



Jenn Unruh

M.S. in School Counseling

Graduate: May 2010

Counseling Practicum at Sellersville Elementary School in Fall 2009

Why did you choose to do this experience?

This experience was my elementary internship. I began at Sellersville Elementary once a week in the Fall of 2008 in hopes of completing my 60 pre-practicum hours that were required. I chose to go here because I knew the Special Education teacher at the school, and I had never been in a Public School before. I completed my pre-practicum hours before the Fall 2008 semester was over, but continued to go to the school once a week because I was thoroughly enjoying my experience. Then, in the Fall of 2009 I began my internship full time at the school in hopes of continuing to learn and develop as a counselor.

What are the benefits of doing this experience?

I found this experience to be exceptional because of the atmosphere of the school, and knowledge of the counselor I was working with. I benefitted a great deal from this school because I was given the opportunity to be a part of many aspects of school counseling that I may not have had the chance to do in another school. I was able to meet with parents, teachers and the principal. I was given the same responsibilities as the counselor at the school. I met with students one-on-one, developed and implemented a self-esteem group, taught lessons in the classroom, proctored learning assessments, completed behavioral observations, developed behavior management plans for students, and even assisted in writing a functional behavior assessment. Some schools do not always allow interns to be a part of all of these activities because as an intern you are still learning. I was lucky to have had the chance to observe once a week in that school before becoming a full-time intern. This allowed me to take on more responsibilities as an intern which I am extremely grateful for. The experience would not have been as fulfilling without having this opportunity.

How has this experience enhanced your academic experience or shaped your career goals?

My experience enhanced my academic and career goals by allowing me the opportunity to see the wide variety of students that are in the public school setting. Being an intern really allows you to see what happens in a profession beyond what you learn in the classroom. During my experience, I many times had to deal with emotional/behavioral melt downs, other behavioral issues, anxiety issues, self-esteem issues, and many more. No matter how much they told me in the classroom, nothing would have completely prepared me for these issues. I knew the general way of dealing with different issues, but every student is different. In classrooms professors will many times say that when you get in the field it will be a huge

difference than us just talking about it in class. I never really believed them fully until this experience. In a school, there could be ten children dealing with the same issue, and each one of them will react differently to that issue. This is where the real counseling skills come in. There were many times that I would try one approach with a child, and within minutes realize that approach was not working. I also learned that as a counselor you need to think quickly, and be very flexible with your time. You never know when a child will need you. Because of this experience I know that my life calling is to work with children who need a little guidance. As much as I enjoy teaching, nothing can compare to the feeling I get when I see in a child's face that I have helped them overcome something they are struggling with. My life truly would not be the same without this experience.

Describe any exciting project or responsibility you've worked on during your experience?

One of the most exciting projects I worked on at Sellersville Elementary was developing and instructing a self-esteem group for third grade girls. I was nervous at first because I had never run a group before, but after the first session, I knew it was going to be great. I started off the group by having the girls look inside themselves for the characteristics they really liked about them. I had them cut pictures out of magazines that described them, and paste them onto a folder they would have to keep all of their work in from the group. I then played a game with the girls where they had to pull a spoon out a cup and complete the sentence that was written on the spoon. All the spoons had the girls telling something about themselves. Then we played a similar game where the girls picked a cookie out of the cookie jar (paper cookies of course) and told something about themselves that was written on the cookie. After that we moved on to saying nice things about each other. I read the book "Have you Filled a Bucket Today" to the girls and had them use t-shirts as their buckets. Each girl had to go around and write something nice about the other girls on the girls t-shirts.

Continuing with that theme, I read the girls a story that I made up about a third grade girls' day at school. While I was reading I had the group tell me if what happened to the girl filled her bucket or dipped into her bucket. The girls did very well with this activity so I gave each of them a small notebook to draw a smiley face when their bucket got filled, and cross off a smiley face when someone dipped into their bucket. Finally I read the book "I'm Gonna Like Me" to the group and had them create their own "I'm Gonna Like Me" books. The girls really enjoyed the interactive activities, and I felt that they grew more confident from these activities. Leading this group helped me to realize how much I really enjoyed working with small groups of students on more personal and social topics. It was a great learning experience for both the students and myself.

Is there anything else you would like to share? Life lessons?
Things you wished you would have known?

I wish I would have known how crazy a counselors' day can be. At Sellersville there are over 550 students, and only one counselor. As you can imagine, the counselor is stretched thin most days. It was like a dream come true for this counselor when I came in to help. I never realized how many students there were in Sellersville with such severe issues. These young elementary students are in great need of one-on-one attention for various reasons, and unfortunately only having one counselor, all of the students cannot be seen on a daily or even weekly basis.

I did learn a life lesson during this experience. Seeing the trials that many of these students deal with everyday outside of school, made me appreciate more the life I have. Some of the issues these children go home to are beyond anything I could have ever imagined. An incredible lesson I learned, and one that all counselors should know, was that as a counselor, you need to separate home life and work life. If you do not separate the two, you can easily become burnt out from the very serious issues you deal with everyday.