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**QUESTIONS**

1. What physiological effects might Cynthia's substance abuse and malnutrition have on her baby? How might these effects inhibit this child's abilities to learn?
2. Why do some women live under and some children are born into such harsh conditions? What political or social changes must take place to address this problem?
3. If you have a student in your class whose family is homeless, what can you and your school do to help the student and family?
4. This account is empathetic to Cynthia's plight. She is primarily described as a victim. Her child will also be a victim of conditions beyond her/his control. Do you think Cynthia is a victim? How might she gain control over her life?
5. How should public schools view and address the many social problems in America? Does school play a role? If so, what?
6. *Activity:* Visit a homeless shelter or a soup kitchen. Observe who is served by the facility. How many women, children, and families rely on that charitable facility? If students and the instructor feel comfortable with the idea, talk to some of the persons to learn about their lives, hardships, and hopes.

**CASE 57. STEVE***Issues: Instructional methods/techniques*

*Steve and his mother, Phyllis, have moved a great distance so Steve could live close to his father. They feel socially isolated in a strange town and stressed by a difficult economic situation. Steve is a first grader already feeling like he can't fit in and find success in school. Steve's teacher says he has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and should go to a doctor, a recommendation that brings further confusion and stress to Phyllis.*

Six-year-old Steve and his mother, Phyllis, live in a trailer nine miles outside of town. They moved here recently from another state after their apartment and all their possessions burned in a fire. Steve's father offered to allow them to use a trailer without paying rent. After the fire, Steve and Phyllis stayed with family members, but Phyllis knew that her family, despite their gracious kindness, could hardly afford to continue to support the two. Steve's father offered a quick solution. He also spoke of spending more time with his son, an attractive prospect for Phyllis who had been raising her son

singlehandedly and could use the help. The offer of the free trailer lured Phyllis to quit her bartending job, leave her hometown, and move across two states.

Now, as Steve attends first grade, Phyllis is struggling. She feels depressed living in this new place with no friends and a trailer only half-filled with somebody else's furniture. She has a job waiting tables at Denny's, but she hasn't been able to get to work in four days. Her idle '77 Dodge needs over \$600 in repairs and she can't begin to sort out how to find that kind of money.

Steve is trying hard to learn the alphabet. The letters seem strange to him. Some of them look alike, so he can't remember which one is which. They have sounds that go with them, but the sounds only go with them sometimes and not other times. It's very confusing. He has an idea of what reading is because he has watched his mother read detective novels, but she's usually too busy to read to him. The other students in the class already know this stuff. It's hard to struggle each day with learning a P and a B when the kid next to you is reading a whole book about cats and dogs.

Young Steve also knows he is wearing the wrong clothes. His clothes were burned in the fire. Now he owns two pairs of ill-fitting pants and a handful of tee shirts from the Salvation Army. Some of the boys on the bus call him Rag Boy. He feels intense shame and tries to ignore them like his mother tells him.

Steve can't put his problems into words. He can't conceptualize the problems. But he can feel it each day as he goes to school. He can feel the uneasiness, the tension, the fear, the sense that he is not worth much in this new school. He feels like the other students belong there and he doesn't. They know how to do this school thing while he's lost in a foreign land. It's like learning to read is a giant jigsaw puzzle made up of a million pieces. The other kids not only put together the puzzle but they seem to have joyfully memorized the puzzle pieces. Steve is staring at the unopened puzzle box, wondering how all those pieces could make that colorful picture of the mountain and the trees.

Although Steve has always been a mild-mannered, sweet little boy, there is trouble brewing in his life. To Steve, despite the nice way the teacher often acts, he knows he's not wanted here. He can feel it in her tone of voice and the way her eyes roll in her head when he makes a mistake. He knows this place isn't for him. When students get stars for doing good, he doesn't get one. When students get praised for being smart, his name is not mentioned. He is gradually learning his letters and a few words, academic lessons that come with time. But he is also learning that he lives at the bottom of the school food chain, a life lesson that comes quickly and painfully. He is learning well to be an underachiever.

Each morning, he begs his mother to keep him home from school. She sends him to school anyway. By December of the first grade, Steve's mild manner gives way to angry outbursts. He throws his crayons across the room and calls his teacher a "fat goose who ate all the other fat geoses." He bites another student who cut in front of him at the water fountain.

Steve's teacher calls his mother and says that Steve has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. He has displayed all the symptoms: lack of attention

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## QUESTIONS

1. What problem does Steve have?
2. What has Steve tried to do?
3. How does Steve feel about reading?
4. Do you think Steve will be successful in school?
5. How does Steve feel about his mother?
6. What advice would you give Steve's mother?



to school tasks, impulsive and disruptive behavior, wandering around the room. To Steve's mother, this sounds like a different child than the one she sends to school each morning. At home, Steve plays quietly while his mother watches TV or reads a book. He rarely gets angry. If he does, he doesn't act out or disobey his mother. If anything, he's been too good, a too well-behaved child. But here the teacher was saying that Steve misbehaves in school and that he has ADHD. She must know what she's talking about since she's the teacher. Besides, Phyllis had a friend back in Delaware whose boy was given Ritalin and his behavior was cleaned up immediately.

Despite agreeing with the teacher that Ritalin would be helpful, Phyllis doesn't immediately take Steve to a doctor. Her medicare card for Steve's health services has expired and she must apply for a new one. At this time, she is not sure where to go or how to reapply, so she has put off taking Steve to the doctor. Besides, how would she get there? She has arranged for his teacher to send home a note about his behavior every day. She has started restricting Steve to his room for the afternoon on days when he receives a bad report. It is unclear at this time whether this intervention will effectively improve Steve's classroom behavior.

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## QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between Steve's recent school behavior problems and the literacy instruction he is receiving?
2. What possible approaches to teaching reading and writing might be tried with Steve?
3. How does poverty effect the way Steve feels about himself? How does poverty effect the opportunities he and his mother have for making a good and happy life for themselves?
4. Do you think that the behavior change plan started by Steve's mother will improve his school behavior? If not, suggest a better approach.
5. How have the social systems in which Steve lives influenced his feelings and behavior?
6. *Activity:* Go to the library and use the ERIC system to find pertinent research on the topic of early literacy learning. Specifically, explore this question: What early childhood experiences help or hamper a young student's learning to read and write?



## 58. TODD

### *Issues: Consultation/collaboration*

*When Ms. Genovese, a special education resource class teacher, hears that a new student will be added to her caseload, she launches a full-scale investigation. She tries to gather as much information as possible*