

2005 General Comprehensive Exam

Question 2

Theoretical Foundations of Intervention

Start a new blue book. On the cover of the blue book or on the top of the computer page, write: the digits of your student number as listed on the brown envelope; Question 2, General Exam; and the date. If using a computer, use no more than six pages (10-point) double-spaced. If writing, use no more than twenty single-sided pages.

Question 2. Shoba, a 37-year-old Asian Indian-American woman who is divorced and has a 12-year-old daughter, is experiencing a crisis in her current work environment. Use the information below about her, her personal and family history and the current situation to discuss the questions that follow.

The Individual

Shoba, the middle of three children, has a brother two years older and a sister three years younger. Her parents moved to the United States from India when she was six years old. “I remember being in school, not speaking English and struggling to understand what was going on around me. It’s a head-spinning kind of feeling, a way I still feel when I get anxious.” A bright child, she quickly learned the language and excelled in school, doing better than either her brother or sister.

Meanwhile, life in this country wasn’t working out so well for her immigrant parents. Her father, who had been an engineer in India, wasn’t able to find equivalent work. A serious back injury further limited his employment prospects. He and Shoba’s mother ended up running a convenience store together, which supported the family, but was a chronic disappointment to her father’s career ambitions. “I see now that he was a bitter and angry man, and for whatever reason, he took that out on me – maybe because I was the only one making it here, maybe because I was the most different from him – I don’t know.” He regularly beat Shoba, mostly for crimes of “attitude.”

“My mother saved my life. I will always be so grateful.” Her mother did not directly take on her father, but worked quietly to get Shoba admission and a full scholarship to a private boarding high school. “Here’s this shy woman, not really speaking the language well, but she approached my public school teachers and got their help to make this happen. I think she saw it as a matter of life and death, that maybe I wouldn’t survive my teenage years staying with my father.” The school, several hours from home in a country setting, was an oasis: “I loved the peace. I loved the learning. Maybe that’s in part what I was seeking when I took the job at this school. Even there, I didn’t quite fit, but it was so much better than home.”

Her mother died of cancer two years ago, and “I still grieve every day.” She is not close to her father or either sibling. Her brother struggles with alcoholism, is single and lives a

marginal life of intermittent employment. Her sister, employed as a bookkeeper and also single, centers her life around a fundamentalist Christian church she has been involved with for a number of years. “She’s perfectly nice, but conversation with her only seems to involve her trying to save my soul.” She remains in limited contact with her father: “Even now, something about me just sets off something mean and angry in him.”

She met the man she married in college. “He is and will always be my soulmate and the love of my life.” An international student from a Latin American country, she found him brilliant, intense, and committed to political action for social justice. “He never met a righteous cause he didn’t want to get involved with. The same, I was later to find out, applied to women he found interesting or attractive.” I was right by his side until our daughter Sheena was born and I wanted more stability for her. We were back in his country at the time. I took a teaching job in an International School. He continued his work with various activist groups, which I supported, until I found out about his multiple affairs. He was unrepentant, said women in his culture just accepted these things and I should know it had nothing to do with his love for me. I couldn’t live like that. I took Sheena back to the States with me and got a teaching job.”

The Work Setting and Shoba’s History Within It

The job is in a private school serving children from kindergarten through eighth grade. It is set within a wealthy community whose population is predominantly Euro-American. Parents are a fairly wealthy and demanding clientele. The school has a high ranking among similar schools and students tend to go on to prestigious private high schools. The Head of School, as well as most of the other teachers, are Euro-American.

The school had recently enlarged its grounds and its enrollment and was in a period of change. It was, due to these decisions, in a situation of more financial strain than usual, and teachers were all told that they needed to participate actively in the current capital campaign and “sell” the school to prospective parents and students. Shoba had spoken out against this “commercialization of education” at faculty meetings: “I’m an educator, not a salesperson.”

The school is divided into two departments: the “primary department” (grades K-4) and the “upper department” (grades 5-8). There has been a long history of conflict and rivalry between the two departments. Teachers in the primary grades believe that those in the upper grades focus too much on subject matter and not enough on the whole student. They also believe the teachers in the upper grades look down on them because their students are younger and it is “easier” to teach them. Some teachers in the upper grades complain that the lower grade teachers coddle the students and do not set high enough standards.

The current Head of School previously taught in the upper department. He has been associated with the school for over 20 years. Shoba’s immediate supervisor, the head of the primary department, is a woman who has only been at the school for two years.

Shoba was attracted to the school when job hunting because it presented itself as very community-focused, “and I was looking for a community.” In this respect, the school has been a disappointment and she has felt frustrated in her attempts to belong. She feels separated from them in values, in class, in financial matters. She depends on and survives on her paycheck. Most of the teachers are in a very different and more privileged economic situation, with personal and political concerns very different from her own. “How on earth did I end up in the midst of Republicans?” She does not socialize with other teachers, rarely if ever attended faculty luncheons or awards banquets, and generally avoided the social milieu of faculty life.

Shoba is in her sixth year as a second grade teacher. As a teacher, she is thoughtful and skilled. Though there have been some troubles on the job, there had never been any questioning of her abilities as a teacher. Parents jockey to get their children into her class. Indeed, her value as a teacher has been acknowledged as the reason they are going to extra effort to work out other aspects of her life at the school. There have been complaints prior to the current crisis, mostly involving other teachers saying that she is “abrasive” or acts “superior.” For instance, bus duty has been a source of occasional interpersonal conflict, with Shoba’s feeling (and probably conveying) that she is the only one seriously trying to do the job of getting all the children on the right bus, while others, who are supposed to be helping, socialize instead.

The Current Situation

There was an incident in which Shoba openly expressed anger to her assistant teacher for not doing her job properly. The assistant teacher, the niece of one of the administrators, was not entirely happy with her assistant job and was trying to segue into the admissions/public relations department. Rather than being in the classroom at her appointed time, she was finishing a public relations project in the main office. When she arrived significantly late, Shoba, handling a roomful of boisterous second graders, said in an irritated voice, “I really need you to be here when you are supposed to be here.” The assistant did not bring up her reactions to Shoba, but went over her head and complained to her supervisor that she felt reprimanded in front of the class and intimidated by Shoba. Even though she and her assistant later worked things out as far as their working relationship and were getting along well in the classroom, the incident sparked a disciplinary reaction on the part of administration.

Citing a long history of “non-collegiality,” the head of the school and Shoba’s immediate superior conducted a painful series of meetings in which they informed her that if the contract for next year had not already been signed, she would not have been rehired. She was told that her job was in jeopardy, asked to look within herself, find what she wanted to change, and write a heartfelt narrative statement about a proposed personal change process. “I feel like they want something in particular from me, but I don’t know what it is or how to give them what they want. It’s that head-spinning feeling again.” The administrators keep reiterating that if the plan came from them, it would not be genuine.