Christine Dudek

In August, 2012, you receive this note from one of your CHLD 495 group members about her new job:

“When I started working here in July, I was so excited to work with the previous Head Teacher. She seemed like a very passionate, caring, hardworking teacher. A month into the job, I have started to notice certain behaviors that make me really uncomfortable and sad. I can’t believe the teacher I’m working with is doing certain things, especially since everyone in this center loves her and respects her. I am leaving the center feeling emotionally, mentally, and physically exhausted!

The Head Teacher basically treats me like a maid, because I’m doing all the cleaning, all the potties, all the supervising, while she just sits on the floor and uses her phone. I find myself multi-tasking every day. I am doing potties, getting snacks and getting lunch ready, putting the cots down/up, and supervising all 14 children all at once. If she does a messy activity or finishes potties, she leaves a big mess and doesn’t clean it up. I am so embarrassed on how dirty the classroom is that I just clean it up since it is dangerous for the children and it looks really bad for parents to see. Her food/drinks are all over the classroom because she is constantly eating while she walks around the classroom. The classroom is really bad every day, and I am not sure how to tell her to clean since she is my superior.

When it comes to curriculum, I feel like I have no say in it. She does what she wants and asks me for ideas but they are never implemented. I tried to help her by doing two weeks’ worth of curriculum but she threw my ideas away. If she does allow me to do an activity with the children she rushes me or doesn’t offer me support so my activities are never completed. I always notice that she has a lot of paper work, so I have offered her my help but she refuses. She always leaves me supervising all 14 children by myself while she does things on the computer; sometimes she just leaves. Also, every time I give a suggestion or a tip she says that she has three years of experience working with two year olds so she knows more than I do. I don’t know why she is like this towards me.

What breaks my heart the most is her interactions with some of the children. The more I work with her I notice she does a lot of yelling. She wants the children to sit still and not make noise. If they act out in any way or make a mess, she yells at them in a very shaming way. She humiliates children by yelling at them in front of the other children and telling the children that he/she is a bad boy/girl. I notice that children are afraid of her and that they feel like they could not say no to her. For example, one of the children was not hungry and said all done and came to potty with me. As I was finished with him, the Head Teacher came and told him in a very firm voice that he needed to eat because he did not eat at all. The child couldn’t even look at her or answer her; he just walked to his spot really slowly. As soon as she turned away, the child came up to me and told me that he was not hungry and wanted to sleep. I was so upset that I told him that if he was not hungry that it was okay and helped him to his bed.”

I would tell this colleague that I am sad for her situation and that I think she should talk to the program supervisor about what is happening in the classroom. Especially if the children’s welfare is at risk, someone needs to be notified of what is going on. I also think that she should address this to the Head Teacher in a professional way. She has only had this job for a month and I think that she should give it more time before she quits. The Head Teacher may still be trying to get to know her and how she runs a classroom. It takes a while to get on the same page as someone you are working with, especially when it has to do with planning.

I would tell my colleague that she has the skills to be a strong teacher and I think that with time her new supervisor will see that as well. This position could also lead to other possibilities, and not saying that the Head Teacher is doing the right thing, but all teachers run their classrooms differently and it is likely that she will run into conflicts working in other programs as well. However, I would assure my colleague that she knows what it takes to be a strong teacher and right now the children need her to advocate for them.

I would also remind her that if she wants to be a strong leader that she needs to stand up for what she believes. If she thinks there is a problem, then she needs to address it with her supervisor as well as with the program director. I think that this colleague should use resources that she gained in school to assess this classroom and try to offer it everything that she can.

The next step that I would suggest to my colleague is to confront the Head Teacher about how she is feeling. This may be all that it takes for the problem to be solved. The Head Teacher is not used to having someone there and so she too may need to learn how to co teach and run a classroom. I definitely think the first step is to address the issue rather than quit.

I would then offer this colleague the best piece of advice that I have. I would tell her that she may not be happy there at the moment, but until things get better the children need her as a safe person who they can express their feelings to. If the head teacher really is as bad as she says, then these children need an advocate who can help make their environment a safe and fun place to learn.

I think that the responsibilities to the children and families should come first, but this program clearly also needs help. I think that in order to be a professional teacher it means that you need to sometimes do things that you do not like and stick through things when times get rough. This program needs a strong leader to get the changes that it needs, and my colleague is qualified to do this as long as she sticks to it!

I learned this information by working hands on in a facility. I had my first experience in a toddler room where I had no say in what happened. Next, I was able to do a supervised practicum in a preschool where I was able to implement my ideas and create an inquiry to employ with the children in the classroom, now as a student teacher I am able to continue with this experience and learn from every situation I come across.

I have not had the opportunity to apply the information in my response to a real life situation. I have been lucky enough to have amazing supervisors who allow me to engage and experience new things every day with the children in the preschool. I feel comfortable enough to express my feelings towards something that I believe in the environment where I am currently working.