



Summer@Smith: 7 Fun-filled Weeks of Unstructured Free Play & Interactive Learning

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Academic Preceptors: Joan I. Gluch, PhD, RDH, PHDHP, University of Pennsylvania, School of Dental Medicine
Community Preceptors: Betsy Neiva, PhD, Smith Memorial Playground

COMMUNITY PARTNER

The Smith Memorial Playground and Playhouse is an indoor and outdoor play space that provides and promotes the opportunity for unstructured free play for children 10 years and under. Founded in 1897 in East Fairmount Park, for generations it has been a public space for kids and their families living in Philadelphia.

Website: <http://smithplayground.org>

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Regionally and Nationally, Smith serves as "thought leader" for the advocacy of play; in cities like Philadelphia where the access to safe, green play spaces is limited, kids naturally lack the experiences and discoveries only made in the outdoor. Smith addresses this issue by providing an inclusive and safe space for kids to play. Smith partners with a variety of stakeholders to increase the access of the park; hosting nationwide events like the Kidchella Music Festival, Play-A-Palooza, Winter Wonderland, and more, all aimed to promote play for kids at little to no cost.

TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

Kevin Okoli served as a summer camp counselor for the 4–5-year-olds and 6–9-year-olds. Kevin developed interactive lesson plans that exposed the kids to nature and the outdoors, developed sport activities and games that promoted physical fitness, teamwork, and problem-solving. Kevin presented a lesson on exercise and nutrition as they relate to cardiovascular health. Lastly, Kevin served as a life coach for all the age groups, teaching them how to adequately vent and communicate their feelings and emotions, coaching them on proper mannerism, and aiding them improve their reading and writing skills.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ CHALLENGES/ JOYS

- ✓ Educating youth on cardiovascular health
- ✓ Developing children's conflict resolution skills
- ✓ Improving verbal expression of emotions among kids
- ✓ Promoting peer coregulation and self regulation
- ✓ Playing all day with kids!



REFLECTION

The BTG CHIP experience at Smith greatly improved my ability to communicate with children and understand children's behaviors. I learned effective strategies to employ when communicating with 4–5-year-olds, and how to instill self and coregulation in this age group. I learned how to motivate and teach self-motivation to the 6–9-year-olds as they embraced challenging sports. I learned that life as a child can sometimes be emotionally difficult, so I constantly coached the kids on the proper ways of communicating their feelings to their peers and adults. Lastly, I learned the best ways to engage with kids when trying to educate them on a topic; once I correlated the topic of nutrition to the foods and people the kids encountered in their everyday lives, it was amazing seeing how quickly the students understood my lesson on essential vitamins and their importance.