



Shenandoah County Early Childhood Program and Family Services

Placement Description

Classrooms for at-risk and special needs preschoolers with extensive outreach to parents and family services

Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

- Play-based learning and social skill development
- Small group activities (i.e. anger management, self-esteem, problem solving, etc.)
- Classroom participation/child observation/data collection
- Assessment of preschoolers
- Exposure to eligibility process for special education
- Network with schools and other agencies
- Parenting support
- Working with dual-language learners and families

Contact Information

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Read about students' experiences at this site below:



Spring 2018 – Maya Rivers

My field placement experience with Shenandoah County Early Childhood Education Program was very unique, yet among one of my greatest undergraduate experiences. The program itself emphasizes collaboration among the home, school and community to provide a quality program which fosters the development of the whole child. In addition, the program instills a diverse community where every family is supported and has access to quality programs and resources for their young children. I took an immense liking to this program because it houses and accommodates children who come from various cultural, home, and educational backgrounds. During my time here, I have had the opportunity to work hands on with children much different from those of which I have worked with before. The children at this site (as well as the staff) are what makes the entire field placement experience worthwhile. I loved walking into the classroom on a daily basis knowing I'd encounter a new and exciting challenge. Being that some of the children come from unique home settings and others struggle with learning disabilities, I was always prepared for a challenge. The challenges I speak of, however, were always learning experiences as opposed to limitations; for this I am beyond thankful.

Having the opportunity to work alongside Mrs. Fainter, Mrs. Muller, and their students was incredibly rewarding. Here, I was able to gain a more unique preschool experience that encompassed a lot of excitement and integration of other communities. Of the nine preschool classrooms in the county, this particular classroom is the only one that is not housed in either of the elementary schools. Instead, Mrs. Fainter's classroom is located in Stonewall Jackson High School, which is right across the street from both Ashby Lee Elementary School and North Fork Elementary School. The opportunity for this classroom to be housed in Stonewall has huge advantages. Some of which include the inclusion of high school child practicum students along with other high school students and staff. The group of child practicum students I briefly mentioned interact with the children every day. They assist Mrs. Fainter in guiding learning time and also participate in group activities with the students. As of late, the practicum students have also had the opportunity to go on field trips with Mrs. Fainter's class. I think that the interaction between both groups of students in this case is extremely beneficial to each party. The practicum students have the opportunity to learn and grow from their experiences, while the preschool children are able to build relationships with additional positive role models. Just from my short time here this semester, I have noticed the incredible bond the preschool students share with the high school students. The smile on children's faces in passing simply says it all. As the involvement of these students has major impacts on themselves as well as the preschool students, it helps take a load off of Mrs. Fainter and Mrs. Muller's plate as well. In this particular setting, I've learned that any help is good help.

During my field placement experience with this program, I have had the opportunity to learn and grow in tremendous ways. Upon starting at this site, I had never worked with special needs children. Although I was hesitant about this at first, I am thankful for the interaction I have had with the special needs children enrolled in the program. Most of the time I spend in the classroom is interacting with the children and guiding them in their daily activities. My role in doing so has allowed me to build relationships with the students that I would have never imagined. I would have never expected to make such an impact on the children's lives, but the full mouth of teeth and open arms I encounter upon entering the classroom three days a week



says otherwise. What some may not realize though, is the huge impact the children have had on me as well. The children of this program have taught me the importance of simplicity, while also teaching me how little it takes to make and keep a child happy. Involvement in this program has allowed for so much personal growth and development as well. I have become significantly more aware of children who come from different backgrounds along with a newfound knowledge of how to respond to, care for, and educate them. Along with the children, Mrs. Fainter and Mrs. Muller have made this entire experience worthwhile. Both of them have been incredibly encouraging and have provided a strong model for behavior while in the classroom. I have learned a lot about teaching and responding to the kind of children they cross paths with through their interactions with their current students. The relationships that each of my supervisors share with their children is incredible. I have observed incredibly emotional children have complete behavioral turn arounds after talking with either of their teachers for a few moments. Each of the teacher's ability to do so has encouraged personal adjustments in how I approach and speak to each of the children in hopes of achieving the same outcome.

I have touched on some of the responsibilities I have had during this placement, but I have yet to mention my role in leading some mindfulness exercises as well as the children's daily calendar and weather time. Upon being asked to lead each of these, I was a little nervous to say the least. Although I had held similar responsibilities in other settings, never was it expected of me in this particular classroom. Despite my hesitation, both mindfulness activities and calendar and weather time has gone quite well during my time here. I am very appreciative of Mrs. Fainter for the areas of which she has promoted personal growth. Being so, the responsibilities I've taken on while at this site have led me to consider obtaining a Master's in Education in hopes of becoming a preschool or elementary teacher. My compassion for children and equal opportunity education has driven this decision as well, however, I would have never been able to reach such a conclusion without the experiences I encountered during my time with Shenandoah County Early Childhood Education Program. I am forever thankful for the program, its children, and its staff for making this experience so unforgettable. I am incredibly sad to have to leave, but am happy to be able to say my goodbyes with nothing but positive things to say about my experience!

Spring 2017 - Kristin Mack

In working at this site, I was able to work with an at-risk preschool class from Ashby Lee Elementary School. However, this year was the first year that the program was housed at Stonewall Jackson High School which was right down the road from Ashby Lee in Quicksburg, VA. The purpose of this program is to create an inclusive classroom for children with special needs and who come from difficult backgrounds to moderate the factors that put these children at risk for early academic failure in school. The Shenandoah Early Childhood Program is unique because it is a part of the Virginia Preschool Initiative and accommodates children who are not a part of the Head Start Program. This site provides the opportunity to get to work with children of a lot of different backgrounds and demographics. For example, our class initially had 15 children including English Language Learners, a child with a birth defect and an incarcerated parent, a child on the Autism Spectrum, a child with behavioral issues, children being raised by a guardian



other than a parent and children coming from severely impoverished homes. By March, we reached our maximum capacity of students for a class; 18 students. One of those new students has a severe visual impairment which posed another challenge for our classroom.

When working with a class in this program, you really get to have the whole preschool experience despite being housed in a high school. My supervisor, Mrs. Fainter, had ordered all of the supplies necessary to set up the classroom at the start of the school year. She reserved rooms in the high school, coordinated the schedules with the staff at the high school, and with the staff at Ashby Lee. Besides organizing special classes for the students (library, art or music class) at Ashby Lee, Mrs. Fainter collaborates with some of the high school classes to have high school students come over and work with the preschoolers whether it is through science experiments, reading stories, or packing their backpacks at the end of the day. The preschoolers then have the chance to interact with an older age group and have access to role models right in the neighboring classrooms. In addition to the high schoolers, Mrs. Fainter interviews, accepts and oversees JMU students like myself, and sends weekly schedules to us to update us on upcoming events and what tasks will be allotted to us for that week.

Working with Mrs. Fainter and the assistant teacher, Mrs. Muller, made me feel like I had the chance to be a student-teacher rather than just a volunteer or a helper. The days I would go, I typically stayed for anywhere from five and a half to six and a half hours which meant I was there from 7:30am to 1:00pm or 2:00pm. My schedule permitted me to stay for almost the whole school day, which meant that I got to experience most everything that a normal school day would entail for them. Upon greeting the children in the morning, I would help serve the kids breakfast and collect their folders which was the main mode of communication between Mrs. Fainter and parents. During the morning meetings, I would assist with keeping the children focused and engaged with the overview of the weather, days of the week and plans for the day. During playtime, otherwise known as “centers” I helped monitor play in the classroom. During this time, I would diffuse any altercations between children and try to invoke appropriate social skills such as using words instead of physical means, listening to others, forgiveness and learning empathy. Some days, I would have an activity that I would lead on my own. For example, I would lead small groups and facilitate learning through sensory activities, crafts, vocabulary development and phonological awareness. These opportunities granted me a lot of autonomy and helped me to learn how to talk to young kids in a way that they understand. I would also accompany the class to special activities like library, art and music prior to going to lunch. After lunch, we would get to take the children to the playground where I would monitor the children and also get to interact with them.

Aside from our usual routines, I also had the chance to input student development data, organize report cards, check homework, meet with a Spanish teacher and subsequently focus more of my time on one of the English Language Learning (ELL) students who was going through a silent period. In doing so, I played with her during centers, would talk to her in Spanish so she felt more comfortable, and tried to work on Spanish to English translations with her for more successful social integration. I felt extremely privileged to be able to do this because of my background in learning Spanish through school. When one of my main tasks became working with her, I was very excited because I felt like I was of extra use to the teachers and they certainly made sure I knew that. Prior to this, the teachers did not have the necessary resources available to help this student on a daily basis. In my work with this class, I always felt



appreciated for my efforts. Mrs. Fainter and Mrs. Muller continuously kept me informed and made sure I knew the appropriate information pertaining to each student so that I could help them in the most efficient way possible.

In my time at this site, I have learned about behavioral interventions and communication with children as young as four and five years old. I was able to gain a whole new perspective on life; one that is simpler and innocent. I recognized the differences in language capacities and was able to learn how to make connections that children would understand. I also learned the importance of focusing on the positives rather than the negatives, especially with children who may come from difficult backgrounds. Positive reinforcement and less attention to maladaptive behaviors can be key for improving good behaviors. These lessons are beneficial to my professional goals of wanting to become a Clinical Child Psychologist because there may be occasions where I will have to work with children as young as preschool. Skills like these are crucial for problem-solving. Over time, I was fortunate enough to watch some of the children grow mentally, socially and behaviorally which are some of the outcomes I would hope to see in my future career.

Spring 2017 – Reema Parikh

Shenandoah County Early Childhood Program's main goal is to provide equal education to at-risk youth and to help the development of the child as a whole. Working at this site for the last few months has helped me see how true this was. The preschool consists of a teacher, assistant teacher, and (up to) 18 students. It is located inside Stonewall Jackson High School.

Working at Shenandoah County Early Childhood Program has provided me numerous opportunities that I was never offered before. All of these experiences have helped me grow as a person throughout this semester. I believe that the most important and influential opportunity that I was given was meeting the school psychologist. Currently, I am planning on going to graduate school to eventually become a school psychologist. So, this meeting helped me confirm that I want to continue on this path. It also allowed me to obtain insight on the educational path to becoming a school psychologist. Right before I was able to sit down with the school psychologist, he hosted a presentation on English Language Learners which was particularly interesting because I lacked extensive knowledge with this type of student.

There were plenty of advantages about working at this site. Working with children of this age is definitely a memorable one. You never know what to expect. Every day is different so you will never get bored! My supervisor, Sherri Fainter, was amazing to work with and her support definitely helped me through this semester. I was also given various opportunities to learn new things. However, unfortunately there were some disadvantages. I feel as if the hardest parts about working at this site was how far it was from James Madison University and how short of a period the preschool was open everyday. Trying to fit in my hours during the time that the preschool was open was a struggle. Also, I did not want to go to the site if I could only go for an hour or less because it seemed like a waste of gas for that short of time. I wish that it was closer to my school so that I could slip in an hour or so each day instead of having to go for seven hours straight on some days.

During my time at Shenandoah Country Early Childhood Program, I was able to lead a lot of group activities. Some would be in large groups and others would be in smaller groups or



individual meetings. This was an amazing opportunity to focus on specific weaknesses of the children. Being able to read individual lesson plans for the students in the beginning of the semester also helped because I was able to work on these students' problem areas. There were some small administrative tasks such as copying, cutting, laminating, grading papers, etc. that I was given throughout the semester as well. One of my favorite aspects of this particular site was the field trips and out of classroom activities! Whether we walked over to the elementary school for music class or went to check the elementary school's science fair or even travel down to the local farm, it was great to get out of the classroom and have a change in the regular schedule!

I think that the most important lesson that I had learned during my time at this site was how to think on my feet. This was something that I was definitely not expecting but picked up on fairly quickly. Working with kids, things are bound to go wrong. There were countless times when something happened and I was forced to act quickly. De-escalating situations was one of the biggest tasks at this site. It was very easy for the children that I was working with to get upset and to overreact. I learned that the teacher needs to remain calm and bring positive energy back into the situation.

Overall, I had an amazing time at Shenandoah County Early Childhood Program and, if given the opportunity to choose a site again, would pick this one. Everyone that I had worked with was so supportive and caring. It made the whole place feel like home. I am very sad to leave but am also excited for what is coming!

Fall 2015 - Brianne Rodgers

If you visit Ashby Lee Elementary School's website, the first thing you will see is the mission statement in large letters stating that their goal is to achieve, "A place where the scholastic community will cooperatively strive to provide an educational program that will enhance the development of the whole child." This statement rings true for the preschool program at Ashby Lee, especially the ending phrase of "development of the whole child." The preschool program specifically is targeted for at-risk youth that Head Start does not serve, along with children who are given an individual education program (I.E.P.). Throughout the curriculum of the preschool program, the children are not only learning academic related ideas, such as their letters and numbers, but are also becoming knowledgeable in areas such as social, emotional, and behavioral norms and expectations. Within the program, the children have access to many different resources. First, the children are able to apply for reduced or free lunches to help those families who are struggling financially. These meals benefit the development of the child's brain, along with their physical nourishment. Second, there are many different specialists at the school. The primary specialist the children see is the speech pathologist. Finally, the dedicated teachers who prepare the lessons and activities for the children to benefit from. Overall, the children within the preschool program are not only receiving an education but are becoming well-rounded individuals who will be prepared to succeed later in life.

Ashby Lee Elementary is located within the Shenandoah County Public School system. The site is an average sized elementary school with around 650 students each year. It is located in a lower socio-economic area. The school system is nicely structured, and there are many



different resources available. I always felt that the teachers and staff were on the same page, and there was a limited amount of chaos throughout the school day. I loved working in an at-risk preschool because I am planning on pursuing a career working with the same population later in life. The one disadvantage of working in this area is the lack of diversity among the students. The population is primarily (81%) white. However, there is a large Hispanic population (15%) within the school, and I had the opportunity to work with a preschool boy who started the year not knowing much of the English language. One of the aspects of Ashby Lee that I appreciated the most was that I was always doing a task. My days were filled with activity and moving from one task to the next. Also, I felt that the work I was doing was meaningful. I was able to interact with the students, faculty, and staff, lead lessons, and be a part of the classroom.

While working in the preschool classroom at Ashby Lee Elementary, I was given phenomenal opportunities to learn and grow as an individual. Most of my time was spent interacting with the children during different parts of the day such as centers, recess, breakfast/lunch/snack, and circle time. The largest skill I developed from interning at the preschool was how to speak and problem-solve with children ages three to five. Speaking to these children is like speaking a different language. I had to learn how to phrase my words differently, and, often times, I had to rephrase what I was saying so that the children would comply or understand. When problem-solving with these children, I learned how to teach empathy and relate the situation to the child. Many of the children are still ego-centric and do not understand the view point of their peers. During my time helping the students diffuse problem-some situations, I also learned how to teach them to problem-solve themselves. Throughout these experiences, I picked up different techniques on how to ease transitions from play to work, how to create a friendship that involves sharing and forgiveness, and how to build rapport and a relationship with the children.

Another fantastic opportunity I received was being able to lead small group lessons. There were multiple benefits from that experience alone. I learned how to structure and create a lesson. I had to think and plan what I was going to say to the children, how many questions I would ask them and how to ask those questions. Also, I learned what activities, toys, etc. are engaging to students and the different methods of engaging the students. Along the same lines as small group, there were some days when I was asked to lead an activity for the whole class. These opportunities were spur-of-the-moment, and I did not have very much prep time. I valued these opportunities greatly because it taught me flexibility and how to think on my feet. Finally, the most rewarding experience out of my internship was being able to watch the growth and development of the children during my time in the classroom. Overall, my interactions with the children and my supervisor, Sherri Fainter, were wonderful. There was a chance to grow with every day I spent there, and I was offered multiple opportunities to enhance my knowledge and skill-set.

The moment I knew where I wanted to take my future was while I was enrolled in a developmental psychology course. The concepts and information intrigued me and I wanted to learn as much as possible about early childhood development from prenatal up until adolescence. As mentioned earlier, while at my site, I was able to watch the growth and development of the



children. This was such a rewarding experience because I was able to take the knowledge that I had previously acquired and apply it to real-life situations. I was no longer thinking hypothetically but able to critically analyze and find a solution to a problem. During collegiate level academic classes, it can be very easy to sit and think of all of the possible solutions to behavioral and social disturbances and emotional breakdowns, but working with these things in person is not the same. An extremely valuable lesson I learned while working in the classroom was how to think on my feet. In a preschool classroom, situations can escalate very quickly and become chaotic within seconds. Being able to know a positive solution to deescalate a situation and apply it to the situation quickly is critical to the structure of the classroom. Instead of letting these chaotic situations scare me away from the field; it pushed me even further towards it. Looking to the future, I plan on receiving my masters in teaching for early childhood education and possibly special education. Watching the positive developmental growth in behavioral, social, emotional and academic areas is astonishing and it is my goal to continue to implement these positive developments in other young individuals' lives.

Spring 2014 - Elissa Edwards

My field placement was at Ashby Lee Elementary School in Sandy Randolph's preschool classroom. The school is located in Quicksburg, VA, which is about twenty minutes north of James Madison University. The school's spirit is apparent and the sense of community is everywhere. The school creates an educational environment that promotes the development of the whole child in a positive way. There can be up to thirty preschoolers enrolled in the school, and they are split between two classrooms. The class I was in has six spots reserved for students with special needs and 12 spots reserved for students enrolled through the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI). The students who have special needs have IEPs with specific goals that each child is working towards. While working with this population of students, I was able to help them work towards their goals. VPI aims to service all four-year-olds who are considered to be at risk who are not already enrolled in Head Start. Students are considered at risk if their family lives in poverty, is homeless, their parents have limited education or are chronically ill, the student have health or developmental problems, or if the student is an English Language Learner (ELL). The preschool at Ashby Lee Elementary builds their curriculum from the standards that are set forth from Virginia's Department of Education.

While I was in the classroom, I acted as an additional instructional aide and volunteer. I had the opportunity to work with students 1:1, lead small groups, help the other instruction aides or Sandy teach lessons, and help with whatever classroom clean-up or paperwork that needed to be done. I had the chance to work with each student on various activities, which gave me a chance to develop a relationship with each student. I accompanied the class to their activities like Art, Music, Computer, and Library. Also, there were many exciting activities that I got to be a part of as well. This included an assembly about the SPCA where we played with dogs, met firemen and got a tour of a fire truck, and we even took a field trip to the post office! My supervisor and the other instructional aides did a wonderful job of making me feel included in



the classroom, even though I was only there two days a week. I really enjoyed being in the classroom and the students were a never-ending source of amusement and happiness.

One of the most influential experiences at my field placement site was working with ELL students. I have never had the opportunity to work with ELL students before, especially students who only knew Spanish. This took some time to get used to, but I was able to form a relationship with these students, despite the language barrier. I enjoyed working with this population and this is a subject that I hope to have more education and experience in later on in life. Overall, my field placement proved to be an exciting opportunity and provided me with many opportunities to grow as a future educator. Although I have decided to not pursue a career in early childhood education, I will be pursuing my Master's for Special Education in K-12.