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Internship 2012  
Rivers Camp for Kids  
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During the summer of 2012 I had the opportunity to work for the Rivers Institute. As an intern I worked both the High School Summer Academy Camp and the Rivers Camp for Kids. Since I am an aspiring educator I believed this internship would serve as a wonderful chance to gain crucial experience with children of all ages. Before the summer began I prepared three goals for myself in order to gain my full potential as an educator. Considering the value the Rivers Institute places on environmental education I decided to form my goals around the aspect of nature. Through the experience of working with children of all ages within environmental settings I hoped to teach the campers the importance of nature.

For my first goal I wanted to obtain was the skill of adapting to a variety of age groups. Through my internship I worked with children from the tender age of 4 all the way to teenagers a year away from going off to college. This gave me the opportunity to experience first-hand the perspective of children at every age. I believe that having the capability to relate to your students is a very crucial in order to help students reach their academic potential. During the first week of camp I worked with teenagers in the High School Summer Academy Camp. This seemed to be daunting at first since I am currently perusing a degree in elementary education. However, by the end of the week I became pleasantly surprised. Though this camp was only one week I learned how to relate and interact with the teenagers as their counselor and serve as an authority figure despite the slight age difference. I also learned great educational techniques that the professors used to relate more to the students. For instance, Dr. Phillip was

the professor I worked with throughout the week and he often used his humor to make the campers feel comfortable and ready to learn.

Throughout the remainder of the summer I worked with much younger campers for the Rivers Camp for Kids. This camp basically gave me a crash course of what it takes to be an elementary teacher. Before camp began I was given the chance to write out and plan a program guide for the second week of camp. This was a great experience because I learned how to adjust my lesson plans and activities accordingly to the variety of ages. Since the camp is available to any child between the age of 4 and 13. I thought it was essential to make the lesson plans appropriate for every age group. In addition to planning out the entire activities for the second week of camp I also worked as a station leader during the summer. This responsibility allowed me to work with every group at camp and find instructional approaches that worked with each age group. Therefore, through this internship I was not only able to work with a vast age range but also learn how to interact and teach children of all ages.

My second goal was to affectively work with the children in different atmospheres particularly the outdoors. Throughout the summer the children stayed in a variety of settings including the YMCA, Science Center and CFA. However, we also made it a point to stay mostly outdoors. The River's Institute purposely structures most of the children's activities to be outside. This benefits the children greatly as well renowned author Richard Louv writes, "Nature introduces children to the idea –to the *knowing*—that they are not alone in this world, and that realities and dimensions exist alongside their own" (Louv 296). Throughout his novel *Last Child in the Woods* he discusses the extreme need for the children in our society to

discover nature. Through Louv's detailed argument and the River's Institute's emphasis on nature I decided incorporate educating the campers about the environment into one of my main goals. I believe that by doing so it not only helped the children learn about nature but also gave me crucial incite of what helps children learn. As camp began I was able to see first-hand the positive aspects of Louv's argument. The children absolutely loved being outdoors and seemed to soak up environmental facts like sponges! One of the main aspects of the Rivers Camp for kids that really exercised this point was the use of the nature trail. Through the trail the children were able to explore and observe nature. Fellow author David Elkind seems to agree with Louv and using resources such as the nature trail within his novel *The Power of Play* as he writes, "Because children have a natural talent for observing, naming, and ordering plants and animals, we should support and encourage this kind of play" (Elkind 143). And this kind of play is exactly what was encouraged throughout this summer at camp. However, I believe that nature had yet another positive impact on the campers particularly the couple of children that attended who suffered from symptoms of ADHD. As Louv argues, "Studies suggest that nature may be useful as a therapy for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), used with or, when appropriate, even replacing medications or behavior therapies" (Louv 100). Although may seem somewhat of a radical argument during this internship I saw with my own eyes how just being outside changed the behavior of these individuals. One child would literally run freely once he was let outside almost as if the indoors made him feel like he was in prison.

While nature seemed to have an influential impact on the campers I was surprised on how this summer has altered my view on the environment. Through this internship and reading Louv's novel *Last Child in the Woods* I feel as if I myself have rediscovered nature. This

rediscovery has lead me to realize not only how important nature is to me but the importance of reinforcing nature's significance to my future students. In the future I plan on incorporating the outdoors in many of my lesson plans to create more of an interactive and hands on learning environment. In addition to teaching my students the importance of taking care of nature, which prompts to my next goal.

My third goal is to promote a strong foundation of environmental education to the children. Through working with the River's Institute I had the ability to educate children of all ages through hands on projects and activities. For example, during the first week of camp I lead the students in an activity incorporating the sand table to teach them about erosion. During this activity the children got to see first-hand one of the main causes of erosion, water. Through this presentation along with my description allowed the campers to use both their hearing and seeing senses to understand erosion. I truly believe that it is essential for educators to incorporate the use of multiple senses when creating a lesson plan. As David Elkind wrote, "What hits us when we step off the plane or ships are the sights, the smells, the sounds, the textures. No travel books, movies, or TV travelogues can prepare us fully for the real thing. We have to sense it ourselves in order to make it our own" (Elkind 102). By allowing the children to use a variety of their senses I believe it not only heightens a child's educational experience but also allows the child to make a personal connection. This connection is crucial in order for children to understand the importance of not only the lesson but also nature.

Through this internship I not only learned to reinforce the importance of the environment but also the significance of play. As I read David Elkind's novel *The Power of Play* in

correlation to observing the campers I discovered first-hand the positive impact that unstructured play. "Learning is most effective when it involves play, love, and work. This kind of learning is more likely to occur in a traditional camp than in a skills camp" (Elkind 85). This compelling quote made me recognize just how special the Rivers Camp for Kids is in what it has to offer. At this camp it is highly encouraged to use your imagination outdoors which is a rarity in our world today where, "...our increasingly technological, automated society is taking us farther away from the natural world"( Elkind 23). I believe this is what makes the River Camp so exceptional, for it is instilling a relationship between the campers and nature. Just as in Carl Hiaasen's bestseller *Flush*, when Noah learns to stand up for the protection of the bayou through his father's vigorous efforts to protect their neighboring environment. I think that this camp aims to teach the campers this valuable lesson through a combination of nature and play.

Overall my summer internship with the Rivers Institute was a great success. Through this experience I learned that I can educate children of all ages in an environmental setting while instilling the importance of nature. I believe this is a significant step for my future endeavors as an educator. This opportunity has not only given myself valuable experience but has also given me the chance to be better prepared and confident for the future. Through the Rivers Camps I learned what it takes in order to be a successful educator and how to make an influential impact on students. The insightful information I learned from this experience will not go to waste. I plan on utilizing this knowledge throughout my career. I will always remember this summer not only as an opportunity to learn but also as a fulfilling experience that has given me many fond memories that will last a lifetime.

