Today was my first day at VSDB during school time. Last year I went a couple of times with the Sign Language Club in the evenings. I showed up today unsure of what to expect. I was worried because I really hadn't signed much since the last club meeting in May. After I watched an introduction video on safety, I was brought down to the speech room.

In the speech room, I met two speech-language pathologists (SLPs). One of them was working with a student when I first entered the room. I felt surprised to see that during this session there was no talking at all. Instead, the SLP was working on language, in terms of sequencing events and telling stories. I have never given thought to the fact that a speech therapy session could be done entirely in sign!

Next, I observed a therapy session focused on articulation and turn-taking. These skills were integrated into a game called Hi Ho Cherry-O. In the middle of the session, there was a lockdown drill. They practice these to make sure all students and faculty members are prepared for all situations. The alert system consists of a light signal and speaker system to meet everyone’s needs. The light system has five colors, each representing a code and procedure to follow.

A few minutes later, a speech screen was conducted. This just meant that the therapist talked with a student to see if a speech evaluation was needed. This brought me to the end of the school day. I only had the opportunity to observe two students doing therapy today, but it was very different than I was expecting. The school is very diverse and has students of various disabilities. I'm comparing it to my shadowing experience in the outpatient services of the New
York University Langone Orthopedic Hospital, and I think I would prefer to be a speech therapist in a hospital. Only time will tell. I hope I can observe the American Sign Language (ASL) class next week. I think it would help me improve my signing skills!

9/6/18

Today I went straight from the security office to the speech room. For the first therapy session I observed, the SLP put three words on the dry erase board: respectful, responsible, and safe. These words were qualities that the SLP wanted the student to maintain throughout the duration of the session. After the student worked hard, they were positively reinforced by coloring a part of a large picture.

Next, I followed an SLP to the opposite side of the playground where the middle school is located to an ASL class for second language learners. I was surprised to learn there are only four students in the class. In this class, students are given the chance to practice their language and social skills. Usually as a student observer, I'd sit in the back of the classroom and watch without being a distraction to the students, but it's not that easy in an ASL class. The desks in the classroom are in a U-shape, so everyone can see each other. I sat in a chair outside this formation near the back wall. I quickly realized this seat was the worst place I could've been. Unlike when listening to spoken language, in which you can understand others participating as long as you're within listening distance to the speaker, you can't understand sign language if you can't see the person's hands! I was just trying to avoid being a disruption, but I need to join the group next time, so I can see what others are saying.

The people I find easiest to sign with are the ones who mouth the words as they sign. This does not only help me learn and follow what's going on, but it also makes me feel more
comfortable. I get nervous when faculty from the school sign to me. I'm not really sure what to say when they ask me if I sign. I do sign (at least attempt), but compared to their fluency, I feel like a beginner. I feel as though I should have more signing knowledge than I do. I have taken three ASL classes, but since those classes were three years ago, I've had three years without constant learning and exposure to the language. I think I'll learn a lot from the ASL class if I keep going. Maybe I can attend the class each week!

9/20/18

I started off my day looking at a book on tactile communication systems. This book is filled with objects that can represent words for use on communication boards and schedules. Some of the tactile symbols seemed appropriate for the words they were representing (plastic spoon=eating), but others seemed unusual (piece of string=day). Why would a string mean 'day'? Anyway, I can see how this system would be useful for kids who are blind but also for kids learning a language or who have difficulties communicating. Tactile symbols could be used to represent nouns, emotions, and actions.

Once the next period began, I joined an SLP for a therapy session. Right before the session, the fire alarm went off. I've been there three times during the school day, and during two of those times there were drills. I wonder if there will be a drill on Thursday. After we went back into the speech room, therapy began. I was incorporated into this session. We played a game in which the student drew a picture and then had to describe what was drawn to me, so I could replicate it on my paper. Since the speech session was entirely in ASL, I was nervous I wasn't going to be able to understand the student in order to draw their picture. The SLP helped me with the signs that required clarification, and although it was a little tricky at times, my picture matched the student's drawing better than I thought it would.
Following this session, I continued shadowing the SLP. We went back to the middle school for the ASL class again. The class involved asking each other preferences, playing a round of the picture replicating game, and lastly, naming as many signs possible utilizing a particular handshape. This class has given me so many ideas to help the members of the Sign Language Club at JMU learn!

10/4/18

There was some free time today before the therapists were seeing students, so I asked if I could take a look through some of the resources and tests on the bookshelf in the therapy room. One SLP mentioned that if I was interested in aural rehabilitation, I should take a look at the Speech Perception Instructional Curriculum Evaluation (SPICE) by the Central Institute for the Deaf. Looking at the test, there were several things I realized I had never given thought to. For example, those who are deaf have not needed to use their auditory memory, so this is a skill they need to work on if they use listening technology. Also, I learned that listening to music doesn't only help practice listening ability, but the rhythm of music assists with the development of language.

I even got to see some aspects of this curriculum in action during a therapy session. The student was listening to sounds and matching them to an item in a picture. The sounds were first from a home and a park, and then they were from a school. Some of the sounds we listened to included doors slamming, water dripping, hair dryers, instruments, smoke detectors, laughing, and even snoring! I would say identification of some of these sounds were even difficult for me.

I attended the ASL class again today. Ironically, we started by signing foods. I say it's ironic because that's what I'm teaching at our club meeting tonight! The students also practiced
explaining the shape of objects to each other without signing the sign. This helps them work on description and being able to imagine a visual. I would love to become fluent in sign langue. One of the things I absolutely loved at my internship at the NYU Langone Orthopedic Hospital this summer were the number of therapists and doctors who could code switch (speak their patients’ native languages). I have an admiration for those in the health field capable of speaking multiple languages.

I won't be traveling to VSDB next week because it's the end of the quarter, so teachers are given Thursday and Friday off to complete paperwork. The following week, I am going to volunteer in the morning, at the beginning of the school day. This will let me meet and observe different students than usual.

10/18/18

Today was the first day I volunteered in the morning. I arrived right when school commenced. The SLP informed me that the high school has two tracks, an academic track and a life skills track. Since the SLP didn't have a student to see right away, I was brought to observe a life skills class. The SLP always makes sure I get the most out of my time at VSDB. In the life skills class, the students were learning about health and more specifically about why exercising is good for you.

Following that class, we picked up two students and brought them back to the speech room. During this therapy session, we played Guess Who. Guess Who helps students practice descriptions, expressive skills, receptive skills, and facial expressions. Afterwards, I went to watch a math class. During this time, they do calendar time. Once this class ended, I was going
to observe an SLP again, but the student was on a field trip. Maybe I can observe that student next week!

10/25/18

Today I observed a speech therapy session focused on reading skills and letter knowledge. I wonder how difficult is it for students with hearing loss to learn letters and read. After this therapy session, I observed an occupational therapist (OT) along with an SLP. Collaboration between an OT and SLP is beneficial for students, especially when working on writing skills. The OT can help a student with handwriting and pencil holding skills. At the same time, however, a student can work on language abilities by writing sentences. With all of these skills combined into a single therapy session, a student can work on difficult tasks in the realm of OT and SLP at once. This provides a student with extra practice and a therapy session that is very meaningful.

11/1/18

One of the skills that children with language deficits may struggle with is sequencing. This is a language skills that an SLP can help a student improve upon through story telling. Also written language skills can pose a challenge because of the differing syntax between ASL and spoken English. I never gave thought to this prior to volunteering. The differing syntax is important to note when working with people who use sign language because it may be the reason their sentences seem jumbled. When signing you also neglect to use articles. These words, however are essential when writing sentences. I wonder how students who only use sign language to communicate learn the importance of articles. How do you explain to them what
they are and why they must be included in written sentences? This volunteer experience has me pondering concepts, like this, that I would have never thought about otherwise.

11/8/18

Today when I arrived, I followed one of the SLPs to the audiology office where they were practicing making ear molds. The SLP volunteered her ear for them to practice on. Ear molds are made when someone needs a hearing aid that needs to fit into the ear. I was afraid to get mine done because I didn’t know what it was going to feel like or if I would like a gooey substance being squeezed into my ear. First, the people making the molds inserted a little piece of foam into the canal to prevent the material for the mold from touching the ear drum. Then, after the molding material was squeezed and shaped into the ear, they waited a minute or two for it to harden. Once it hardened, they loosened it up around the edges and pulled it out! The mold looked pretty cool once it was pulled out. I had a little bit of regret that I didn’t let them make one with my ear also.

After that cool experience, I went and observed a speech therapy session for a student who is blind. During this session, I saw the importance of using music for engagement, enjoyment, and learning. Once that session ended, before I left, one of the SLPs showed me a website called Super Duper Publications. It has tons of resources for SLPs to use, including tests, exercises, and games. Some of them are free to download, and some you have to buy. I’ll probably use this website once I start my career! The SLP also recommended a book to me called *Thinking About You Thinking About Me*. It’s about theory of mind and social thinking.