

Diversity at BLAST

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### Abstract

The paper will discuss the observations that have been made while working through BLAST. BLAST is an afterschool program that will enable children to have snack, read/complete homework, play outside, and a plethora of other activities. This paper will discuss the different demographics of students at this program such as gender, socioeconomic background, and cognitive limitations, just to name a few. There have been some interventions done during the setting that have helped the students, families, and supervisors at BLAST. The interventions mentioned will include both environmental and instructional interventions. The paper will discuss environmental adaptations to create success within the setting. Other adaptations are also included in the text. Other interventions that have been successful will include the parents/guardians and their willingness, or lack thereof, to help improve their child. The insights gained from working at BLAST have also been summarized. Lastly, ways to carry out these insights into the future classroom have been noted as well.

My diverse setting for this course is actually my involvement with the BLAST program through Bismarck Parks and Recreation. I've been involved with BLAST since last fall (2015) and have been at Solheim Elementary School. During the summer, BLAST turned into Activity Center, which is basically the same type of thing, just all day long instead of 3 hours.

BLAST is an after school program in which us supervisors of the children (leaders) help the students with their homework, have snack time, play games, go outside, make crafts, etc. It's such a great way to get to know the students and their families outside of the classroom setting where the children are free to be themselves without the pressures that school can place on them. Throughout the time I've been working at Solheim, I've gotten to know a variety of diverse students and families. For the confidential sake of this assignment, all students will have the name A1, A2, A3, etc. and will all be considered male in gender.

The demographics at my specific BLAST site are fairly diverse compared to other schools, however not quite as diverse as some of the other schools in Bismarck. At BLAST, we have all ages from kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade of both male and female genders. Many of these families have varying levels of income. Some own houses with full size basketball courts and pools in their backyards, while others are living in a trailer with 4 other children. Our children are very good at accepting others who don't have as much money as other students. Thankfully, at this age, students aren't concerned with income. However, if some of the families, or even us leaders, don't prevent it, there could be further issues.

At our site, we don't have any children with extreme levels of physical disabilities. The children may just be growing out of a strange phase. Our students at Solheim have more cognitive disabilities than physical disabilities, but the students who have a cognitive disability

seem to be performing at a fairly decent level socially however, we don't take grades or have homework so we don't necessarily get to see how well they are performing in school. However, a majority of our students don't have any disability in either of those two areas whatsoever.

Some of the discipline/intervention procedures for BLAST are sending children home, the amount of time/days will depend on the number of previous incidents there have been and also the severity of the incidents. Most often, children aren't sent home, instead they're "written up" with what we call a Behavior Report. This report has the basics of the incident that the child was involved in. Then we ask the parents to read it and sign the form, once they sign it a leader will go discuss the situation with the parent.

One child last year came from an African American family. A1 had problems with ADHD and anger issues toward other children and the leaders. One time last year, he picked up another student who was his same age, and threw him to the ground all because he got "down" in the touch football game they were playing outside. A1 ended up being sent home for an entire week due to this violence. Another thing we noticed about him, was his inability to sit still, his inability to remain quiet when asked, and his attention span was rather short. What we found worked best to deal with his angry outbursts and his inability to focus for long periods was having simple one-on-one conversations with him about his actions and how we could fix them. Once he had that private interaction, he usually behaved better for the rest of the day. In my future classroom, I know I'll have to have one-on-one conversations with students of a variety of different backgrounds, this will be very beneficial to each student's success. Often times with this student, we would make him point out his flaws in the situation. This is another strategy I hope to use in my classroom because it will hold my students accountable for their own actions.

A strategy we would incorporate with A1's mother was to tell it to her completely straightforward. We also made sure the child was there when we were telling his mom about the situation. We discovered this method worked best because A1 wouldn't try to lie about the situation to his mother, he often would leave out parts where he was in the wrong. The mother wasn't always on the side of the leaders, she thought we were being harder on her child than other children. We would simply explain that A1's actions have been disrupting other children and putting them in danger and because the other children weren't causing as much trouble, that is why A1 always seemed to be in trouble. She would usually agree and say "We'll work on these issues at home." However, I'm not entirely sure how much "working out" there was. It's always a toss-up on whether or not to have the student present during this conversation. Obviously in my future classroom, I'll have to get a general understanding of the situation/parent involvement. Most often times, I feel like having the child there will help keep the student from lying about it later on in the day. Plus, it will make the student more accountable.

Another student, A2, was from a family from India. The family was constantly traveling and leaving the country to go visit relatives, business trips, or even trips just because they could. Some of the places he's traveled to (in just the year I was working there) Florida, Spain, and India (as they did every year to go visit their family). The one thing I loved about this child was his amazing cultural ties to his family. A2 would constantly be talking about the different religious beliefs and trips he went on. I remember him bringing in story books about the gods of their Indian culture. He would ask if I wanted to read them, and I did. What I found while reading the books, not only did I enjoy reading them, but I realized how different their religious system is when looking at the Indian culture. I would constantly ask A2 questions about their gods and he would tell me with pride. It was really a great thing to witness. Some of A2's

classmates didn't understand why the gods were so different, however they were usually polite about it. Plus, A2 would always make a positive comment in return instead of a negative argument toward his classmates. I think the amount of cultural ties A2 has to his family and culture are absolutely amazing. We didn't have many problems with this child except the few times he didn't follow our rules for coming to BLAST right away. The family was very polite to all of the students and leaders as well. This student and his family are a great example of how we can understand a different culture in such a positive way.

I know in my future classroom I'll want to stress different cultures and traveling as much as possible, thanks to A2. In my future classroom, I would love for the students to look into their cultural backgrounds more and possibly have a "heritage day" where the students each do something traditional to their native culture. Not only is there so much for the students to learn from traveling and different cultures, but there's so much I (their teacher) can learn from traveling and cultures as well. I think it's very important for the students to see that their teacher is constantly learning, just as they are.

Lastly, this year we have a child who (according to our informational packets) doesn't have anything mentally diagnosed with him. However, A3 will be shy toward someone until you get to know him, which could just be an age issue, however he also is rude and doesn't like to listen to any form of authority. Once you get him talking about science-based topics, or once he starts drawing, then he's perfectly fine toward everyone and doesn't mind speaking up and talking to the leaders and other students. As I stated above, we don't have any written down issues, other than a difficult family life. Maybe the familial issues could be the main problem, but A3 is definitely a student who acts in a different way than some of our other students.

A3 has been sent home for a week at a time due to some heavy misbehaviors he's had. However, he hasn't gotten much better since the start of the year. Whenever we tell his mother about the situation, she usually just shrugs it off and doesn't seem to discipline him. One of the huge environmental factors that helps A3 calm down is when we are able to go outside and he's free to draw. His mother knows that he calms down when drawing, so she will always recommend this, even though it seems as if she doesn't offer any other advice. From the BLAST leader end, we can't create a program to help the child. However, we recommend that A3 should be held accountable for his actions, he should have more intervention outside of BLAST as well.

Overall, I've loved working for the BLAST program. It has been so great to see these children grow over the past year. I've definitely learned how to handle different situations that don't normally arise to the everyday person. I'm eager to see what else I can learn about these children and how I can better myself to help those children who will be in my future classroom.