Teaching science to children with emotional and behavioral problems

Leanne Barrett • Italian Home for Children • Jamaica Plain, MA • Fall 2014

Introduction
I did my Fall 2014 co-op at Italian Home for Children, a non-profit organization that provides residential and day-treatment programs to children with emotional and behavioral problems. I mainly worked with children in the Community Based Acute Treatment (CBAT) program. Because this is a short-term program, these children typically don’t attend their regular school during this time. Because of this, Italian Home has classrooms for these children to participate in educational activities during the weekdays. During my time at Italian Home, my main role was as science teacher to children ages 7-13.

Activity
Some of my responsibilities included in the classroom included:
- Planning out activities for my classes
- Leading the children through activities and managing staff to provide individual support to children who needed it
- Making decisions about behavior management
When I wasn’t in my classroom, I would support the other teachers in their classrooms. Our main goal was to provide an educational environment for the children while they were unable to attend their regular schools. At the end of the day, we would write a daily summary to communicate with the children’s clinicians on how they were doing in class.

Outcomes
Because the prior science teacher left before I started working at Italian Home, I had little guidance in teaching science to young children. After my first week, I read a few papers on teaching children science and was able to come up with more hands-on experiments that would be more easily understood by the age group that I was working with.

An even greater challenge than teaching my children science, though, was learning how to manage them. I was able to learn how to present myself in a more authoritative way. I got much better at setting limits with the children. I’d use a more stern voice when necessary, and I’d remind them of the class rules at the beginning of each class. I also noticed they were more receptive to the day’s plan when the schedule for the week was given to them on Monday.

Reflection
I was exposed to a population of children that I had never worked with before. I was able to see how various mental illnesses manifest themselves in children and learn how to work with and connect with them despite their challenges. By working with them, I learned how to present myself much more confidently and how to manage a group of children. I learned that I really love working with children with emotional and behavioral problems and hope to continue working with this population in the future. This co-op significantly narrowed my future goals. I now know that I want to pursue a field in research, education, or clinical psychology.

Some Experiments We Did in Class:

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