



Practicum Notes

THE COLLEGE TEACHING TEAM:

You are a key player!

You've been asked to become a contact teacher, but what exactly does that mean?

During practicum, students work closely with you while a College Practicum Advisor provides liaison and support.

As a Contact Teacher you have a unique and complex role. You are an observer and evaluator, a model, a planner, a conferencer, a counsellor, a professional peer, a mentor and a friend.

It's a big responsibility and right off the top we'd like to say thank-you; not just from the College but from all your colleagues in the field of early childhood education.

Steps for Success

1. Orient the student to your classroom and centre.

2. Identify your expectations and help the student understand his or her role.



3. The student is with you to gain some experience with as many aspects of your program as possible.

4. At the beginning, the student should focus on getting to know individual children, observing children and increasing his or her understanding of age appropriate expectations.

5. For the first few days the student will work and play with individual children and gradually become more involved.

6. Encourage the student to act as your assistant, helping with activities and routines that you are engaged in.

7. By the end of the second week students should be ready to gradually take on some responsibility for planning activities.

8. Practicum III students will be ready to plan and offer activities to larger groups of children.

9. You should have regular meetings with your student to discuss progress. The student should be reflecting on his/her own

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Important Dates:

Practicum I—M/Tu Placement

- September 29th—November 30th
- Block Week:** Oct. 26th—Oct.30th

Practicum III—Th/F Placement

- September 25th—November 20th
- Block Week:** Oct. 19th—Oct. 23rd

Learning at the College

Fall is an exciting time of year: new books, new classes and a lot of new knowledge. First year students at NSCECE will only have a tiny taste of what early childhood education is all about when they enter your classroom for the first time. Everything is new to them.

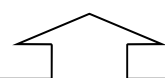
This term they are taking classes in Communications; Child Growth and Development;

Observing and Recording; Curriculum; Health, Nutrition and Safety; and Practicum I, with you.

Child Growth and Development is one of the biggest and most theoretical courses they will take during their time at the College. As part of that course they will create a portfolio for a child in your classroom. This assignment has changed in

some significant ways this year. You can find out more about on page 2.

Students in Practicum III should be ready to spring into action. They have a behaviour guidance course under their belts and will be exploring the topic further in Behaviour Guidance II. They are also beginning to learn about children with special needs.



**150 hours
20 days**

Child Growth and Development— Child Developmental Portfolio Assignment

One of the most challenging and most important courses taken by students at the NSCECE is Child Growth and Development. This course provides a foundation for everything else the students learn during their time at the College, and in fact will continue to be a foundation and a touchstone for

their work throughout their careers as Early Childhood Educators. Making sense of developmental theories and understanding how these models of looking at and understanding children can help us in our daily work is one of the primary goals of practicum.



How do you take what you are learning from a book and discussions in class and make it real and meaningful? You become a scientist. You observe real children in real settings and you try to connect what you are observing with established theories. That has always been the goal of the Child Development Portfolios created by NSCECE students during their first practicum.

This goal continues but the format of these portfolios has changed this year to reflect the use of documentation and our profession's growing understanding of the value of stories to communicate our understanding of children's development.

For this portfolio assignment students will

use their beginning skills of observation, data collection, and analysis to help them understand and explain a child's learning and development. The students will be collecting and creating "learning stories" of a selected portfolio child, which "offer snapshots of children's learning and development in action

by describing actual, unique experiences" (Carr, 2001, Dickinson, 2006).

The stories can take the form of photographs, written observations, anecdotes, drawings, child work samples, or even video/audio depending on the policies of your centre with regard to docu-

mentation and privacy.

The students will complete an analysis chart for each learning story that explains the story in terms of developmental domains, norms, and theory. The portfolios are graded, returned to the students and then given to the parents/guardians of the child who's learning has been documented.

Students will be looking for written consent from the parents/guardians of a child in your room so that they can complete this assignment. We'd like to thank you ahead of time for helping the students identify families who might be willing to allow their child's learning to be documented in this way.

Behaviours of Effective Mentors

Acceptance: a mentor can be helpful by simply giving support and encouragement.

Learning the ropes: a general-purpose function of the mentor is to explain the dos and don'ts of the organization.

Friendship: a mentor is a trusted friend.

Role modeling: an important part of being a mentor is to give the protégé a pattern of values and behaviours to emulate.

Counselling: a mentor listens to the protégé's concerns and offers advice.

Encouragement in problem solving: mentors help their protégés to solve problems by themselves and make their own discoveries.

Coaching: a mentor gives advice to help the protégés improve their skills.

Protection: a mentor might caution a protégé about potentially detrimental situations.

Referral agent: the mentor refers the protégé to resources.

(NSCC, Mentoring Manual, p.6, 2001)

**"Mentor: someone who's
hindsight can become your
foresight."**

Goals of Practicum

1. Practicum is intended to help students progressively develop their skills and knowledge as they proceed through the practicum levels.
2. Practicum is intended to develop the student's knowledge of children through observation and interaction. At the same time, students are learning the introductory phases of planning and developing activities to support the optimal development of children.
3. Students are asked to prepare and implement activities under supervision. They are not expected to supervise children without support from site staff and are never counted in ratio.
4. A student's final practicum is an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to plan for and manage groups of children within a controlled environment.
5. NSCECE provides students with a foundation in the theory and performance of developmentally appropriate practice. Practicum experiences allow the student to construct his or her own practical knowledge and to make connections to the professional life of the field.

Dear Elly, My Student Talks to Me But Not the Children

Dear Elly,

Elly, I was looking forward to having a student—an extra pair of hands in the room; someone to read to the children ... But now that I have her, she's proving to be as much work as any six children. It seems like she's always hovering around me asking questions and trying to chat. I literally fall over her to try to get to the children. It's driving me crazy.

Enough Already

Dear Enough,

Your student isn't the helpmate you envisioned, that's clear, and by now you probably realize that your expectations weren't totally realistic. Students can be a help but they also require an investment of time from you. They're still learners, and when you agree to supervise them you take on a commitment to help them learn. Having said that, of course your first responsibility is to the children. So let's figure out how you can be available to them while helping your student learn.

Elly

(For more Dear Elly visit the *Supervising With Style Website* <http://www.hcs.macewan.ca/ecd/supervising/>)

You haven't said whether this is your student's first placement, but it sounds like it might be. I'm willing to bet that the reason she's hanging around you is that she's not sure what to do with the children. Here are some suggestions:

- Give her a specific task. How about asking her to sit in the book area and look at books with any children who come by? This is usually a non-threatening way for a student to get acquainted with children.
- Arrange a definite time when you will talk with her each day. It might be 15 minutes after the children are asleep. Ask her to write down any questions she has during the course of the day to bring to you at that time.
- Make it clear through your own behaviour that the children's needs come first. Say "I have to talk to Jared right now, but let's discuss that when we meet this afternoon." You might add, "Would you mind helping Amy find her shoe?" Once your student is feeling more confident that she knows what to do in the room, she'll probably move out from under your feet.

Formal Feedback—Using the Evaluation Form

Formally evaluating a student can be a real challenge for many contact teachers. Our hope is that by the time you are facing down that evaluation form you've had many informal conversations with your student where you've given feedback about particular activities and shared your expectations and impressions with regard to his or her work in your classroom. But that doesn't make filling in the form any easier. Somehow writing it down makes it much more real.

Here's the good news! Evaluation is only a small part of your role as a contact teacher. Your major roles are to:

- Role Model good practice so that students can learn from you how it is done
- Explain what you are doing and why you are doing it that way—walk the student through your thinking
- Use gentle detailed feedback to offer guidance and encouragement—celebrate the small victories too

You are not alone in the evaluation process. Your role is to mentor and teach not decide if a student passes or fails. If you ever have any concerns about a student's progress please consult with the student's advisor. Together the three of you can come up with some next steps to support the student's learning. You are part of a team and the evaluation form you complete is only one of the elements used to assess the student's progress and support their learning during practicum.

The evaluation form is competency based and designed to show how a

student is progressing in their ability to demonstrate a particular set of skills and attitudes that are important to the work of early childhood educators. A student receives 1, 2, or 3 points for each competency listed on the form.

- You assign 1 point to a student when you believe the student does not yet have the skill; needs support with the skill; depends on your role modeling to demonstrate the skill; or you and your colleagues have not yet observed the skill being used
- You assign 2 points to a student when s/he demonstrates the skill with assistance; when the student's confidence in the skill is just emerging; when the student needs practice but his or her competence with the skill emerging
- You assign 3 points to a student who demonstrates the skill with confidence and with competence; and who consistently demonstrates initiative in using the skill—the student needs little direction in using this skill

We expect students to need assistance with many skills because they are learners. But we also expect that students will show improvement as they move through practicum.

We hope that keeping all this in mind will make filling in the evaluation form a little easier. Thanks again for your time and thoughtfulness in completing the evaluation form. Just remember the real value in the form is in the conversation you and the student have together after the form is completed!