

Vocational Assessment Paper

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Field Experience Summary

I completed my field experience at the afterschool program for vulnerable youth (specifically the Newberg school district middle schoolers), MyZone. While MyZone is hosted at a church and my supervisor and all of my coworkers are Christians, it is a secular program. My job includes greeting the kids when they arrive, checking in with them about their days, providing encouragement, participating in activities, simply talking with or listening to the kids, supervising behavior, and teaching a dance class as a therapeutic intervention once a week.

I would describe my field experience as nostalgic, challenging, tiring, educational, rewarding, reinforcing, and inspiring. The kids at my site remind me of myself when I was their age; many of them struggle with mental health issues, low self-esteem, but have a determination to prove themselves. To my surprise, the hardest kids to deal with are not the ones with the behavior issues. Instead, they are the girls who struggle with depression. There are days when my heart just aches at what some of these kids have to go through. I want to be able to simply take their pain away, but that is not how this life or field works. I find myself desperately trying to say the right things to them. However, I have to admit that I cannot and will not always have the right thing to say. There are some days when I mainly listen. I understand the power of listening, but I want to be able to encourage these girls in a way that will help them. I am learning that I still have so much to learn about helping. I don't like feeling helpless when in a helper role, but I am not perfect; I cannot save everyone.

As hard as this internship may be, I really do love it. I relish the good days the kids have. I love seeing their eyes light up when they achieve something. I especially love seeing how dance and music serve as a healthy coping mechanism and promote self-confidence and self-esteem. To my surprise, the kids also seem to really enjoy it too. I am realizing that you will always take work home if you are in the mental health field; I often find myself thinking about the kids when I am "off duty". I wonder how they are, what they're doing, how others are treating them, what decisions are they making, etc. I want to be able to say that I made a difference in these kids' lives and that I grew stronger personally and as a future

mental health professional as a result of my experience. My field experience has allowed me to meet the goals I set, such as becoming more confident in my abilities and being a better listener. I have also learned how to work with adolescents, which is a population I was previously unsure about working with. In addition, I have also learned to apply and grow my skills in ways I did not anticipate, such as teaching dance as a therapeutic intervention or using play therapy techniques while playing basketball or air hockey.

I have seen my field experience relate to my Addictions and Abnormal Psychology courses. Some of the kids at my site are starting to experiment with drug use; they mostly use cigarettes and joints (and I would be naive to assume they do not yet do any hard drugs). In Addictions, we talked about the concept of gateway drugs and whether or not they actually exist. I firmly believe that cigarettes and joints are gateway drugs and it breaks my heart knowing that some of the kids use them because I fear which substances they will try next. Many of the kids have anxiety disorders or depression, which is discussed in Abnormal. I am also grateful I took Adolescent Development because I am able to understand the mental processes of the kids and know what is important to them due to what stages they are in. For example, when they do something really, really stupid, I know it is due to their lack of prefrontal cortex development. Or if they are they are overly self-conscious or constantly worry about being embarrassed, I know it has something to do with their egotistical worldview; they think everyone is always watching them and judging them. I have also seen topics from Learning, such as social learning theory. My counseling classes have been extremely helpful.

I am realizing how important it is for adolescents have access to psychologists. These kids spend so much time being picked on by other kids and listening to their parents dismiss their concerns. They need someone to *listen*. While these kids need guidance and limits, they also need someone to treat them with unconditional positive regard. So many of their relationships at this stage in life are conditional and they need someone who is going to care about them unconditionally. This is also affirming child and adolescent psychology is the field in which I need to be.

My faith plays an important, yet interesting role in my field experience. I work in an Christian environment, have Christian co-workers, and a Christian supervision, but yet my internship is not a Christian one. MyZone is a secular, public school program hosted at Newberg Christian Church. To make matters slightly even more odd, there are a handful of kids at the program who are Christian and are open about their faith and there are others who want absolutely nothing to do with Christianity. I like to think that my field experience can be a form of ministry, even if it is not so explicitly. I clearly see the biases of my faith; I often correct the kids on their foul language and find myself shocked at their blatant disregard for rules and disrespect to authority figures.

My faith also impacts my internship positively, but in an internal way. I am able to pray for patience, good listening skills, and the insight to know which kids need attention. I am also able to pray for the kids to know that they are loved and for me to be able to say something that they need to hear. I am so grateful for this because some of the kids are so broken and need to feel love and know that they matter. In addition, I have also had a few kids (mainly the Christian ones) ask questions about God or Christianity. I enjoy engaging in the conversations, but I will only do so if the kid is the one to initiate them. I believe I am using the gifts God gave in my field experience work and that I am making a positive impact for his kingdom. I believe this because I know God is calling me to be at MyZone.

My experience at MyZone confirmed my desire to work in the field of child psychology. While I would still like to work with a younger population than adolescents, I have come to have a passion for that population and realize the need for mental health workers within that population. I will continue to work at MyZone for the next several years as my schedule allows not just because it is my job, but because I love what I do at MyZone and I know it will continue to be a valuable experience as I continue onto the PsyD program.