

Reflection: Outside School, Inside the “Real World”

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This past summer I had the wonderful opportunity to work within Surrey Parks and Recreation day camps as a one-to-one support worker for children with special needs. For someone who is avidly interested in child and adolescent development, I could not have asked for a better experience; working with children in differing stimulating environments, learning about each of their unique characters, and obtaining hands on experience with various behavioural and physical special needs. Shortly after arriving on site on my first day it quickly became apparent that I was not in school anymore, but out in the real world, struggling to organize everything that I had learned in the past four years at Kwantlen and apply it to a situation that I had never been in before. I found myself taking a deep breath and I realized that all of the skills that had been taught were in fact relevant, and all I needed to do was analyze the situation I was in, and pull those skills out of the textbooks and finally put them to use.



I learned a great deal about myself from taking part in this amazing program. It not only taught me a lot but I was able to tap into different areas of my life. My patience was tested on several occasions and I feel as though it has grown for the better. I had to learn how to be flexible and adapt to a variety of situations. In certain cases a child would have physical disabilities yet cognitively still want to participate with their peers. Therefore part of my job was to be creative and figure out ways that the child could be included in whatever activity was occurring. For instance, if a child in a wheelchair wanted to play soccer, a new rule was applied for soccer that every person on a team had to touch the ball at least once before the team could try to get a goal. I literally had to take the interpersonal skills that had been implemented into the Psychology program and apply them outside on a playground.

Prior to my work experience, I was concerned about how I would handle some of the issues that I knew I would come across in a career working with children and adolescents. I feel that I demonstrated my capability to persevere in a job where many people quit once they realize the difficulty involved. A number of people enter into this line of work thinking that they will spend their days playing with children, when in fact you are working in a field where you are dealing with children and parents who face a great deal of adversity every day. I am appreciative that I was able to work with a population of children who need extra help and it is gratifying to see the appreciation in return from their parents who need a break from their hard work as well. One of the reasons as to why these day camps are organized by these associations is that the

people who are organizing them recognize that the parents of special needs children are doing the work that we are doing 24 hours a day and they deserve a break.

Having reminisced on my brief experience outside the classroom in the real world, I would like to offer future students some words of advice. The first piece of advice would be to carefully examine the field that you are interested in and determine some of the difficult factors that you could potentially come across in your future career. Quite often, people can naively enter into a job believing that it will be amazing failing to take into consideration the negative aspects of the job, possibly causing them to hit a wall and second guess if it is something they truly want to do. Completing my practicum where I did, I was able to work in the area in the field of child and adolescent development that is a particularly challenging area, and as a result it opened my eyes and helped me to determine where I would like to go with my career. The final piece of advice that I would offer for future students would be to learn to be flexible, be creative, and try your best to adapt to new situations. Recognize that things will not always go according to your master plan but be patient and understanding all the while and it will only help you to succeed in whatever you choose to do.

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