to confide with you about issues pertaining to harassment and bullying.
- Assure them that you will not ban electronic devices if they share offensive language or behavior they experience.
- Contact your child’s teachers and principal.
- Establish your expectations for peer to peer interactions.
- Listen carefully to your child.
- Determine what happened and who was involved.
- Don’t assume you child did something to warrant this behavior.
- Never tell the child to ignore harassing behavior.
- Never encourage retaliation.
- Speak with the school administration.
- Contact the police or a lawyer.
- Know what devices and electronic media they utilize.
- Talk to them about privacy and self-protection.
- Parents should go over their school’s digital user-agreements and policies on Cyberbullying and harassment, and discuss the examples provided of inappropriate content.
- Broaden your understanding of cyberbulling using websites such as:
  
  - www.stopbullyingri.com
  - www.commonsensemedia.org
  - www.netsmartz.org
  - www.cyberbullying.us
References


Chapter 10

Words Can’t Express

Many of us often take for granted the simple things in life such as the ability to have a conversation with a peer or casual acquaintance. For most of us speaking and communicating occurs in our daily lives with very little effort unless of course you are talking about public speaking, and that is in a category all its own. As for the day to day communications necessary in everyday life, most people seldom give it a casual thought. Imagine the difficulty individuals who stutter have with this same communication process. For some students, something as simple as being called on in class or being asked to read a passage from the book can become a major feat.

Millions of Americans suffer each day with the speech issue known as “stuttering”. Though the exact causes of stuttering remain for the most part unknown, researchers do acknowledge that nearly 60% of individuals with these symptoms have a relative with the same problem leading many to believe that it may be hereditary to some degree. Others speculate that anxiety and nervousness cause a lot of the related symptoms. Oddly enough children tend to develop repetitive speech patterns and “stuttering” between the ages of two and five years old. Though most manage to “outgrow these symptoms many do not and continue stuttering on through adulthood. Others receive specialized speech training from Speech and Language Pathologists and are able to overcome this.

Vignette

Johnny Ray has always been described by his teachers as being a “delightful young man” who has always been very compassionate towards his peers. He is very studious and eager to please his teachers. Johnny is much like any other 12 year old boy with the exception of his speech problem. Johnny suffers from problematic stuttering. He experiences increased difficulty during times of stress or anxiousness. Johnny Ray had participated in speech class since early primary. Although he has made marked improvement over the years he still has a persistent stutter.
While Johnny Ray moved through the primary and intermediate grades his peers became very accepting of him and paid little notice to his occasional stutter. He was well liked and included in all peer activities including basketball. Johnny Ray loved basketball and was quite impressive on the court breaking his school’s record for free-throw percentage during his last year in grade school. Johnny loved school and being around his peers. Whether it was recess, gym class, or math, Johnny seldom ever missed school. He was one of the top students in his 5th grade class and had always been on the super honor role.

When Johnny Ray transitioned to middle school he began to experience a few run-ins with some of the other students. Often they would mock him or make fun of his stutter. This angered Johnny immensely causing him to lash out at his aggressors. On more than one occasion this seemingly delightful boy had ended up in ISS (In-school suspension) for fighting. Johnny Ray never really thought it was fair to be punished for defending himself even though his principal had explained the school’s Zero Violence Policy to him. This essentially meant that anyone engaged in a physical confrontation was subject to ISS. Johnny’s father also strongly disagreed with punishing his son for retaliation. He made his expectations clear, to both his son’s principal and the district superintendent, that he wanted the harassing behavior stopped and assurance that the school would ensure the other student’s did not mock or make fun of his son.

Johnny Ray hated the entire situation and often argued with his dad that it was alright and that he could handle it. Though his father knew better, no student should
be picked at or belittled by others. Eventually Johnny began to withdraw from his peer group and for the first time he dreaded going to school. He increasingly began to keep to himself and avoided conversations with peers when possible. His interest in extracurricular activities such as basketball also began to dwindle. Though he managed to keep his grades up, the social aspect of middle school life began to wear heavily on this once outgoing student. Johnny’s only wish was that he could somehow stop his stuttering in the hopes that he would fit in with the rest of the group. He very much hated his condition and often pondered what life would be like if he could only communicate fluently like the others.

Johnny needed intervention. Luckily, Coach Stevens, the middle school boys’ basketball coach and Johnny’s father continued to encourage him to try out for the basketball team. Also, Mr. Smith, the middle school counselor, along with Coach Stevens began to mentor Johnny Ray and managed to convince their principal to begin a school wide campaign against bullying and harassment. Johnny also continued speech class under the direction of a new speech pathologist assigned to the middle school. His speech teacher was Mrs. Krieger, a brilliant lady, who greatly enjoyed working with children. Under her persistent guidance Johnny Ray’s speech problem continued to improve. She always stressed to him the importance of taking his time while speaking and encouraged him to block out the anxious feelings that often haunted him while speaking. She spent countless hours working and assisting Johnny Ray. She was determined to stay abreast of new treatments and interventions
for stuttering. Her determination and perseverance made the difference. As the year progressed so did Johnny Ray’s outlook.

Research

Bushel and Sommer (2004) classifies stuttering in one of two categories such as persistent developmental stuttering (PDS) or Neurogenic, aka “Acquired Stuttering” which is typically caused by some form of damage to the brain due to injury such as blunt force trauma or stroke (2004). According to their findings “Developmental Stuttering” first appears in most preadolescent children between the ages of two and five years of age (Bushel & Sommer, 2004). PDS being the more common form of stuttering found in adolescents likewise they estimate that nearly three million people in the United States suffer from persistent developmental stuttering (2004). It is also pertinent to add that this research clearly indicates that these symptoms persist equally in all demographics with no social class or race presenting an increase in occurrences (2004). Although the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) does report that males are three to four times more likely to develop stuttering than females (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2013).

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA] website also reports that:

The development of stuttering varies considerably across individuals. Some children show significant difficulty with speech fluency within days or weeks of onset. Others show a gradual increase in fluency difficulties over months or years. Furthermore, the severity of children’s stuttering can vary greatly from day to day and week to week. With some children, the disfluencies may
appear to go away for several weeks, only to start again for no apparent
reason. For teens and young adults who stutter, the symptoms of stuttering
tend to be more stable than they are during early childhood. Still, teen and
adult speakers may report that their speech fluency is significantly better or
worse than usual during specific activities (How common is stuttering and
when does it typically start? Section, para. 2).

Research indicates that nearly 75% of the children who stutter will eventually
experience cessation of symptoms; some will simply outgrow the symptoms while
others are enabled to stop with the aid of intervention from certified speech and
language pathologists (ASHA, 2013). Other research also supports the notion that
stuttering will stop on its own, though in some preadolescent children the symptoms
persist much longer (Kids Health, 2013).

Many children are teased by their peers for stuttering. This in turn leads to an
increase in anxiety and can have negative impact on self-esteem for the child (Kids
Health, 2013). Also in some adolescent children the fear or anxiety experienced from
stuttering can in fact perpetuate the symptoms causing the condition to continue or
even worsen (Duckworth, 2004).

**Interventions**

Johnny Ray sought to free himself from his speech disability so that he would
not be harassed or teased about it by other children. He wanted to be able to live
without fear of stuttering. All he wanted was to fit in. He did not wish to be
ostracized from his peer group. Soon he began to resent his speech problem and
blamed it for his unhappiness. As his self-esteem suffered he began to withdraw from
the interaction of his peer group. Johnny Ray needed intervention. Schools could
benefit from providing transition activities that teach students tolerance of others, how to report incidences of unacceptable behavior and how to include students with disabilities in regular school activities.

**Strategies and suggestions:**

As taken from Amy Nelson, MA, CCC-SLP

- Don't require your child to speak precisely or correctly at all times. Allow talking to be fun and enjoyable.

- Use family meals as a conversation time. Avoid distractions such as radio or TV.

- Avoid corrections or criticisms such as "slow down," "take your time," or "take a deep breath." These comments, however well-intentioned, will only make your child feel more self-conscious.

- Avoid having your child speak or read aloud when uncomfortable or when the stuttering increases. Instead, during these times encourage activities that do not require a lot of talking.

- Don't interrupt your child or tell him or her to start over.

- Don't tell your child to think before speaking.

- Provide a calm atmosphere in the home. Try to slow down the pace of family life.

- Speak slowly and clearly when talking to your child or others in his or her presence.

- Maintain natural eye contact with your child. Try not to look away or show signs of being upset.

- Let your child speak for him or herself and to finish thoughts and sentences. Pause before responding to your child's questions or comments.
• Talk slowly to your child. This takes practice! Modeling a slow rate of speech will help with your child's fluency.

As taken from Lisa A. Scott, Ph.D., Florida State University
• Don’t tell the child to “slow down” or “just relax”

• Don’t complete words or sentences for them.

• Develop classroom routines that encourage all students to take turns speaking and listening.
  o Children who stutter find it easier to speak when there are fewer interruptions.

• Hold all students to a high level of expectation.
  o Expect the same quality and quantity of work from students who stutter.

• Communicate with the student in an unhurried way, pausing frequently.

• Never make stuttering something the student is ashamed of. Talk about the symptoms just like any other matter.

• Discuss needed accommodations in the classroom with the child; but do not be an enabler.
References


Chapter 11

Slacker

Nearly every middle school teacher can identify with at least one student that just never performed to their ability level. When teachers receive their rosters each year they begin to review assessment scores, grades, and benchmark performance ratings of their students. It is always disappointing to a teacher when a child assigned to you simply does not achieve at the level they have in the past or that they are capable of.

Often there are underlying reasons why this occurs. For many students the causes vary from events pertaining to their home life such as relocation, divorce, etc. For others it is due to physiological and biological events such as the onset of puberty, transitioning from one level of school to the next, and change in general.

Regardless, the more familiar teachers are with their respective students and their individual needs, the better teachers can identify with and develop action plans to help their kids.

Connecting to students before they show up for class is one way of ensuring student success. Lorain 2011, reminds us that the most significant step to ensuring a “successful middle school experience” is the transition plan.

Some schools go to rather extensive ends to connect with and assist their students during transitions by preparing formal transition plans encompassing the physical, emotional, academic, social needs of the student. Schools that utilize formal transition plans that involve all stakeholders during this most challenging stage of adolescence experience fewer issues that negatively impact student outcomes (Lorain, 2011).

Vignette

Timmy was a very bright young man who always excelled in academics and sports. He is a middle child and his siblings are both high achievers. His older brother is in high school and very popular with his peers. His younger sister still in elementary school seems to excel in everything she participates in. In elementary school, Timmy was in the top 10% of his class and was self-motivated. At that point it was as if he was driven to be the best in everything he participated in. It was no
surprise that he was identified for the Gifted and Talented Program during his fourth grade year.

His parents were well educated and successful professionals with a very strong work ethic and always stressed both the importance of hard work and maintaining good grades to their children. Upon transition to middle school, Timmy regressed to becoming an "average" student.

He quit every extracurricular activity that he took part in using the excuse that it was interfering with his academics, and that he did not have time to study even though he seldom brought home any assignments and rarely studied for his tests. He no longer was driven to be the "best" student.

At home, Timmy was testing the rules and boundaries. He started questioning authority and back talking his parents. He frequently became very emotional and had difficulty controlling his outbursts. His interactions with his siblings were often very negative and many times ended up in an argument. Timmy also became very engulfed in video games and spent most of his free time at home on the X-box.

Physically, Timmy was in the pre-puberty phase of adolescence with associated weight gain and mild acne. He became increasingly concerned about his physical appearance particularly his weight. His parents continued to encourage him to participate in athletics knowing that this would help keep him physically fit. Unfortunately for Timmy he had joined the 6th grade football team after school started having missed most of summer conditioning. Lagging far behind he eventually dropped out of the program during the second month of practice.
The one thing that he did enjoy at school was the yearbook club. However, when one of the teachers that he had admired did not choose him to help with the fun task of going to the local businesses to sell yearbook advertisements, he became very upset. When he asked his teacher why he was not chosen the response he received was both inappropriate and demoralizing for Timmy. He was told you were not selected "because you are not one of my favorite students". This was such a disappointment to Timmy that he lost respect for all of his teachers and essentially gave up on middle school altogether. Though his parents were intent on Timmy making good grades and achieving, every day was a struggle just to get him to school. He spent the majority of his sixth grade year being grounded having most of his personal effects and privileges taken away.

Are we aware of “changes” with our students? A student once active and engaged in school that no longer participates in any extracurricular activities should trigger something within a school community that signals the need for intervention. What was the root cause of Timmy’s withdrawal? What do educators do to help students like Timmy who are becoming more lost in the transition?

Research

It is extremely important for teachers and parents to remember that the once passive, upbeat, and loveable student who seemed to perform almost effortlessly in the elementary grades is still the same preadolescent child that is now met with moodiness, anxiety, irresponsible behavior, and lifelessness today (Baenen, 2005). The reality of this stage of development is that preadolescent children will exhibit robust energy at one moment and near lifeless vitality the next (Baenen, 2005).
Though parents and teachers tend to find this packaged deal very difficult to handle at times, they should persevere through this transition time in a child’s life. Research and understanding will lend to patience and tolerance of the behaviors of the adolescent child. Better understanding this stage of development will also provide effective strategies in dealing with lethargic behavior and emotional outbursts.

There are no time clocks for the emergence of adolescence. Most children tend to show the physical changes associated with puberty, which in turn causes the adrenal glands to produce hormones known as adrenal androgens, between the ages of 8 -14 years of age (KidsHealth, 2013). The noticeable effects for boys are facial hair, testosterone production, and a deepening of the voice. Effects for girls include developing breast tissue, menstruation, and the production of estrogen.

There is a distinction between puberty and adolescence and the two impacts the growing child simultaneously (KidsHealth, 2013).

The adolescent period of development, unlike puberty has very little physical change associated with it. Adolescence is more biological and emotional changes marked by a desire to seek independence from their parents and identity seeking (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2011). The adolescent stage of development is marked by many behaviors often interpreted as being disrespectful or inappropriate such as: mood swings, lack of interest in activities previously enjoyed, tendency to exhibit childish behavior when stressed, impulsive decision making, and even dangerous or “risky” actions of the child (2011).
Interventions

KidsHealth, (2013), reminds us that parents must endeavor to remain part of the growing child’s life as they enter the pre-adolescent stage of development, illustrating the need for parents to stay connected during this phase of their child’s life. Persistence and compassion combined with effective role modeling and communication skills are a necessity. It is common for preteens to attempt to shut out their parents; but remember that they need you in their life now more than ever before. It is during this stage of development that children are preoccupied with their peer groups and this is normal behavior. Parents sometimes feel as though their involvement and interaction with the child have been “traded in” for that of their peer group (KidsHealth, 2013). Reality is they are merely expanding and growing as they need to identify and seek independence. This is a part of the nature of human growth and development.

Strategies and suggestions:


- Stay involved in their daily lives. Remember you don’t have to be the little league coach simply attend practices and games when possible. Be willing to discuss the effort of the team regardless of winning or losing. Stress the effort involved in the competition.

- Create Special Time with the family. Ensure that the child and siblings participate.

- Plan Family Meal Time. Schedule this in advance and include the child in conversation.

- Show affection. Tell them you love them frequently. Then show them.
• Share one on one time with your preteen. Enjoy each other’s company. Communicate but don’t argue. Be willing to listen more than advising.

• Mentor the students showing increasing difficulty fitting in.

• Research and Review the adolescent stage of development. Identify with the student. Focus on the Middle School Concept.

• Communicate with your students.

• Participate in character education classes with the students. Include these in the curriculum where appropriate.

• Provide as much choice as possible in assignments and homework. Allowing the child to make decisions and choices will lend them voice and autonomy.
References


Chapter 12

Social Immaturity

There exists a wide spectrum of emotional maturity among adolescent male children. Having served hundreds of intermediate and middle school aged children one develops the ability to identify those on the lower end of the spectrum quite easily. Attention seeking behavior often indicates immaturity. Students lacking the social or emotional maturity of the peer group will often resort to foolishness to gain the attention of the crowd. This behavior frequently lands them in the principal’s office and has a tendency to aggravate even the most patient bystander.

Vignette

“Alright young man you just earned yourself a detention”, said Mrs. Stephens, sternly. “But all I did was ask her if she ever played Suck and Blow”, replied Tommy. “You will report to the principal’s office”, shouted Mrs. Stephens, with her finger pointed towards the classroom door, “I will not have that kind of talk in my classroom”, she continued. As Tommy rose from his desk with a smirky grin, he slowly looked over his shoulder to observe his peers reaction, he replied, “but it is only a card game”, as he walked toward the door he noticed the snickering of some of the boys in his class.

Tommy’s attitude and behavior was not uncommon as of late. Since school had started last month he had already been served several detentions and two separate office visits for unruly or disruptive behavior. He was certain this time he would be placed in ISS or even suspended. As he began to worry about his parent’s reaction, Tommy shuttered to think of being grounded for the rest of his life. As he slowly approached Mr. Whit’s office he quickly began to rehearse his plea in his mind in the hopes of avoiding punishment.
Though Tommy wasn’t truly a bad egg, his immature behavior was creating quite a disturbance at school. He had always been a top student being described by his former teachers as one of the brightest they ever had in class. When Tommy entered the early primary grades he managed to thrill the staff with his inquisitiveness and his ability to comprehend so easily. He was the first among his peers to begin reading and boy did he read. Mrs. Brewer, his first grade teacher would frequently take him to read to the principal and other staff members in his school.

By the time Tommy had finished first grade his teachers encouraged his parents and the school administration to allow him to enter 3rd grade in the fall instead of attending second grade with his peers. Essentially they would double promote him. His teachers were certain that with his physical size and intelligence he would adjust quickly. His mother’s concerns were that he would not fit in socially with the older group of children, though the teachers assured her he would be fine.

As Tommy continued through elementary school his progress seemed to slow as he found himself trying to fit in with the older crowd instead of focusing his attention on learning. Though his grades never really suffered he no longer achieved at the accelerated rate he had early on. Due to his birthdate, Tommy was nearly a year and a half to two years younger than the rest of his class. Academically he was where he needed to be; but socially he was immature being so much younger than the others. The impact of his age did not really begin to surface until he transitioned to the middle grades. At this point he found himself seeking attention from a much
larger audience of peers which often lead to the attention seeking and annoying behavior.

As Tommy began to enter the pre-adolescent / adolescent stage of his development he found himself in an uphill battle as much of his attention was now focused on members of the opposite sex. Tommy had apparently gone “girl crazy” as his mother once remarked. His immaturity and inappropriate remarks had the tendency to repel girls rather than to impress them.

At home this was also a very trying time for Tommy as well. He found it increasingly harder to communicate with his parents especially about issues at school. He seemed to spend more time in his room on the computer communicating with his friends or outside playing basketball in the driveway. Tommy’s younger brother often became the catcher’s mitt for the rude comments or putdowns as the age difference between the two boys made it difficult for him to connect with and relate to his own sibling. At home he withdrew to his room. At school he became the class clown in trying to fit in.

Educators need to take notice and work collaboratively with staff members to design transition activities for students to interact with peers in a positive manner. Part of our teaching includes teaching students how to socially interact known as the hidden curriculum. If educators promote students to another grade or to an advanced “honors” class, is there a plan in place to monitor that move? Do educators have a transition plan to integrate advanced kids into upper grade level classes where cliques and groups are already formed? Acting out is a reaction marked by the need to
receive attention. We should ask ourselves why the student is reacting in the manner they are and what kind of attention it is they need to navigate this transition. Behaviors such as this, if left unattended by adults, may not produce the desired results for the student.

"Adolescence is a period of rapid changes. Between the ages of 12 and 17, for example, a parent ages as much as 20 years." – author unknown

Research

The early teen years are a time of rapid growth for the developing brain of the adolescent child (Chamberlain, 2009). One of the last regions of the brain to develop for the adolescent male is the prefrontal cortex known as the control center for regulating impulsive behavior, problem solving, and rational thought processes (2009). Chamberlain (2009) asserts that due to the development of the adolescent brain, younger teenagers may actually not be entirely at fault when it comes to poor decision making, moodiness, and impulsive behaviors (2009). Understanding the physical development of the adolescent brain should assist both parents and educators in understanding why children sometimes act like “children”. They are not adults and do not have the full benefit of mature brain functions.

Abrams (2011) argues that boys and girls differ greatly in both physical and emotional maturity. In a 2011 article entitled “In Praise of Boys”, prepared for “Psychologies Magazine” she states that:

Boys are not just different from girls, but also in many ways more vulnerable. Boys are born six weeks behind girls developmentally, a gap that widens throughout childhood right up to puberty, by which time they are two years behind. In infancy, boys cry more, take longer to settle, and are slower to learn
to walk, talk and potty train. They have more difficulty adapting to school. Reading, writing, sitting still all come harder to small boys. Socially, too, they lag behind girls. Behavioral problems and mental illnesses, from autism to attention deficit disorder, are more common at all ages in boys than girls. In adolescence boys do less well at school, leave school earlier, and are more likely than girls to die, in road accidents, from substance abuse, in fights and by suicide (Abrams, 2011, In Praise of Sons, para 5).

Chamberlain (2009) reminds us that though the adolescent period of development is a time of seeking independence and personal identity, it is also a time when youngsters most need to spend quality time with parents and other well-adjusted adults to assist in shaping their developing brains by mentoring and modeling effective actions and behavior.

**Interventions**

For many, adolescence is a period marked by separation from the parent and connecting to the social peer group. This period in social development lends to status seeking, often risky or even dangerous behavior, and sometimes rebellious behavior such as non-performance (Chamberlain, 2009).

Child psychologists and researchers both agree that the pre-adolescent stage of development is often a very troublesome time for most children (Chamberlin, 2009 & Abrams, 2011). It is during this stage of development that educators and parents must be mindful of many of the stressors, physical and emotional changes that face the pre-adolescent child and strive to establish both effective and age appropriate interventions to assist them during this phase of life.
Strategies and suggestions:

- Remember each child is an individual. Don’t expect all children to act and behave the same way. Post classroom rules and expectations. Rehearse frequently with the students and teach the expected behaviors. Never assume that each student fully understands.

- Deal with discipline without embarrassing the child. Praise appropriate behavior and recognize effort of each student (Dweck, 2008). This builds self-esteem.

- Find the time to work one-on-one with immature students. Teach proper interactions for conversation and communication. Provide opportunities to rehearse with small groups.

- Adopt a character education program for your school. Second Steps is a nationally recognized program that teaches an effective character education curriculum with focus on socialization behaviors (Second Step, 2012).

- Develop an adult mentor program such as Big Brothers/Sisters of America to assist with the development


- Get involved with your adolescent. Spend quality time together. Mentor and Role Model proper behavior for your child. Discuss and role-play everyday situations pertaining to social interaction.

- Encourage extracurricular activities that foster positive social interactions with others.

- Learn to listen to your child. Do not attempt to do all the talking. Listening is key to effective communication.

- Limit video game play on X-box and Television to reasonable time periods.

- Teach organizational skills by creating schedules and structure at home.
• Establish routines such as mealtime and "lights out". Discuss the importance of sleep for the adolescent brain development and ensure plenty of rest. Allow your child to have input on this decision rather than dictating it to them.
References

http://psychologies.co.uk/family/sons-be-praised.html


Chapter 13

Top Dog

Be it the superstar athlete, class valedictorian, or the general student who thinks “with rank comes privileges”, many individuals leave high school feeling like the “top dog”. This could be a result of messages from family members, teachers, coaches, peers, community members, etc... Within a few months, a majority of those students learn that they are truly a “small fish in a big pond” when they begin their post-secondary education. The sudden change in perceived status could have an impact upon the self-image of a young person. It takes time for individuals to learn that after high school, hierarchy is truly situational. According to Seth Godin (2008), “it takes guts to acknowledge that perhaps this time, right now, you can’t lead” (p. 87). Instead of allowing their new environment to be the source of anxiety, students must learn when to be “top dog” and when to join the pack as a follower and develop other talents.

Vignette

Sitting in a local shop, Ashleigh sips a cup of French-vanilla coffee as tears stream down her face. Has she lost a loved-one? Did a long-term relationship end with a broken heart? No. Ashleigh is so focused on a class project that she does not even notice that she is crying. She is half-way through her first semester as a college student, and is working on an assignment for her freshman communication course. Each student has been asked to submit a co-curricular transcript that can only include her higher education experiences. Her tears are reflective of the fact that Ashleigh has been staring at a blank piece of paper for days and cannot come up with anything to complete the project. As the time draws near for Ashleigh to go to class, she puts pen to paper and writes “I have done nothing as a college student, and this assignment has helped me see that I should stop wasting my parent’s money and drop-out”.
Ashleigh is a young lady who comes from a great family. Throughout her life, she has been taught the importance of a positive attitude, strong work ethic, and community service by her family, teachers, friends, spiritual community, and mentors. During her high school career, Ashleigh was voted “most likely to change the world” and her report cards consistently praised her for her ability to multitask. To many, her ability to hold a job, maintain a very respectable grade-point average (GPA), tutor students who were struggling in Math, serve as student government association (SGA) president, actively participate in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, spearhead the school’s recycling program, write for the school newspaper, serve as yearbook editor, serve as the student liaison with the local Habitat for Humanity chapter, and serve as a regular volunteer with the community Meals on Wheels program is nothing short of “super human”.

In her high school, Ashleigh was “queen”. This was true on a literal and figurative basis as she was elected Homecoming Queen during her senior year. A vast majority of students, teachers, staff, and administrators in her school know her by name (an impressive statement given her high school has over 2,000 students) and respected her opinions. If her school had a formal hierarchy, she would easily be considered one of the “top dogs”.

Given her experiences as a high school student, a reasonable person could assume that she would enter her post-secondary experience with a high level of confidence and self-esteem and that she would need multiple sheets of paper for her co-curricular resume. However, several barriers early in her college career caused her
to question herself at a deep level. Ashleigh was told that she could not serve as a tutor until her second semester as she needs an established college GPA to apply for a position. She found college assignments and expectations to be far more difficult than what she experienced in high school. Therefore, she spent most of her time in the library or in her residence hall studying. These days she is feeling more like a "court jester" than the "queen" she was just a few months earlier.

With the weight of the world on her shoulders, Ashleigh sits through her communication course, hands in the note she had written in the coffee shop and walks back to her residence hall in tears. "How will you tell your parents you want to throw in the towel?" a voice echoes in her head. The lack of an answer is the source of her endless tears. She knows they will be so disappointed in her.

As she fumbles for her ID to open the door of her residence hall, Ashleigh hears a voice saying "Ashleigh, are you OK"? Confused, she turns her head to see her resident assistant (RA) Jenny standing next to her. "Are you OK?" she asks again. Ashleigh cannot respond as she does not know what to say. "Do you have time to talk?" Jenny asked. Ashleigh began to cry harder, and simply nodded her head.

As they talked, Jenny soon learned why Ashleigh was feeling "lost" in the new environment in which she found herself. Jenny listened to Ashleigh's story for more than an hour. She then shared with Ashleigh that she was in the exact same position when she arrived on campus. She too felt lost, and wanted to "go home" where she thought she would feel more comfortable. In fact, Jenny shared that she
had gone home. Within a few weeks, she realized she had made a huge mistake. The next semester, she returned to school, and found one organization that interested her, and she joined. Now, she is involved with more than 10 student organizations and she is an RA. She was a leader in some, a regular participant in others, but an active member in all of them. Jenny asked Ashleigh to remain on campus, and she promised to help her become more involved.

To help the situation, Jenny simply invited Ashleigh to join her for lunch for a few weeks. During that time, she introduced her to several of her friends who were involved with countless activities and organizations.

Although Ashleigh took the time to decide which groups were “right” for her, she remained focused on her academics and she no longer feels the need to drop out. She is a regular lunch guest of Jenny’s, and sees those social opportunities as important elements of her college experience. With the guidance of others, and opportunities to become involved on campus, Ashleigh’s levels of self-esteem and self-image have returned where they were when she was a high school student.

Research

As they move from one institution to another, students will experience a variety of changes and transitions. In order to best prepare, students should understand the possible concerns that might arise before they occur and cause them stress. Hicks and Heastie (2008) confirm this assessment in their assertion that “during the transition from the high school environment, students often experience personal and emotional problems, global psychological distress, somatic distress,
anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression” (p. 143). It is important for students and parents to understand that these feelings are normal and in a vast majority of cases temporary.

Similarly, the research of Hair and Graziano (2003) supports the importance of high self-esteem as a means for students to have academic success as they transition from one level of education to another.

The work of Alexander Astin is most applicable to Ashleigh’s situation. Astin’s studies note the correlation between student involvement and satisfaction with the college experience (Astin & Schroeder, 2003). Had Ashleigh been able to make more immediate connections on campus, she may have avoided the feelings of wanting to drop-out.

Smith and Zhang (2009) address concerns associated with the transition from high school to college with regard to academics. Specifically, the authors collected data from students who attended a mid-sized institution in the southern portion of the United States. In their work, Smith and Zhang (2009) reference the fact that students have little knowledge of what they will experience at an institution of higher education. Similarly, the authors noted that teachers struggle with mentoring students on how to prepare for college (Smith & Zhang, 2009).

Interventions

There are countless Ashleigh’s in the world. Many students move from a position of being on top of the world in high school to feeling inferior in college. As noted by Astin (2003), the stronger the sense of involvement and connection a student has to
an institution, the more likely s/he will persist to graduation. As a result, it is critical to actively engage students in the college environment as soon as possible.

In addition to the need for timely student engagement, it is important to provide students with resources to help them acclimate to their new environment. As noted by Smith and Zhang (2009) and Michael, Dickson, Ryan, & Koefer (2010), students in transition require strong mentors and resources to help them navigate. Smith and Zhang (2009) also note the important role that parents, educators, and colleagues play in helping students during educational transitions. As a result, it is essential that provide strong educational materials and resources for these individuals to have the best possible influence on students making educational transitions.

No matter the articulation activities educators implement, Walker, Downey, & Cox-Henderson (2010) state that successful transitions occur when individuals are provided with “hands-on” and “[real] life experiences in a post-secondary setting” (p. 300). Parents, mentors, high school educators, and post-secondary educators need to focus upon help students actively engage in experiential learning as they make educational transitions.

**Strategies and suggestions:**

- Post-secondary institutions should create strong orientation programs which educate new students about traditions and matters that are unique to the institution.

- Provide educational materials for students and parents so they have a clear understanding of the issues new students might experience in college and examples of resources that students can use to work thorough those issues. Resources include, but are not limited to, housing staff members, admissions
counselors, tutors, faculty members, attending open house and orientation programs, and career services professionals.

- Create college transition sessions in high schools where students can hear real-life examples of college transition experiences they will encounter.

- Institutions of higher education could create strong training programs for housing staff members (to include resident advisors, hall directors, etc...) to identify and address students who might be struggling early in their college careers. Examples include, but are not limited to, students experiencing homesickness, isolation, change in hygiene, being overly emotional, and not going to class.

- Train high school administrators and educators as well as college faculty and staff on how to identify and assist students who might be struggling academically. Examples include, but are not limited to, students exhibiting a change in hygiene, not attending class, failing to complete assignments, and students who are not engaged in class.

- Create faculty/staff mentoring programs for students in high school and college. These programs would pair individuals with students in an effort to provide them with information on what to expect during the transition period from high school to college as well as how to navigate a college environment. Examples include, but are not limited to, assigning mentors based upon intended major, ethnicity, academic preparedness, and on a random basis.

- Create orientation activities that help students with transitional issues. Examples include, but are not limited to, sessions on time management, taking notes, meeting with upperclass students to talk about lessons they learned during their transition from high school to college, and meetings with housing staff to understand issues associated with living in a community environment.
References


Chapter 14

We’re Not in Kansas Anymore

I was hurt when she sneaked out, returning only to get her clothes while I was not there. I was devastated when the dormitory director told me the girl’s parents requested a room change. Being a proper Negro did not shield me from inequality, but failed me. – Twinet Parmer (1994, p. 440)

Vignette

On a hot Saturday in August, Joseph begins his college career dressed in a pair of shorts and a t-shirt with the school logo on it that he bought from the college bookstore earlier in the summer while attending summer orientation. Standing outside his residence hall, he looks up at the 6-story building which to him appears taller than a New York skyscraper. Joseph is simultaneously filled with the excitement that comes with being a new college student, and the fear which accompanies being in unfamiliar territory.

After what seemed like 100 trips up and down the stairs, Joseph begins the process of trying to organize his residence hall room. Though supportive of his decision to attend college, Joseph’s parents are like deer in headlights during this journey as neither of them earned a college degree. In fact, his father has an 8th grade education and his mother did not finish high school as she was pregnant with Joseph. Their actions make it clear they want to leave as soon as possible as they have always been “out of sight, out of mind” people. The sooner that get home the more comfortable they will feel.
Like many students, Joseph comes from a very small, rural town. His community is filled with hard-working folks, but diversity is limited to whether you wear cowboy boots or work boots to dinner. Like the endless miles of corn fields, the people in Joseph's home town all look the same.

Seeing their discomfort, Joseph kisses his mom on the cheek and his dad on the forehead sending them the message that everything will be alright and it is time for them to depart. With a "good luck" handshake from his father, and a "we love you" from his mother, the couple prepare to leave. However, before they can make it out of the room, Joseph's roommate arrives. "Hello, I'm Thomas" he said. Thomas continues, "I am glad to finally meet you", extending his hand to greet Joseph.

While the two roommates greet each other, neither notices the look of horror that has come over Joseph's parents. When Thomas leaves the room to retrieve more of his belongings from his vehicle, Joseph's mother calls the housing office.

"Hello, this is the housing office, how may I help you" says the Director of Housing who has answered the call of Joseph's mother. "My son needs a different room immediately" she says. "Is something wrong with his room" replies the director. "There most certainly is" states Joseph's mother. "He must be moved immediately" demands his mother. By this time, Joseph has noticed that his mother is on the phone, and Thomas has returned with a load of personal belongings.

The director asks for more information about the cause for the room change request. In the softest voice possible, Joseph's mother responds "his roommate is a Negro". "I'm sorry, but I cannot hear you, can you please repeat yourself" the
director responds. Still in a voice barely audible, Joseph’s mother says, “his roommate is a Negro”. The director repeats himself to share the concern that he cannot hear that she is saying. He continues by asking “why are you talking so quietly”? “I am in the room with my son and his roommate” she replies. “Can you please repeat your concern, as I cannot hear what you are saying” asks the director. Though not yelling, she says in a voice that can be heard in the room, “my son’s roommate is a Negro”. At that moment, it appeared as if the entire universe went silent, and all eyes in the room turned to Joseph’s mother.

The director shared with the mother that ethnicity is not a factor used by the housing office to make room changes. However, he assured the mother he would check on the room as soon as possible. When the call ended, Joseph’s mother assured her son he would be moved to a new room and she and her husband departed for their journey home.

After a few minutes of awkward silence, Thomas asked Joseph if he was a racist. “Hell no” said Joseph, somewhat offended by the question. “Then why was your mom calling me a Negro and wanting you to change rooms”. “We just don’t see many colored people where I’m from” said Joseph. Thomas quickly responded by saying, “first of all I am black, not colored, and secondly I do not want to live with a racist”.

Still trying to figure each other out, the two continued the process of moving their belongings into the room and organizing them. Later in the day, the director of housing stopped by the check in on Thomas as Joseph. After hearing from both
students, he asked them to “give things a try for a few days” and then to see if a room change would be necessary.

After about two weeks, Thomas and Joseph went to the housing office together to ask for a room change. The two had no major issues with each other (in fact they had become friends as they learned to know each other a little more); however, they simply could not overcome the events which occurred on the day they met.

Research

As with many aspects of life, prior knowledge of an activity or environment can help a person successfully navigate similar events. This concept is especially true when referencing attending an institution of higher education. Individuals who are the first from their families to attend a college or university (first generation students) are less likely than their counterparts to have a positive experience and persist to graduation (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007). The lack of knowledge about colleges and universities is demonstrated by the fact that only about one-third of students who meet the definition of being first generation actually attend a post-secondary institution (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007). As stated by Fischer (2007), this lack of experiential reference is a significant contributor to why the transition from high school to college “can be complex” (p. 128).

In addition to research on first generation students, Mendoza-Denton, et. al. (2002) acknowledge the existence of self-esteem issues with students of color as a
result of a “history of rejecting behaviors” (p. 896). As a result, insensitive behavior from others could be magnified when directed at minority students.

**Interventions**

Students who attend colleges and universities come from countless backgrounds, and have a variety of experiences – some broad and some limited in scope. Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, and Thomas (1999) focus upon educational transitions for students of color. The authors outline the importance of providing students of color with real-life examples of issues they may experience in a college environment and effective mentors as students transition between educational environments.

Similarly, Baker and Narula (2012) state that building strong connections to an institution, involving families, and implementing a collaborative approach to helping students are essential to promoting successful educational transitions. The following activities can help them better understand the diversity that exists on college and university campuses:

**Strategies and suggestions:**

- Provide educational materials for students and parents so they have a clear understanding of the diversity that exists at colleges and universities. Smith and Zhang (2009) also note the important role that parents, educators, and colleagues play in helping students during educational transitions. As a result, it is essential that provide strong educational materials for these resources in an effort to prepare them to have the best possible influence on a student making a transition.
• Provide students and parents with experiential opportunities during open house or orientation programs to exhibit examples of how they might react to a roommate of different ethnic or culture.

• Create a venue for students to learn about the strengths and limitations for social media sites as we live in a society where individuals are prejudged as a result of what is present, or not present, on their social media sites like Facebook and Twitter.

• Plan and implement forums which include parents and students discussing real-life scenarios to better educate them and diffuse issues that might arise.

• Train college faculty and staff on how to identify and assist students who might be struggling with cultural diversity.

• Create strong mentoring programs for students of color.

• Intentionally plan separate, nonthreatening events for high school and college students in which they can interact with others. Examples include, but are not limited to, ice cream socials, club and organization awareness fairs, and campus-wide entertainers/speakers.

• Create orientation activities that help students with transitional issues related to diversity.
References


Chapter 15
Not My Brother’s Keeper

“College students’ perceptions of drinking norms influence their engagement in binge drinking” (Seo & Li, 2010)

Vignette

On September 10th, Tammy was awakened by the loud voice of a police officer. “Tammy, it is time for your arraignment, please come with me” said the officer. What a strange dream she thought. “Tammy get up, it is time to go” said the officer in a more stern, loud tone. This was not a dream. Tammy soon learned that she was in jail. “But how did I get here” she asked in protest. “Come with me please” is all she heard.

The answer to her question could be found in the first month of her college career. By most standards, Tammy was fully prepared to attend college. She was an excellent high school student, and she scored well on her ACT. In addition, Tammy came from a family where her parents and two siblings had graduated from college. In short, she was academically prepared, and she had anecdotal knowledge of what to expect in college from a social and co-curricular perspective.

Tammy demonstrated her preparedness from day one during her college career. She never missed a class, had excellent time management and study skills, and by all measures she was on a path to continue her academic success on her way to becoming a lawyer. However, the lure of college social life caught up with Tammy on September 10th. She crossed the line and was arrested for public intoxication.
Like many other college students, Tammy enjoyed attending off-campus parties. At first she attended these events to be with her friends and meet new people. However, that quickly turned into the “work hard, play hard” mentality for Tammy. She was getting her work done and doing well academically. So, in her mind, she earned the right to enjoy parties during the week.

Tammy’s friend noticed she was “getting out of control”, and confronted her on her drinking. “I am concerned about you Tammy, every time you drink you get drunk” she said. “College students are supposed to party” declared Tammy. “Besides, it is not affecting my grades, so where is the problem” Tammy asked.

For two weeks, Tammy’s friend has been begging her to stop her reckless behavior. “You are scaring me Tammy” she shared. “With each new party, you are getting more and more drunk – please stop” her friend begged. Tammy assured her friend that she was worrying about nothing.

On September 10th, Tammy and her friend attended a party together. As Tammy showed signs of being intoxicated, her friend tried to convince her to leave. “Let’s go home Tammy” she said on several occasions. However, Tammy kept avoiding her friend as she wanted to stay at the party. Several hours passed, and her friend finally convinced Tammy to leave the party. She was highly intoxicated and she was being very loud as they walked back to Tammy’s apartment.

About halfway on their journey home, Tammy sat in the middle of the street and declared that she was not moving until she had another drink. Cars passed her by, and the occupants simply laughed at the drunk girl in the middle of the street.
However, her friend did not see the humor in the matter. She was afraid Tammy was going to be injured.

After several attempts, her friend realized that Tammy was not going to move. Having programmed the number for campus police in her phone, Tammy’s friend resorted to calling them for assistance. The police responded, and arrested Tammy for public intoxication.

Research

Though they are satirical in nature, society tends to stereotype college students using the lens of the entertainment world with movies like *Animal House* and *American Pie*. Yet, there is a reality to the notion that during their transition from high school to college, individuals tend to consume more alcoholic beverages and demonstrate a higher willingness to use drugs such as marijuana (Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse, 2008).

Similarly, Quinn and Fromme (2011) identify that “alcohol use in the United States is most prevalent during the college years” (p.1104). Even though there is a significant body of research which identifies the dangers of alcohol abuse, the notion that college is a rite of passage which requires heavy alcohol use appears to be indestructible.

As a result of alcohol use/abuse, students can experience increased risk associated with disciplinary action on behalf of the institution, poor academic performance, sexual assault, unhealthy behavior, etc...
Interventions

Across the country, alcohol abuse is the primary issue that faces colleges and universities (Saylor, 2011). Baker and Narula (2012) state that building strong connections to an institution, involving families, and implementing a collaborative approach to helping students are essential to promoting successful educational transitions. These suggestions have particular value when it comes to addressing a topic like alcohol. The following activities are suggestions on how to assist students with the transition from high school to post-secondary education:

Strategies and suggestions:

- Provide educational materials for students and parents so they have a clear understanding of the data associated with alcohol experimentation in college as well as alcohol abuse.

- Create educational sessions in high schools where students can hear real life examples of college experiences and ask questions they might have about the transition.

- Create strong training programs for housing staff members, faculty, and staff on what to look for so they can help identify and address students who might be struggling with addictions or abuse of alcohol early in their college careers.

- Create orientation activities that help students with transitional issues associated with alcohol and social life.
References


Chapter 16

The "Freshman Fifteen" in Reverse

If the "Freshman 15" is a real phenomenon, then the first year of college would be a time to focus efforts to encourage healthy lifestyle habits in order to prevent obesity. If, however, the "Freshman 15" is a media myth, then focusing anti-obesity efforts on new college students will prove ineffective and repeated warnings about weight gain may cause unnecessary worry or worsen body image in ways that actually contribute to weight gain. – Zagorsky & Smith (2011)

Vignette

Only the third week of classes, and the entire campus knew Brenda was a cheerleader! Her make-up was perfect, her smile contagious, she had a hair bow for every occasion, and the warm-ups she wore all said "Fantastic Footwork Cheer and Dance". Her energy level was such that her classmates joked that she had a permanent Red Bull buzz. However, truth be told she never touched the stuff. Brenda was simple a happy person who loved to make others smile.

Sadly, like the effects of the Red Bull people thought she drank, the happiness that beamed from Brenda was short-lived. In less than a week Brenda's life would change dramatically.

It was the fourth week of the semester, and the cheer squad has been practicing hard in preparation for the first home football game of the season. Brenda and Steve have been partners since the 9th grade, and they want to prove themselves as strong new members of the team. Known for their stunting, the two have been struggling of late. None of their lifts have been working, and the coach is beginning to think they need more practice before he allows them to perform at sporting events.
To make his decision, the coach gives Brenda and Steve a test. If they make two out of three lifts successfully, they will join the competition team. If not, they will be relegated to the practice squad (which in the world of Brenda and Steve is worse than death). The tension in the gym was thick, and could have been cut with a knife.

With a few stretches, and cloud of chalk after clapping their hands together, and a loud yell of "let's do this" from Steve, the couple was ready for attempt one. Brenda went up, and right back down. The attempt was a failure. The next two lifts held their fate. Attempt two found Brenda going up strong, and Steve balancing her like he had never done before. As Brenda jumped down from Steve's arms, the two embraced as if they had won Olympic gold medals. But they still needed one more perfect lift.

After a quick drink of water and a few more handfuls of chalk to soak up the sweat on their hands, Brenda was on her way up for their final test. Like the first attempt, Brenda went up without incident but then started to fall. Both cheerleaders dug deep into their souls to find the inner strength to hold on. With a few grunts and screams, the two were able to hold on for a second successful lift. The applause and hugs from their teammates assured the two that they had made the competition squad. Later in the evening, in a crowd of friends, Steve was overheard saying, "that was tough, I think she's has gained the freshman 15 already". Hearing the roar of laughter, Brenda could only defend herself by saying "I think you just need a little extra time in the weight room".
Though no one knew how much those words hurt, Brenda took them to heart. She was 5'2" tall and weighed 107 pounds. However, she had never weighed more than 105 pounds before college. "Maybe I have gotten fat" Brenda said to herself. "Maybe I am making it hard on Steve". In a short amount of time, as a result of only a few words, Brenda set her mind to losing some weight to make her a better cheerleader and partner for Steve. With a few less calories during the day, and a few more miles on the elliptical, Brenda knew she could drop some pounds.

"It's working" her mind told her. "You're doing great"! The scale read 104. In the days, weeks, and months to come, it kept falling. First 102, then 98, and before she knew it, Brenda weighed 85 pounds. To the outside world, Brenda looked like a walking skeleton. In the mirror, she looked like Ms. America. Though her mind was clouded, Brenda did not feel weak. In fact, the couple hit their moves with the precision of a brain surgeon. They had regained their superstar status in the world of cheer.

Despite her success as a cheerleader, people were worried about Brenda. She was not healthy. Her hair was falling out in clumps, her menstrual cycle had stopped, and she was constantly cold. Seeing the significant changes, the team trainer stepped in and said, “enough is enough”.

The trainer met with Brenda and expressed his concerns. Their session began innocently with the trainer sharing his concerns. “I am worried about you Brenda; you have lost a significant amount of weight in a short period of time”. Brenda shared that she was “fine”, had not lost very much weight, and that she had a recent
physical with her doctor and all was well. Brenda has quickly thrown up walls and it was obvious to the trainer that he was going to get nowhere with her.

After meeting with his supervisor, the trainer elected to suspend Brenda from practices and performances until she participated in counseling, began to gain some weight, and demonstrated that she could see the concerns others had about her condition. In addition, the trainer met with Brenda’s parent to express his concerns and share the rationale for his decision.

From his experiences, the trainer expected the parents to be supportive and work with him to help Brenda regain her health. However, the trainer found himself to be the target of ridicule. Brenda’s mother was furious at his allegations and threatened to sue the trainer if he continued to spread “rumors and lies” about her condition. In the eyes of her parents, Brenda was beautiful, healthy, and eligible to participate with her teammates. Before the trainer could say another word, Brenda’s parents shared that they would not allow their daughter to be treated poorly and that she would be leaving the University. The next day, Brenda withdrew and went home with her parents.

Research

The work of Childers, Haley, and Jahns (2011) provides significant insight into the need for understanding the reasons students might gain weight as they transition from high school to college. Although colleges and universities are providing students with more nutritional information about the food being served, the
reality of college dining facilities is that they are still filled with fried foods, pizza, and items that can be served quickly.

Childers, Haley, and Jahns (2011) suggest that peer interactions focused around food, and the transition to buffet-style dining both have a significant impact on the typical increase in weight during the freshman year of college. This phenomenon is commonly known as the “freshman fifteen” (Childers, Haley, & Jahns, 2011, p. 306).

Interventions

Transitioning from “mom’s kitchen” to eating in a college dining facility can be a challenge for students. Not only is the food cooked differently, it can be difficult to obtain accurate nutritional information from a cafeteria environment. According to Bellmore (2011), articulation activities are most successful when they focus upon strong peer relationships and education on new social challenges students will face. Baker and Narula (2012) state that building strong connections to an institution, involving families, and implementing a collaborative approach to helping students are essential to promoting successful educational transitions. The following are suggestions to assist with dining-related transitions:

Strategies and suggestions:

- Provide educational materials for students and parents so they have a clear understanding of the issues they may face with regard to eating in college. Examples include, but are not limited to, providing sample menus, nutritional information, and discussion questions.
• Create college transition sessions in high schools where students can learn about real-life examples of eating habits of college students. The sessions would occur in high school cafeterias and include a discussion on the differences between high school and college food.

• Institutions of higher education could create strong training programs for housing staff members (to include resident advisors, hall directors, etc...) to identify and address students who might be struggling with dietary matters. Examples include, but are not limited to, students experiencing changes in eating habits, body image, weight gain, weight loss, etc...

• Create orientation activities that help students with transitional issues. Examples include, but are not limited to, sessions on healthy eating choices, food preparation in residence halls, and effective exercise programs. To some students, eating fast food and not exercising is seen as "normal".
References


Chapter 17

There's No Such Thing as a Free Lunch

It is well established in the literature that college students have poor eating habits and that many barriers exist to achieving optimal nutrition for this busy population. Little is known about students' perceptions of this problem or suggestions for improving their dietary habits. - Cousineau, Franko, & Goldstein (2004)

Vignette

Imagine your thoughts about what describes an "average college student".

Your mind might paint the picture of a person who did reasonably well in high school, has career aspirations, is motivated to have a better life than family members, etc... Similarly, you might think about a person who lives in a residence hall, participates in campus organizations and events, enjoys attending parties, and has more electronic gadgets than can be charged at one time. Although some college students meet those descriptions, Roger has a different story.

Roger is an African American student who entered college with unlimited dreams. Both of his parents were teachers, his siblings are teachers, and he planned on becoming a teacher. From an academic perspective, Roger has been successful. With a 2.8 GPA, Roger meets the requirements of the college and the teacher education program, and is on track to graduate on time.

Despite his performance as a student, Roger is struggling. Staff members have noticed that Roger is always in the Student Center. He is waiting outside the doors when they are opened, and the last to leave the building when it closes. The unique aspect of this is that there is no evidence that Roger does anything in the
building beyond watching television. Roger does not study, is never seen eating in
the cafeteria, and does not appear to utilize other services in the Student Center (i.e.
bookstore, post office, etc...).

Recently, students have been expressing concerns about Roger. Specifically,
they have shared that Roger never changes his clothing and he emits a terrible odor.
However, the greatest concern is that Roger does not appear to be eating, and he has
lost a significant amount of weight in a short period of time.

Concerned about the comments being made about Roger, the advisor of a club
in which he used to be a member asked Roger if he would pay him a visit in his
office. Reluctantly, Roger agreed to meet with the advisor. After a great deal of
silence, the advisor simply said “you look and smell terrible Roger, what is going on
with you?”. Seeing the sincerity in his eyes, and hearing the emotion in his voice,
Roger began to open up to his former advisor.

Roger shared that the “answers” to the questions people were asking were
quite simple. With the failing economy, Roger’s father and mother both lost their
jobs within the past three months. Roger is experiencing feelings of guilt because he
is “living the high life” while his family is struggling to survive on a daily basis. As a
result of the predicament they are in, Roger has used all of his meal plan money to
purchase food to send to his family. He eats little to nothing each day, and has no
money to launder his clothing or purchase personal hygiene items.
Wanting to pursue the matter further, the advisor was disappointed when Roger had reached his limit on the desire to share any more information. Roger thanked the advisor for his time, and left the office without another word.

The advisor simply could not watch a young man perish in front of his eyes. Instead, he worked with a colleague and the two made an anonymous donation of $150 to Roger’s meal card. At least he would be able to eat and regain his strength to be able to finish the semester.

Much to the dismay of the advisor, Roger continued to exhibit his usual behaviors. Did he not know about the additional money on his account? If he did, was he too prideful to accept the gift? No. Roger had learned of the anonymous donation, and had simply used it to purchase food to send home to his family.

Shortly after using the $150 that had been added to his account, Roger was seen caring his limited belongings out of his residence hall. Roger had made the decision that he could not continue his education and he needed to return home.

A full year after his departure, Roger was seen on campus again. He had gained weight, but more importantly he had regained his smile. Seeing Roger in the student center, the advisor rushed toward him to see how he was doing. “How are you Roger”, said the advisor. “I have never been better”, replied Roger. “My parents have new jobs, and I am able to resume my education” he said with a proud grin. “And thanks for the helping hand when I needed it” said Roger. He had known all along who had made the donation to his meal card. “You’re more than welcome young man” replied his advisor.
Roger graduated in December, and he is now working with at-risk teens to try to help them graduate from high school and enroll in college. His personal experiences will serve him well.

Research

As Roger can attest, there are a number of factors that can cause students of color to be less involved on campus and drop out of college at higher rates than their peers (Fischer, 2007). At the same time, Kao & Thompson (2003) states that the income level of parents can significantly impact the persistence rate of students. Eisenbarth (2012) identifies connections between “stress” and “depression”; he exposes the lack of information related to the true connection between “self-esteem”, “stress”, and depression (p. 150).

Interventions

In the current economy, college students are being placed in difficult situations which require difficult decisions. Although Roger’s experience is extreme, it is by no means unique. According to Walker, Downey, & Cox-Henderson (2010) successful transitions occur when individuals are provided with “hands-on” and “[real] life experiences in a post-secondary setting” (p. 300).

Smith and Zhang (2009) also note the important role that parents, educators, and colleagues play in helping students during educational transitions. As a result, it is essential that provide strong educational materials for these resources in an effort to prepare them to have the best possible influence on a student making a transition.
Michael, Dickson, Ryan, & Koefer (2010) state the importance of strong mentoring programs to assist students with educational transitions. Students need to have individuals upon whom they can depend to voice their concerns when times are tough.

**Strategies and suggestions:**

- Create college transition sessions in high schools where students can hear real life examples of financial decisions they will encounter. Examples include, but are not limited to, proper use of credit cards, financial aid, and meal plan money.

- Create case study or role play scenarios where students are faced with financial challenges and are required to develop possible solutions to the problems that face.

- Provide incoming students and their families with clear information on options available if they have financial difficulties. Examples include, but are not limited to, availability of student emergency funds, ability of financial aid counselors to use “professional judgment” to assist students in need, and community resources that can provide students assistance if necessary.

- Train college faculty and staff on how to identify and assist students who might be struggling on a non-academic level. Examples include, but are not limited to, students exhibiting a change in hygiene, not attending class, failing to complete assignments, and students who are not engaged in class.

- Create faculty/staff mentoring programs for students in high school and college. These programs would pair individuals with “at-risk” students in an effort to provide them with information on what to expect during the transition period from high school to college as well as how to navigate a college environment and seek out available resources.
References


Chapter 18

It's All Greek to Me...

Contrary to the perceptions held by many people in modern society, "Greek letter organizations were founded on an appreciation of learning, a commitment to lead, an ethic of service, a love for one's brothers and sisters, and a belief in democratic ideals" – Jackson and Harless (1997, pg. 23).

Vignette

The opening of school is a hectic time for new college students. Questions of intelligence, preparedness, self-image, etc... flood the minds of young men and women as they learn to navigate a new environment. However, Sandra had a significant advantage over her peers. The world of higher education has been a component of her entire life. Her mother has been an English professor for more than 20 years, and her father served as the director of counseling services for 15 years before his retirement. All totaled, her parents have over 43 years of experience at institutions of higher education.

In addition, Sandra cannot name a member of her family that does not have some sort of a college education. Aunt Ruth is the "outlier" as she only has an associate's degree. On the other hand, her cousin Theresa has set the education pace for the family as she has a Juris Doctorate and a PhD in Sociology. Obtaining a post-secondary degree has never been an option for Sandra, and she has never questioned her college readiness. She is more concerned about her ability to fit in on a social level.
In addition to being a family committed to academic success, Sandra comes from a long line of fraternity and sorority members. She is confident that she could capture the entire Greek alphabet if she were able to collect the "letter shirts" from her relatives. Though she has heard countless stories about Greek life from her relatives, Sandra is nervous about the recruitment process. What if no one likes her? What if she is not granted a bid? Will she become the “Aunt Ruth” of the family when it comes to being a member of a Greek organization?

On the first day of sorority recruitment, Sandra arrives at the orientation meeting in the student center. Much to her surprise, there were about 150 other students signing up to participate. The perceived pressure from her family coupled with anxiety from the large number of participants in the recruitment process was almost more than Sandra could handle. However, the structure of the meeting provided little time to deal with nervousness. The combination of group sessions, preference parties, submission of forms, completing bid cards, etc... quickly filled her calendar for the first week of school.

It did not take long for Sandra to sour on the entire process. She spent many hours with friends she had met who cried as a result of not “fitting in” with the groups that were their top choices. Some were told they did not have the “right look”, others were not strong enough academically, and a few heard “rumors” about what was being said about them behind their backs. It upset Sandra to hear the comments and see them cry. “How can you be a part of a process that hurts people’s feelings” Sandra asked herself. How?
Sandra called home one evening, and shared her thoughts were a few family members. “I want to drop out” Sandra told them. Having experienced some of the same feelings when they were in college, her family asked her to stick with the process. “It is not as bad as you are being told” they shared with her. “Not everyone is meant to be Greek” she heard in the background. After a long conversation about how she was feeling, Sandra was struck by the overwhelming philosophy that she needed to continue in the recruitment process to maintain family pride and tradition.

Sandra could not remember a time she had been so upset with her family. Pride? Tradition? Not everyone is meant to be Greek? Had her family been accosted by aliens she asked herself? Sandra simply could not come to terms with why they did not see the process through her eyes. So, she locked herself in her room for the evening, reflected on her values, and cried herself to sleep.

Her night was filled with dreams about Greek life. She dreamed of wearing the letters worn by so many of her family members. She dreamed of seeing her friends crying in the background because they did not receive a bid. She dreamed of hugging her mother after accepting a bid, and fighting with her after dropping out of the recruitment process. Before her alarm could sound, Sandra awoke to find the bedding disheveled and her heart beating out of her chest.

After showering and getting ready for the day, Sandra was of clear mind about her decision. Today was the day. She was heading to the Greek life office to submit her decision. “Good morning” Sandra heard as she walked through the office door. “How can I help you”? With her head held high, she replied, I need to remove myself
from the sorority recruitment process please. “I am sorry to hear that, is everything alright” said a female voice from behind the counter. “Everything is perfect” said Sandra “just perfect”. She signed the proper forms, and left the office.

Though she left the Greek life office with a high level of confidence, Sandra knew she needed to call her mother and break the news. “It’s like a bandage Sandra, just rip it off and get it over with” she told herself. However, she was not prepared for the pain it would cause. After sharing her decision, Sandra’s mother was furious. Not just the “I can’t believe you did that” furious. Her mother was the “raise your blood pressure, veins pop out of your neck and forehead” furious. Sandra was thankful the discussion was occurring on the phone. As the conversation ended, Sandra’s mother demanded that her daughter return to the Greek life office and rescind her decision. “I will not permit you to drop out young lady” continued her mother. “If you do, you will be coming home immediately” she said before hanging up the phone.

After getting through the initial shock of the reaction of her mother, Sandra sat at her desk and composed and e-mail that explained the reasons or her decision in great detail. Within the text of her message, Sandra expressed her love for her family, and the power of the lessons she learned from them over the years. The end of her e-mail simply reminded her mother that she had been taught to respect others and treat them according to the “golden rule”. In addition, she shared that “most importantly, you taught me to respect myself”. “I respect you mom, and I respect myself” Sandra acknowledged, “and because of that I am not going to change my decision”.
It is said that time heals all wounds. Though Sandra’s mother is still sad that her daughter did not join a sorority, she is proud of the fact that Sandra has found other student organizations on campus. She is doing well academically, engaged in a great amount of community service, and truly enjoying her college experience.

Research

The messages transitioning students hear about Greek life typically are negative. Although Animal House was release in 1978, individuals entering college today are very familiar with the stereotypes the movie portrays. A simple example is that of the “toga party”. Immortalized by the film, college students today still use their sheets to create a unique outfit while dancing to Shout by Otis Day & the Knights. As noted by Scott-Sheldon, Carey, & Carey (2008), the real and perceived reputations of Greek organizations causes administrators, faculty, and students to question their legitimacy and validity.

In addition to handling the stereotypes of becoming a member of various student organizations, the transition from high school to college typically forces individuals to address the move from dependence to independence. Zirkel (1992) and others state that this transition can be extremely challenging for many students. A significant level of stress develops as individuals navigate the process of learning new skills while remaining true to the desires of their families (Zirkel, 1992).

To the dismay of some parents, the process students use to compare and contrast what is best for their current and future development is highly dependent
upon the influences surrounding them (Zirkel, 1992). As a result, many students
develop their principles and guiding tenants in the absence of their parents.

**Interventions**

Although Sandra is in a unique position with regard to her family, she is not
alone in her experiences with recruitment. Many students experience the highs and
lows of the recruitment process. Smith and Zhang (2009) also note the important role
that parents, educators, and colleagues play in helping students during educational
transitions. As a result, it is essential that provide strong educational materials for
these resources in an effort to prepare them to have the best possible influence on a
student making a transition.

According to Walker, Downey, & Cox-Henderson (2010) successful
transitions occur when individuals are provided with “hands-on” and “[real] life
experiences in a post-secondary setting” (p. 300).

Jackson and Harless (1997) outline the importance of having a structured
model for the implementation of a strong Greek life program. As a result, they
created a model which has been implemented successfully at Elon College.

**Strategies and suggestions:**

- Provide educational materials for students and parents so they have a clear
  understanding of the issues new students might experience when considering
  joining a Greek student organization. Examples include, but are not limited
to, creating a “view book” that highlights each Greek student organization,
  provide recruitment guidelines that are easy to understand, and have a Web
  page that is easy to navigate and find information.
• Create college transition sessions in high schools where students can hear real-life examples of college transition experiences they will encounter with regard to becoming involved with student organizations.

• Plan and implement programs which allow students to hear real-life examples of the positives and limitations for being involved in student organizations. In addition, have the programs intentionally address what is "fact" and "myth" when it comes to being a part of a Greek organization.

• Create unbiased mentors that are available throughout Greek recruitment to help students process concerns or make decisions that are in their best interest.

• Create intentional opportunities for the entire campus community to come together to discuss issues related to Greek life in an environment which promotes honest, open, and productive communication.
References


Chapter 19

The Land of Opportunity

For many people the thoughts of leaving home, and traveling to another country to continue ones education is unheard of but for the thousands of foreign exchange students in our country this is a common occurrence. Overcoming the many cultural barriers that these students face is nothing less than heroic.

Vignette

"Are you Ms. Smith" a barely audible voice said while standing in the doorway. "I'm sorry, may I help you" I said after noticing a young Asian woman just outside my office. I had not heard what she said, and was a little startled when I looked up from my e-mail and saw her waiting for me. "Please come in" I said in an assuring voice. "Are you Ms. Jones" the young lady asked with a volume only slightly higher than before. "Yes, how may I help you" I said with a smile. "I do not like the food here" she said. "I do not want to pay for the food".

Before we delved too deeply into our conversation, I stopped and asked the young lady to share some information with me. I know this is a very important issue; however, can you please tell me your name I asked. My name is "Angela" she said. Great to meet you Angela, my name is Pat. Where is "home" for you Angela I inquired. I am from Japan she said with confidence and pride. "I have never been to Japan, but it is a destination on my travel wish list". "How long have you been in the United States" I inquired. "About six weeks she responded". "I came here two days before school started". "What brought you to this school" I asked. "I am a part of the
international student exchange, and I want to be a doctor”. Well, you have made an excellent choice for that career.

“Tell me more about your concerns” I said to Angela. In her soft voice with an Asian accent, she shared her concerns with the food in the dining hall. There is nothing for me to eat, and I am wasting money by having to purchase a meal plan. “Is there anything you enjoy in the cafeteria” I asked. “Nothing” said Angela, “I ate there once and was sick for days”. “I have never been back”.

While on the topic of food, Angela took full advantage of her audience of one. She shared that as a result of her experience in the dining hall, she had tried to eat in her residence hall. However, she shared that people steal her food from the common area refrigerator, and it is difficult to find food in the store (as well as expensive when she kind find what she needs). So how are you eating I asked. I do not eat very much shared Angela; however, I have some friends who live off campus where I eat from time to time. Angela shares that she has lost 15 pounds since coming to campus.

I shared that I was very concerned about her eating habits and would help her in any way possible. I asked if she had other concerns. After a slight hesitation, Angela shared that she did not feel “at home”. She noted that the rules of the university were very confusing and different than her experience with college in Japan. She was not able to smoke, nor could she cook in her residence hall room. She had been through two roommates already and simply wanted to live in a room by herself (which was not possible due to overcrowding in the residence halls). Angela would prefer to live with someone; however, her previous roommates complained
that she wanted them to “teach her how to speak better English”. To her, the campus was not very friendly and she spent most of her time alone or with other international students.

In my mind, I was concerned as Angela was discussing areas that should have been covered during the international student orientation. “Did you participate in an orientation process when you arrived on campus” I asked. Seeing the look of confusion on her face, I asked if anyone had talked with her about these issues when she first came to campus. “No” she said. I was simply given the name and phone number of the director of international student support and told to call if I had any questions.

Is that all I asked, with a clear tone of disappointment in my voice. Yes, that was it replied Angela. I can assure you we address the lack of support for international students I shared, but let’s begin with addressing the reason you are here – your concerns about meals.

After a long discussion, I was able to provide Angela with resources to address her concerns. She could speak with the director of dining services about her concerns with meals, she was given information on where she could smoke close to campus, and she was put in touch with housing staff in an effort to help with her desire to have a kitchen. Most of all, she was given a listening ear with allowed her to vent her frustrations.

Shortly after our meeting, Angela learned that her grandmother was not well, and she returned to Japan to be with her family. Though I have not heard from her
since her departure, I fondly remember her every Christmas as we hang the ornament she gave me as a "thank you" gift.

**Research**

Although all students experience transitional issues on some level, international students have other barriers to navigate on top of those that traditionally come with educational transitions. As described by Kwon (2009), international students tend to have higher rates of relationship problems, feelings of isolation, homesickness, academic pressures, finance and accommodation were likely to contribute to difficulties” as compared to other students (p.1024).

Kwon (2009) further explains the importance of creating guidelines and policies which address the concerns of international students in a timely manner. Specifically, Kwon (2009) states that institutions which recruit and enroll students from other countries assume a responsibility to identify issues and resources to help address matters as they relate the non-American students. According to Mathiesen & Lager (2007), failure to do so could result in unmanageable consequences for international students. What might appear to be a minor “bump in the road” for a traditional student could end the college career of a student from another country.

Concerns with dining services, roommate conflicts, etc... are seen a “rites of passage” for a number of college students. However, Dremuk (2012) outlines the need to be intentional when addressing the concerns of international students. He specifically states that “short-term gains from increased recruitment of international
students should not and cannot be made at the expense of students and institutional reputation" (Dremuk, 2012, p. 11)

Similarly, Aw (2012) summarizes the importance of addressing the needs of international students as “our overall efforts, through cooperative ventures, will be the most important step toward achieving the educational exchange objectives of our universities, our students, and our nation.” (p. 11).

Interventions

International students experience a great deal of stress during their transition to American institutions of higher education. Smith and Zhang (2009) note the important role that parents, educators, and colleagues play in helping students during educational transitions. As a result, it is essential that provide strong educational materials for these resources in an effort to prepare them to have the best possible influence on a student making a transition.

According to Walker, Downey, & Cox-Henderson (2010) successful transitions occur when individuals are provided with “hands-on” and “[real] life experiences in a post-secondary setting” (p. 300). In addition, Michael, Dickson, Ryan, & Koefer (2010) state the importance of strong mentoring programs to assist student with educational transitions.

Strategies and suggestions:

• Provide educational materials for students and parents so they have a clear understanding of the issues international students might experience in college and examples of resources that students can use to work thorough those
issues. It is essential that the information be translated into multiple languages to ensure the information is understandable to multiple populations.

- Engage in focus groups with international students to learn about the issues which caused them the most concern during their transitional period. The information from the focus groups would be utilized to create stronger orientation programs for international students.

- Create faculty/staff mentoring programs for international students. These programs would pair individuals with international students in an effort to provide them with information and skills on how to navigate university guideline, policies, etc…
References


Chapter 20

Those Who Can Represent, Those Who Can't Teach

"The 'anyone can do it' theory does ring true, however, to this extent — almost anyone can walk into a room, tell the kids to shut up, hand out some busywork and thereby keep the machinery of schooling moving. But to actually teach — to get kids to transcend themselves, to care about something distant or abstract, to push them to become better than they knew they could be — requires talent and faith and above all persistence." — John L. Allen, Jr. (1998)

Vignette

In the hot summer heat, Barry is sweating as if he had just completed the New York Marathon in record time. However, he has never been to New York City. In addition, the last time he ran any length of distance he was being chased by a man with a chainsaw on a haunted hayride. He was 10 years old at the time. How was he to know the chainsaw and blood that stained it were not real? His friends experienced a bout of laughter that made them struggle for breath, and Barry earned the nickname "Forrest Gump". If he had a nickel for every time he heard "run Forrest run" Barry would be a rich man.

What could be the cause his intense perspiration? Barry and his parents, younger brother, and maternal grandmother had just arrived for his college orientation program. Prior to his arrival on campus, Barry was asked to complete several documents to ensure his day would proceed as smoothly as possible. He was very pleased when his mother asked "do you want me to send these in for you?" Like the response from downhill skiers who have been asked if they would like more snow, the obvious answer from Barry was "heck yes!"
As is the case with many students transitioning from high school to institutions of higher education, Barry's mother was happy to fulfill the request of her child. On the housing form, Barry was listed as a "neat freak". Although he does not know the definition of a clean room, Barry's mother hoped her "little white lie" would result in the assignment of a roommate who would help Barry with his lack of cleanliness. Similarly, Barry's mother listed his intended major as "pre-law" on the orientation data form. She would soon learn her response to that question was also a "lie".

Why was Barry sweating? Yes, the 92 degree temperature was playing a role in his excessive perspiration. However, the unavoidable confrontation that was about to occur with his family was causing his great anxiety which displayed itself through his sweat glands. Barry is well aware of the expectation for him to become a lawyer. Yet, Barry has no desire to study law. He wants to be a teacher, and he knows that will not be a popular opinion with his family.

Barry comes from a family of lawyers. His father, mother, two older siblings, both grandfathers, and six extended family members are current or former lawyers. In addition, his younger brother plans to pursue a law degree. A teacher in this family would be comparable to being the lone Democrat in a family of Republicans. However, Barry's passion for teaching is strong. Although he has an unmoving appreciation, love, and respect for his family, his desire to be a teacher is just as strong.
Outside of his family, Barry cannot think about one lawyer who has had an impact on his life. However, in a matter of minutes he can share several teachers who changed his life. Mr. Smith taught him to understand algebra in one session after so many others had tried and failed. Ms. Jones’ class instilled in him a passion for literature when the mere thought of reading a “classic novel” made him ill only a year earlier. Mr. Thomas helped him appreciate that “home economics” was not just a class for girls. He is now the primary chef in charge of Thanksgiving Dinners at his house. Coach Adams forced him to understand that the lessons in a game that was lost were just as valuable as those that came from a win. His list of examples could continue for hours...

Soon Barry found himself waiting in a large auditorium with his family. In a monotone voice, the staff member started to rattle off majors, and students began leaving the room to work with advisors on their schedules. Then came the moment of truth for Barry, he heard the announcement loud and clear – “pre-law”. Smiling in his direction, his family knew it was time for Barry to leave. However, he did not budge. Confused by his lack of action, his parents simply stared at him but said nothing as not to cause a commotion.

“Education” said the voice from the stage. At that moment Barry stood up and walked proudly toward the exit. His only words to his family were, “I will explain later”. Though he knew it would be a difficult discussion, Barry had broken the invisible barrier in his life. He wanted to be a teacher, and he was not going to allow the expectations of his family to deter him from his goals.
**Research**

The adage that "those who can do, and those who can't teach", is nothing less than an insult to the countless professionals who commit their lives to the development and growth of others. Teachers matter. Strunk, Weinstein, Makkonen, & Furedi (2012) state that they are the most important school-based influence on student achievement, and research suggests that having a particularly good teacher will positively affect students’ current academic performance and their future success.

**Interventions**

The reaction a parent might have to a child going off to college cannot be predicted with any level of accuracy. Some parents are thrilled, others are devastated, and some fall at all points in between those extremes. Smith and Zhang (2009) note the important role that parents, educators, and colleagues play in helping students during educational transitions. As a result, it is essential that provide strong educational materials for these resources in an effort to prepare them to have the best possible influence on a student making a transition.

Cunningham (2008) states the importance of individuals participating in self-assessment activities in order to promote successful transitions. Although not always popular, students need to determine their own plan for success during their college experience.

**Strategies and suggestions:**

- Create intentional opportunities for students to be away from their parents, and make decisions (no matter how small) without having to rely upon mom
and dad. This will allow students who might disagree with their parents to assert a certain level of autonomy.

- Plan and implement intentional orientation programs to provide parents with information and resource they will need to handle their transition period.

- Create opportunities for students to participate in interest inventories on a regular basis to ensure they feel comfortable with their educational choices (i.e. major).

- Sponsor panel discussions with parents and students to address real life issues they will face during the transition period. Also provide examples of solutions and resources that could be used to address a concern if it arises.
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Chapter 21

I Sing Therefore I Am

You know them well... the countless students who are quiet and reserved, but if they were to come out of their shells they would be positive change agents in the world. Research demonstrates that students who embrace the risks of being involved on campus persist to graduation at rates higher than other students. – Morrow & Ackerman (2012).

Vignette

Reed is a young man that is “typical” in most senses of the word. He was an above average high school student, but not overly intelligent. A member of the football team, Reed was only there for his weight and not his athletic ability. He was a good person who had many acquaintances who liked him, but very few close friends who knew him. Reed comes from a nice family which includes a mother, father, sister, and brother who love him. If he was a point on a bell curve, Reed would be somewhere in the middle 68% of the population his age.

Like so many of his counterparts, Reed was both nervous and excited about the next journey in his life - going to college. With the exception of attending one 4-H overnight camp as a child, Reed had never slept outside of his own bed. He was raised in a small town, and as a result his exposure to diversity was limited. Naturally, he was apprehensive about what lied ahead. At the same time, he enjoyed his visits to campus and summer orientation program. He had met some friendly students, faculty and staff during those visits, so he was excited about joining them on campus.
Like his experience in high school, Reed began his college career in an average fashion. He attended some events, but spent most of his time in his residence hall room. That all changed when Reed saw a sign announcing that the university was sponsoring a singing competition similar to *American Idol*. To this day, Reed does not know what motivated him to sign-up, all he knew is that his church taught him to have a passion for singing.

For the first phase of the competition, Reed had to audition to determine if he would be one of the top acts. Although he sang from his heart, he did not leave the audition with confidence. He reflected that his performance was good, but nothing that blew the judges away. For the next three days, Reed obsessed about the competition. Had he been good enough? His journey to the student center on "decision day" was worth the wait. Reed had made it as a finalist.

On the day of the competition, the auditorium was packed and Reed's nerves were almost uncontrollable. What have I done he asked himself. What have I done? His nervousness was compounded as his family and a news reporter from his home town were in the audience to see him perform. They had faith in Reed, but he was not as confident.

The time had come. His name was announced and the curtains opened. The crowd was even larger than he had imagined. Standing beside the microphone waiting for his music to begin, Reed looked like a watermelon next to a pencil. Standing about 5'5" tall and weighing about 350 pounds he had a unique body shape.
The delay in starting his music did not help as he began to hear people snickering as he stood alone in his rented tuxedo in silence.

Finally, the sound technician was able to start his CD. The crowd hushed and much to their surprise they heard a rendition of Amazing Grace like no other. His voice was angelic. After a few seconds of processing their awe, the crowd erupted in a huge round of applause. Reed was a hit with the crowd, but would he make it to the finals of the competition? The judges agreed with the crowd, and he was selected as one of the three final contestants.

For his encore performance, Reed sang *Swing Low Sweet Chariot* and this performance was event better than his first. The crowd rewarded him with a standing ovation. After all was said and done, Reed was holding the $500 check that was presented to the winner of the competition.

**Research**

As stated by Morrow & Ackermann (2012), there is a significant connection between student performance and happiness and a “sense of belonging” (p. 484). Though each student experience is unique, those who become involved in campus life and feel comfortable with the college environment tend to persist to graduation at high rates. Hausmann (2009) notes that when students lack feelings of connectedness, there may be “important negative consequences” (p. 804). The author also references the work of Tinto by stating that a sense of belonging is a significant indicator in whether or not an individual will remain a student at a given institution (Hausmann, 2009).
Pittman (2008) takes the sense of connectedness a step further by addressing the subject from a more universal perspective. The author states that students who have strong connections to society outside of the college (i.e. local, regional, national) experience more successful transitions.

No matter if it is on a petit or grand scale, the sense of belonging a student has is an important factor in his/her ability to navigate educational transitions in an effective manner.

**Interventions**

If left to their own devices, students tend to forget about the importance of developing a sense of belonging early on in their careers. Cunningham (2008) states the importance of individuals participating in self-assessment activities in order to promote successful transitions.

Michael, Dickson, Ryan, & Koefer (2010) state the importance of strong mentoring programs to assist students with educational transitions.

**Strategies and suggestions:**

- Institutions should create and implement orientation programs that place an emphasis upon educating students about traditions and school spirit.

- Faculty and staff members should take advantage of opportunities to have students complete interest surveys early in their college careers to promote involvement in campus activities and organizations.

- When possible, students should be praised for their work. The world is filled with negativity, and a simple kind word may be the spark that ignites the internal flame of passion within a student.
• Residence hall staff should be trained to engage students in meaningful conversations to help them identify ways to become, and remain, connected to the institution.
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Chapter 22

What's Wrong with a "Mobile Home"

A Latin Proverb states that a person makes his home where the living is best. For some "home" is a castle, igloo, nursing home, prison cell, residence hall room, or spacious mansion. On the other hand, some individuals struggle to define the place they call home. Our physiological needs are inherent; however, our definitions on how those needs are met differ from person to person.

Vignette

On a college campus, and in many communities across the country, it is common for people to live in mobile homes. When exploring options for housing, mobile homes can provide individuals with lower cost options as compared to traditional houses. As a result, no one has questioned Todd's living arrangements. He lives in a mobile home.

By most measures, Todd is an average young man who has handled adversity in an above-average fashion. The only child of two loving parents, Todd always had enough of what he needed to get by in life. His family was lower-middle class from a socio-economic perspective; however, they were rich with love, support, encouragement, and compassion for others.

One day, while sitting in his high school Math class, Todd was called to the office. When he arrived, he knew something was wrong as his minister was waiting with the principal, his guidance counselor, and a police officer. Though he still has trouble remembering exactly what happened in the meeting, Todd remembers the words "we are terribly sorry to tell you..." What he was told is that shortly after they dropped him off at school, his parents were killed in a car accident.
During the next several weeks and months, Todd was faced with many situations a 17 year old should never have to address. Making funeral arrangements for his parents, selling a house, and countless other interactions with people he had never met. After the initial shock, cycle of grief, and bouts of depression, Todd developed a sense of resolve beyond his years. His mission in life became to honor the memory of his parents and to make them proud.

Less than a year after the tragedy, Todd began his college career. Like so many of his peers, he moved into his residence hall and met his new roommate. He also was diligent about attending classes while balancing an interest in social activities. However, about six weeks into the semester, Todd began to struggle with his living arrangements. He began to feel anxious in his room, and the grief over his parents was starting to resurface. As a result, Todd checked out of his residence hall, and shared with others that he was moving into a mobile home near campus.

Technically, he was not being dishonest with anyone. His home was in fact mobile. By traditional standards, a mobile home is defined as “a dwelling structure built on a steel chassis and fitted with wheels that is intended to be hauled to a usually permanent site” (Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mobile+home). However, Todd’s “mobile home” was his 1976 Chevrolet Impala. The vehicle was spacious compared to most current car models, had ample space in the trunk to store his limited belongings, and provided Todd with a sense of connection to his parents as it was their gift to him the day he earned his driver’s license.
Todd gave it the old college try for a few weeks; however, he soon began giving clues that all was not right in his world. Living in his car was bearable in September; however, October brought with it too many cold nights and gas bills that he could not manage. His personal hygiene began to suffer as he found it difficult to shower on a regular basis without getting “caught”. He also had limited access and funding to launder his clothing properly.

Noticing the changes in his appearance and academic performance, Todd’s instructors began questioning him about what was wrong. He simply responded with a terse “I’m fine” and ended all conversations about his current circumstances. Eventually, Todd elected to simply withdraw and end his educational pursuits.

Todd has not maintained any form of communication with his friends, peers, or instructors. From time to time, people will catch a glimpse of a bearded man driving a 1976 Chevrolet Impala through the neighborhood; however, the mobile home never sits still long enough for anyone to check to see how he is doing or how they can help him.

Research

Abraham Maslow is well-known for his work referred to as a hierarchy of needs. Rowan (2007) states that the work of Maslow can be summarized as describing personal development as a series of incremental stages of growth. However, Rowan (2007) adeptly notes that the manner in which issues are addressed in the world tends to be uniform. Specifically, the author asserts that we “[treat] everything on the same level” (Rowan, 2007, p. 73).
Such is the case with Todd. It can be, and has been, argued that the manner in which he has dealt with transitions has not been effective. Minogue (2012) states that when people demonstrate “individualism”, they are often portrayed as deviant or negligent (p. 257). In his mind, Todd simply identified an issue in his life and addressed it the best way he knew how.

Interventions

Todd is simply one of countless students who have baggage which can impact their ability to cope with transitions.

Strategies and suggestions:

- Institutions should create and implement strong lines of communication in an effort to assist students like Todd who have special circumstances. This would allow the school to which the student is transitioning to be prepared to help if, when, or before concerns surface.

- University employees should be trained on whom they should contact to refer a student who might exhibit concerning behavior.

- Residence hall staff should be trained to better ascertain why students are checking out of residence halls.

- Intentional support programs should be in place to assist roommates of people like Todd to help them handle concerns that might arise if they are overwhelmed by an issue (i.e. living with a student whose parents were recently killed).
References


Chapter 23
Don’t Judge a Book by Its Cover

Pretty enough to be a model? Strong enough to be a construction worker? Fast enough to be a professional athlete? Smart enough to be a rocket scientist? Charismatic enough to be a politician? Through media and personal conversations, people spend a significant amount of time placing judgment (positive and negative) upon others. We might be better served if we view the world through the lens of possibilities as opposed to the lens of predictability.

Vignette

Jim is a young man who is bound for success by most standards. His was an organized person who was able to manage a significant amount of responsibility in high school. Manager for the football team, president of the student boosters, member of the Habitat for Humanity Club, and consistent member of the honor role, Jim was able to multi-task with a high level of efficiency and effectiveness.

When he enrolled in college, Jim did not anticipate anything would change for him. He would be highly involved on campus while maintaining academic excellence. He had never experienced anything different. As a result, it was a shock to his system when he was not selected for a leadership position in the housing office. He was devastated. “How could this be possible”, Jim asked himself on several occasions.

About a week after receiving notification that he was not selected for a position, the director of housing called Jim into his office. At that time, the director explained to Jim that everyone on the selection committee agreed he had potential;
however, he simply needed a little more experience before being offered the position for which he applied. Still confused, Jim listened intently.

The director went on to share with Jim that he would like him to consider participating in a different opportunity within housing. “We need strong voices in housing to represent the opinions of other students”, he shared with Jim. “We think you would be incredible in this role, and it will allow you to grow and develop skills that will help when you re-apply for the other position next year” the director elaborated.

Stunned at first, Jim allowed the words of the director to sink you. “You think I have potential” Jim offered in a rhetorical question. “You want me to be a voice for others” he continued. “Yes” the director offered. “This will allow you to assume a leadership position and work toward your ultimate goal”. “I’ll do it” Jim exalted with a huge smile and a great sense of pride.

For the remainder of his first year, Jim was highly successful in his role. He gained the confidence of his peers, and served as an excellent representative on their behalf. As he was preparing to leave for the summer, the director of housing called Jim to offer him the position for which he had been denied less than a year prior. After a short hesitation, Jim shared that he appreciated the offer, but he preferred to remain in his current position. He was happy with his role, and had three more years in front of him if he wanted to re-apply for the other opportunity.
Research

Astin, Astin, Chopp, DelBanco, and Speers (2007) provide a strong foundational framework for helping students be successful in college. Many students come to leave high school with an image of what being a college student will entail. For many, those notions turn out to be false, yet they exist until they are disproven. Astin, Astin, Chopp, DelBanco, and Speers (2007) state that all students must come to terms with who they are by answering a series of thought-provoking questions. However, individuals often do not have the skill sets to effectively engage in true self-reflection. As a result, university personnel have a unique opportunity to help individuals by having open, honest dialogue when timely and appropriate to assist students.

Tinto (2009) states that students require open and honest dialogue in order to feel a sense of connection and value in their college experiences. It is easy to send a student applicant a rejection letter. However, it is more impactful if higher education professionals take the time to share the potential a student has to be successful during a conversation as to why s/he may not have been selected for a specific opportunity.

Interventions

The need to work has become a reality for many college students. As a result, it is critical that appropriate interventions be implemented to help them grow and develop in a manner that will assist students with the transitions they face in college. Cunningham (2008) states the importance of individuals participating in self-assessment activities in order to promote successful transitions.
Hertzog and Morgan (1998) identify the need to establish "transition [teams]" which create a broad collaboration to assist students with acclimation to a new environment (p. 94).

**Strategies and suggestions:**

- Institutions should create protocol where decisions about employment, etc... are communicated in person as opposed to via letter or e-mail. Such a program would allow for meaningful conversations and growth.

- Colleges should provide students with opportunities to complete interest inventories to explore ideas in a non-threatening environment like the career services office.

- Enrollment services offices should intentionally collect data about student interests in high school in an effort to help make similar connections in college and impact transitional issues in a positive manner.
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Chapter 24
The Dog Days of College

Imagine being blind and attempting to navigate the stressors of college life. Many students without disabilities struggle with academic, social, emotional, and physical adjustments which occur during their college careers. As one might predict, the educational transitions for the visually impaired are magnified as compared to their peers without sight concerns.

Vignette

In her second week of college, Sam finds herself so exhausted that she has slept through her alarm clock. Without a roommate to holler at her to wake up, the alarm sounds without attention. Instead, Sam continues to dream about being at the beach with the sun hitting her back and water splashing at her face. She soon is wide awake with the realization that her face is wet as a result of a tongue bath from her dog and not the salty waves of the ocean.

Sam does not attend a college that allows pets. Instead, she lives with a service animal named Tiger. As a blind student, Sam relies heavily on Tiger to assist her with her daily activities (although it appears Tiger overslept as well). Though frustrated with herself, Sam is very forgiving of Tiger as she has only been with her for less than a week. Fresh out of her extensive training, Sam will cut her a little slack this time.

Over the course of the semester, Sam and Tiger experience their share of problems. Although Tiger is never in public without her blaze-orange vest informing people she is on-duty, students, faculty, and staff have had difficulty adjusting to a dog being on campus. Sam is often late to class because individuals stop her on a
regular basis and attempt to pet or play with Tiger. Politely, Sam has to explain that
Tiger cannot “play” when she is wearing her vest. On other occasions, Sam has had
to deal with students trying to feed Tiger in the cafeteria. Similar to her strict work­
 ethic, Tiger is also on a regimented diet in order for her to be the best assistant she
can be for Sam.

Though she has handled herself in a gracious and courteous manner, Sam has
reached her limits. As a result, she meets with the coordinator of student advocacy to
share her concerns. “I just want to get my education without being afraid of how
people are treating Tiger”, Sam shared with conviction. She is afraid that Tiger is too
young to maintain her sense of discipline and that they both will be placed in danger
if that occurs.

After brainstorming ideas to address Sam’s concerns for almost an hour, the
coordinator asks if Sam would be willing to “go public” with her concerns. Not
knowing his definition of “public”, Sam asks for clarification. The staff member asks
if she would be willing to participate in an interview with the college’s radio station
to enhance awareness about the special nature of service animals.

After a short time of consideration, Sam agrees. Though frustrated by what
she and Tiger have endured, she is confident that the actions of others have been out
of ignorance as opposed to malice. Together, she is confident that she and the
coordinator can help educate the campus about Tiger and service animals in general.

Two weeks after their initial meeting, Sam and the coordinator went on air
and spoke about proper etiquette with regard to service animals. It will take time to
determine if the interview will have a significant impact on the behavior of others. However, in the short-term Sam has found that people have begun to respect Tiger more and appreciate that she is working to help Sam. In turn, Sam has worked with the coordinator to have times when Tiger is “off-duty” and can interact with others. Tiger seems to appreciate fewer distractions when she is on-duty, and loves the attention when she is not working.

Research

For many people, the thought of having the person they love the most being mistreated is concerning. Kwong & Bartholomew (2011) suggest the same is true of the bond between owners and service animals. When given significant thought, it makes sense. A person with a service animal is placing her safety in the control of an animal that cannot communicate with her in a direct and clear manner. Bedwell-Wilson (2009) confirms the notion as she states that the primary role service animals provide in the lives of their owners is preventing them from harm. Some with argue that such a relationship defines trust at the highest level. As a result, owners of services animals experience significant levels of frustration and grief when their companions are mistreated or when they pass away (Kwong & Bartholomew, 2011).

In addition to preventing harm, Shaughnessy (2008) learns in an interview with Melissa Winkle that service animals create feelings of security for their owners by serving as “social conduit” and unconditional “companionship” (p. 35).
The effective training of a service animal and matching it with a proper owner can provide a person with a disability opportunities that allow them to pursue dreams and opportunities that would not be otherwise possible.

Interventions

Sam is a young lady who simply wants to pursue her dream of being a college graduate. Without the help of Tiger, her passion would have gone unfulfilled.

Malone (2009) identifies the importance of “summer transition” programs and the role they play in assisting students. Sam and other students can benefit from summer programs to help with acclimation and transition issues.

Hertzog and Morgan (1998) identify the need to establish “transition [teams]” which create a broad collaboration to assist students with acclimation to a new environment (p. 94).

According to Walker, Downey, & Cox-Henderson (2010) successful transitions occur when individuals are provided with “hands-on” and “[real] life experiences in a post-secondary setting” (p. 300).

Strategies and suggestions:

- Educators and educational administrators should create open lines of communication which allow students with disabilities to transition from one institution type to another without incident.

- Post-secondary institutions should create summer programs which allow students with disabilities to explore the campus, residence halls, academic buildings, etc... at their leisure prior to their first semester of enrollment.

- The campus disabilities services coordinator should communicate with appropriate institutional personnel to ensure they are aware of the
accommodations to which a student with disabilities is entitled well in advance of his/her arrival so they can be in place from the beginning of the student’s career.

- Appropriate campus personnel should meet with students with disabilities on an individual basis to determine what they are comfortable sharing (if anything) about their service animals. If the owner is comfortable, the institution should use available avenues to educate the general campus population about the “dos and don’ts” of interacting with service animals.

- If the student were comfortable, s/he could schedule times when members of the campus community could interact with the service animal in an effort to remove the “novelty” of having an animal on campus.
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