



Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education

# Practicum Notes

Formerly St. Joseph's College of Early Childhood Education



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## THE COLLEGE TEACHING TEAM:

### The Practicum Advisor is there for you too!

Working with practicum students can be a rewarding on many levels. As a contact teacher you have the opportunity to share your skills, knowledge and expertise through role modeling, conversation, and coaching. It's also nice to have the support of another set of hands to help with the day to day busyness of classroom life.

There is of course, a possible flip side. Supporting a student who is struggling to meet expectations can be a huge responsibility added to your already busy day. Don't get stuck with that feeling; call your student's Practicum Advisor for help. She's there as a resource for you

too. But she can't support you in your role, or support the student in making the necessary changes unless she's aware there is a problem.

Issues with attendance, and personal or professional skills/attitudes are more easily resolved when the whole team is informed and working together to solve the problem.

The Practicum Advisor can be a resource in many ways. She can explain practicum goals and expectations that the student may not understand; she can mediate difficult conversations; and she can reinforce your program's philosophies and expectations with the student.

Beyond that, Practicum Advisors are experienced mentors who love the work of early childhood education. If you are interested in talking about your work with another ECE professional they are always happy to oblige.

*SJC practicum students and contact teachers are supported by our Practicum Advisors. Our team includes ECEs who work in their own classrooms and others who work as Centre Directors. If you think you might enjoy this challenge call Carrie Mel-som, NSCECE Practicum Coordinator at 420-1492.*

## What the students are studying now

First Year students have six courses this term. In addition to *Practicum* they are studying the sociology of today's families in *Child In the Family*; *Infant and Toddler Care*; *Curriculum II*; *Inclusive Learning Environments*; and *Behaviour Guidance I*.

*Inclusive Learning Environ-*

*ments* is a new course that encourages students to use an holistic approach in recognizing and planning for the diversity of individual children and families.

Second Year students have seven courses this term. In addition to *Practicum* they are studying *Emerging Curriculum*; *Research Issues*;

*Advocacy*; *School-Age Child Care*; *Program Planning for Children with Special Needs*; and *Art Education for Young Children*.

The Second Year students took **Building Blocks: Strategies for Inclusion** training in early January. The training highlighted many inclusion strategies.

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**First Year Students are on March Break, March 16th—March 20th and will not be at practicum that week.**

## Important Dates:

### First Year Students

- January 20th—March 24th
- **Block Week:** February 23rd—February 27th

### Second Year Students

- January 16th—March 13th
- **Block Week:** February 16th—February 20th

150 hours  
20 days

# Planning for Activities

Students at the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education (formerly known as St. Joseph's College) take 600 hours of practicum during their two-year Diploma program. During that time they are responsible for planning many different types of activities.

As they move through the College program of studies students take a number curriculum classes. At their core these classes all stress the same things; the value of play; the importance of children's active, hands-on engagement with materials; and the value of observation as the first step in planning for young children.

Students are given planning forms that are designed to help them start thinking like early childhood educators. As part of each activity plan they are

asked to record two detailed, objective observations of the children that lead them to believe that their activity is a good match to the children's interests, developmental levels, or needs.



**An ECE student talks with children about their designs during a creative experience she planned for one of her practicum activities.**

Students are also asked to think about what developmental goals their activity relates to, consider the materials they will need, and outline a plan for inviting and

supporting the children's active engagement in the activity.

The most important part of the planning form is saved for after the activity. Intentional and reflective early childhood educators make time to think about how things went and what they are learning from, and about, children during the activities they offer. Activity plans are not complete until this work is done.

As a mentor you play a major role in the quality of your student's thinking. You can ask the kinds of open-ended questions that will extend the student's thinking and share stories of experiences and potential pitfalls that the student should be aware of. Not every activity will be successful, in fact many won't be, but every one can offer students a learning opportunity.

## 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. SJC 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.

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# Dear Elly, I'm Uncomfortable Giving Feedback



Dear Elly,  
I know that I'm expected to give my students feedback, but I wish I could be a little more comfortable

in that role. I find it especially hard to discuss problems-it's easier when things go well. Do you have any suggestions?

*Helen M.*

**Dear Helen,**

Often people have difficulty with feedback because they see supervision as a "power on" activity, rather than one where the supervisor has "power with" the student. In a "power on" situation, you are judging and controlling the student's activity. In a "power with" relationship, you are supporting the student in their learning and probably even learning along with them. The authoritarian nature of a "power on" relationship is often uncomfortable for we early childhood people and, fortunately, it should also be only a last resort in our work with students.

Think of feedback as something that begins with your first meeting with your student. That's where you start to build the trusting relationship that forms the basis for feedback. It's also where you establish an environment for learning: where you talk about practicum as a place to try out new ideas and skills; a place where mistakes will certainly be made. Once these two conditions are in place, you have created a "workshop" where you and your student are working together toward effective practice.

In this workshop setting, one of the things you can do is share information that you have with

the student with a view to helping them succeed. This might mean telling them about strategies that seem to work with a particular child or giving them some ideas for an activity they are planning. You'll need to use your judgment about how much information to give them and how much you should let them try on their own.

Another part of your role is observing, then asking open-ended questions that will help students reflect on their practice. "I noticed that a lot of children came to the activity right at the beginning. How did that work out for you?" gives students the opportunity to recognize that the activity was too crowded for that period of time and to think about what they might have done differently. Listen attentively to what they say.

If, after your student has had a chance to reflect on the activity, they aren't picking up on an area that concerns you, you can use an "I" message: "I was worried that some of the smaller children might get hurt when the bigger ones came." Again, listen attentively.

If the student doesn't come up with a solution, lead them into problem-solving, "I wonder how we could keep this from happening another time?"

Having some specific strategies in your repertoire can help you through those difficult feedback situations. With practice, your interventions will come naturally, just as they do in your work with children.

***Elly***

***From: Supervising With Style Website***  
<http://www.hcs.macewan.ca/e.cd/supervising/>