

"RAP"

Practicum project

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While trying to figure out what was the best situation for my practicum project, I encountered a student that I hadn't really spent a lot of time with. I am an Aboriginal Advocate; we work with students emotionally, culturally, intellectually and physically. I have the opportunity to work from my office and in the classrooms; however, I am only funded to work with Aboriginal students. How does one turn away any child who needs supports? I ask myself this often and I have come to the conclusion that I just don't. I was asked to run a homework club after school 3 days a week. This is where I started to build a relationship with Mitchel.

Mitchel is a student in grade 6 who has been in and out of trouble since grade 1. I noticed him because his teacher always has him sitting in class alone and at the back. I see him often in a cubicle in the Learning Assistant room working independently or at least pretending to work. I also see him in the office on a regular basis awaiting his next punishment. According to his teacher, Mitchel doesn't complete hardly any class work, he disrupts the class which is affecting the other students learning, he talks back, and he is highly defiant and very misbehaved.

Mitchel started attending homework club a few months ago, forced by his teacher and parents. In the beginning his teacher would walk him down with a large handful of books and worksheets for him to complete. It didn't take me long to realize this child was not there to do his school work. If he got even one sentence written down or one question done I was happy, I was just glad that

he was there. Seeing how his behaviour was so defiant with his teacher, I was surprised that he even attended homework club. This became the start to getting to know Mitchel.

Outside of homework club, Mitchel started to approach me. He started to acknowledge me, if I was in the next room he made a point to come and say hello. Every time I saw Mitchel I would always ask how his day was going or how his weekend was. Soon he started to joke around with me; he has quite the sense of humour. Whenever we would see each other we could joke playfully and laugh together.

Getting back to homework club, a CEA runs it on the days I don't. Mitchel doesn't miss a chance to complain to me on how mean she is. He says she is always angry and nagging him to finish his work. I asked him, "does it help, do you get your work done?" He laughs and says "NO." I told him different people have different ways when working with students.

During the last few months Mitchel started to talk to me about his family. He told me he lives with his mom and older sister most of the time. He talked about how much him and his sister do not get along and are always fighting. It seems he is left alone a lot while his mom is out with friends. He talks about his dad and how they go fishing together and he really enjoys that. He has shared his interests with me; he loves mountain biking, snowboarding, and trying any extreme sports he can. He has told me his parents have been divorced for a few years now because of drugs and jealousy. Actually looking back homework club really wasn't doing homework. A lot of times it was just me and Mitchel because so many students didn't show up, especially when it started to get nice outside. This made a perfect opportunity to get to know Mitchel better.

The weekend back from attending the Victoria seminars, Circle of Courage and RAP training Mitchel asked why I wasn't at homework club. I briefly told him about the training and how much I enjoyed it. He went on to

say “Well no one can help me, everyone has tried everything already and it doesn’t work!” I asked him what it was that everyone has tried. He said, he has been suspended 9 times since grade 1, sent to the office (which he likes because the leather chairs are comfortable), yelled at, given more work to complete, missing out on activities, isolated to the back of the classroom or the learning assistance room and even been given lower grade level work. He also said the principal and teacher think he is crazy because they made him see the counsellor. He said it was a waste of 5 minutes because it was awkward and uncomfortable. Not only he gets those punishments from school; at home Mitchel seems to be often grounded and unfortunately I have heard about some physical abuse as well.

I asked him why he doesn’t listen to his teacher. He told me because “he treats me like an ass, and he always is staring at me.” Mitchel asked me “What would you do if I swore at you?” I was stunned that he said that and it took me a minute to respond. I said “Well I would have to look at what it was I did to make you that upset that you would resort to swearing at me.” He didn’t say anything, just looked out the window.

The only real time I have to work with Mitchel is a few hours a week. In that time I feel I have created belonging for him. He has been able to open up and talk about his feelings. I have provided him a caring relationship, encouragement and positive feedback while he has been opening up to me. I don’t think he feels a sense of belonging in his classroom, how could he being isolated almost daily. He does not trust his teacher; that relationship has not been built on respect or fairness.

I can’t say I have yet to get him to do his school work, but I have learned he loves to read. He brings books that he reads at home and tells me about them. I have noticed that when he does do his work, he knows what he is doing. He is smart and doesn’t seem to need academic support. It is just figuring out how to get him to want to work. Providing Mitchel the opportunity to develop

coping methods or problem solving skills to deal with the stresses or crisis he faces may be ultimate for his changing belief or attitude.

I feel if the relationship between Mitchel and his teacher wasn't based on a power struggle, Mitchel would be a lot more successful. It seems to be a circle based on disrespect on both of their parts and I don't see that it will stop unless the teacher can learn some new strategies.

I really enjoy being around this child, he is smart, funny, motivated and he definitely fights for what he believes in, which to me makes him a very strong individual. I think Mitchel needs to feel in control of his life, as he should and right now he is fighting for that need. If I can provide him with certain tools to allow him independence it may help him to reach that personal goal. Now what tools to provide him with? I guess just me being me and building that relationship with him; and still having consistent boundaries. By being there when he is having a crisis, I can emotionally support him through it. I can listen to him and be empathetic to his needs in all areas. I can encourage and be a positive role model for him.

What I learned from this project is that it is not about fixing the problem or the behaviour of a child. It is about being that child's support and showing them that they are cared for and loved. And that they belong and that they are important in every way. I learned that not only do I want to make a difference in a child's life; I am making a difference every day and I love it!