

Scenarios for PSY6102 Activity 3

Scenario 1

Sherri reports:

My first job after getting my MA in psychology was with a psychoeducational center in the deep southern United States. Keep in mind, of course, that what I'm telling you here may not reflect the current intercultural situation in the South, situation, but this was an important intercultural event for me.

This took place back in the late 1970's, and school integration was still a hot issue, being resisted by many in attitude if not in fact. There were not many African American educators and most of the African American children were taught by White teachers and went to schools where most of the personnel, except for the service personnel, were White.

Our center's staff was run by a wonderful White Southern woman, and we had an integrated staff. Many of our social workers and teachers were African Americans, or Black, as we called them then. As a White "northerner" I sometimes felt like a species all to myself!

On my first day of work, I had to take my testing kit and drive out to Peach Tree County to test a little boy who had been referred by his teacher for having behavior problems. It was my job to give him a psychological evaluation, checking his intelligence, looking for signs of what we now call ADHD, and give him a simple projective drawing test looking for emotional problems. Basically, the school wanted to know if he was too stubborn to learn, or had an intellectual or learning problem.

At the school, Derrick was called from his school room to go to the principal's office. He shuffled in with his head down, as he had probably done on so many occasions when he had been summoned there before. In the small testing room, we sat at a table, me on one side, and he across from me. I opened my Weschler Intelligence Test briefcase in way that blocked him from seeing what was inside of it, took out my stop watch, and began asking him questions from the first part of the test, the Information test. (The Wechsler has since been revised). "Derrick, what is coal?" Silence. As I was from Pennsylvania where they mined coal, and where it was still used sometimes to fire furnaces, (and also where

we were told that if we were bad children Santa would put coal in our Christmas stockings) it seemed strange to me that he would miss such a common item.

Next, "Derrick, can you tell me how far it is from New York to Los Angeles?" Again silence. I looked out the window at the red dirt playground and wondered if he had ever heard of these places. I realized we were getting nowhere with the Information subtest, so I moved to Block design. This was a simple spatial motor test and didn't require any previous learning. Lots of kids with behavior problems or ADHD scored well on this; this was a favorite subtest with me, because a good score on this could really pull up the overall IQ of the child.

I laid out the blocks, showed him a sample and how I put them together to match the pattern on the card. I mixed up the blocks and told him it was his turn to put them together, deftly clicking the stopwatch concealed in my lap. Still, Derrick didn't move. He had a glint in his eyes that somehow told me was a lot more intelligent than he was letting on. But how could I crack through the barrier? How could I get him to cooperate when stubbornness and a lack of communication with his (White) teachers were some of the reasons he had been referred to our center for evaluation?

Almost in tears, I was ready to pack up and go back. But how could I, a new employee, say I had failed to be able get any results? Putting aside the "I'm the tester, you're the kid" thing, I slid around to the other side of the table, looked Derrick straight in the eyes and said, "Look, this is my very first day on this job, and if I don't get this test from you, I'm gonna go back there lookin' like a fool! So if you don't mind, can you just answer a few questions and puts these puzzles and stuff together, then I'll be out of your hair."

Derrick cocked his head, sizing me up, and slowly started to put together the pieces of the block design. We got through the rest of the test together, with him stingingly answering the verbal questions but putting together the puzzles with speed. When I left, I shook his hand and thanked him, and he stood tall and just stared at me as I turned to walk away.

Scenario 2

When I first married my husband, who is from Persia, I didn't understand a word of his family's native language. And because he came from a traditional Muslim family, when there were large family gatherings, which took place very frequently, males and females met in separate parts of the house, so I was essentially left without a translator.

Many of the ladies were very solemn and never tried to communicate with me, talking and gesturing amongst themselves. One older woman, an aunt and elder in the family, however, often nodded in my direction with a full smile. I tried to place myself next to her in any gatherings, and returned the customary hug and three kisses to the cheeks each time I saw her. Although I still didn't understand what she was saying, I enjoyed sitting next to someone who at least smiled at me. And I often smiled at her, to show that I liked her and appreciated her.

My husband and I went on a trip for three months, during which I learned the basics of Persian conversation. I was so looking forward to our next family gathering so I could finally understand what everyone was saying. Now that I could finally tune in to what everyone was saying, I finally got some insight into what people were talking about—their children, housekeeping, each other, and a little bit of current events. When I paid closer attention at the next afternoon tea, I was aghast to find out that any time "auntie" was upset with someone, or felt that person had broken the family's rules of etiquette, she would make a remark about that, nod at the person, and flash her a huge smile.

All the time that I thought she was reaching out to me, she was actually upset and irritated by my ways and behaviors! As a matter of fact, the aunt was a distant member of the country's royal family, and was quite put off by my casual American style of dress and behavior. I was quite an odd character to her, and she had been using those family meetings to point out my odd behaviors to everyone, such as the way I sat close to people, spread my arms wide eagle style on the back of the cushions instead of placing them in my lap, took tea the first time I was offered, and, horror of horrors, occasionally stretched out my legs in front of me instead of keeping them hidden, folded cross legged beneath me (which

unbeknownst to me meant that I was pointing the dirtiest part of me, my feet, toward others!).

Yes, I did learn to fold my feet under me, rather than sit with them pointed straight out when sitting on the floor; and to wait until I was offered tea or cookies at least two or three times before actually taking one. But "auntie" changed too! Through all my innocent sidling up to her, she had actually come to like me as a person, despite my manners. She learned that I truly liked her, even though my manners were not what she had expected.

Through the years, I became close friends with this older woman, whom many considered to be picky and difficult. I still made some wrong moves, like when I served lunch late, which, as a guest, she construed to mean that she was not wanted, or when I scolded my children, which she took to mean that I was tired of her being at my house, but overall, on some level, we were able to reach out past these barriers and truly express our appreciation and care for each other. And when she was troubled with dementia in her later years, for some reason, I was one of the few people she could still recognize. Maybe it's like the Persian expression goes: Dil bi bil rah darad. "The heart finds a way".