

2020–2021

NSCECE Workplace Practicum Roles and Responsibilities



6208 Quinpool Road
Halifax, NS B3L 1A3
Phone: 902.423.7114
Fax: 902.423.3348
info@nscece.ca
www.nscece.ca

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. NSCECE Workplace Practicum	2
2. Challenges	3
3. Definitions	3
4. General Considerations	4
5. Criteria for Potential Students	6
6. Criteria for Potential Practicum Sites	6
7. Time Lines	7
8. Approval Process for a Workplace Practicum Experience	7
9. Practicum is an Important Course	8
10. Practicum Learning Outcomes and Objectives	8
11. Practicum Grades	9
12. Essential Practicum Dispositions and Capabilities	9
13. Required Documentation for Practicum	10
14. NSCECE Program Philosophy	10
15. Practicum Roles & Responsibilities	12
16. Practicum Portfolio Assignment	15
17. Practicum Portfolio Requirements	16
18. Practicum Policies and Procedures	18

NSCECE WORKPLACE PRACTICUM

Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education (NSCECE) recognizes the challenges associated with accessing practicum opportunities for educators who are working full-time. In response, NSCECE has developed the opportunity for educators who are currently working in an approved early childhood program to complete their required Practicum courses within a Workplace Practicum setting providing that certain criteria are met.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has set out criteria for Workplace Practicum experiences in the Standards for Early Childhood Education Post-Secondary Programs. All prospective Workplace Practicum sites need to go through an approval process to ensure they meet all the criteria as explained below. Once approved, the workplace will sign a Memorandum of Understanding with NSCECE where the expectations, roles and responsibilities of all parties are laid out as determined in the Standards for Early Childhood Education Post-Secondary Programs.

One of the core objectives of NSCECE practicum courses is for students to receive a wide variety of perspectives and philosophies in diverse programs and with a range of ages over the four practicum experiences. NSCECE believes that this is possible in a Workplace Practicum, provided that all parties understand potential issues and are committed to create a unique learning experience within a familiar setting.

While there are many benefits of students remaining in their workplace while completing their practicum requirements, there are also challenges. The student now has two roles: that of employee and that of student. A practicum in one's place of employment requires a clear delineation between the student and employee roles. Such a distinction is required to protect the student's learning and to avoid conflict of interest.

The more closely a practicum situation approaches the employment situation in terms of tasks, location or supervision, the more difficult it becomes for the student and the workplace to make necessary distinctions between focusing on learning and focusing on work. The student may feel that being paid creates an obligation to perform routine tasks rather than being challenged with new tasks to increase learning.

Many relevant factors need to be considered by the prospective student, the Sponsoring Workplace and the NSCECE Practicum Coordinator. These factors could influence the decision to proceed with a practicum at the student's place of work. All parties have to consider how the following information could affect the practicum experience before a decision can be made to proceed.

CHALLENGES

There are some challenges that students may face when doing a practicum in their own workplace.

- The student may feel pressured to allow the centre's needs to supersede their learning needs
- The student's ability to think critically about the centre may be constrained
- Unless appropriately protected, a negative evaluation of the student's performance in one role may jeopardize their status in the other role
- Issues related to managing conflicts or disputes at the workplace may create tension for the student

All parties need to consider these possibilities and prepare for ways to overcome these situations should they arise. Clear expectations and ongoing communication are two strategies that will help ensure a positive experience for all.

DEFINITIONS

Sponsoring Workplace Practicum Site: A program that meets criteria as outlined on page 6. The Sponsoring Workplace is the employer of the student and agrees to support the student through the practicum experience by providing mentorship and release time to attend meetings with the College Advisor and supervising ECE. The Workplace Practicum Site will allow the student to fulfill the expectations of the practicum assignments. Centres may be eligible to receive funding for substitutes to provide support for these release times through the Continuing Education Program provided by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Sponsoring Workplace Mentor Educator: The Mentor Educator is an employee of the centre who agrees to oversee the practicum experience. The Mentor Educator must provide role-modeling, mentoring and feedback. This employee must clearly understand the roles, ethical considerations and responsibilities associated with supporting the practicum student to fulfill the expectations of practicum. This employee needs to have a Level 2 or Level 3 classification and at least one year of experience in the field. The Mentor Educator cannot be working in the same classroom as the practicum student but must be available to observe and provide feedback on experiences the student offers as part of the practicum expectations. The Mentor Educator must also be available for weekly one-on-one meetings with the student to discuss progress and explore topics.

Workplace Practicum Student: This person is a student who has been approved to take a Practicum course within their own place of work. The student is an employee of the Sponsoring Workplace Practicum Site and is included in the staff–child ratios. This person assumes paid responsibility for the supervision, care and education of children enrolled in the Workplace Practicum Site.

Practicum Advisor: This person is an employee of NSCECE and oversees the student’s practicum experience by supporting reflective practice and offering practical guidance during seminars and on–site visits. The Advisor will facilitate communication between all parties involved in the practicum and provide feedback to the Student both during, and at the end of the Practicum experience. The Advisor will make at least two visits to the student at the Workplace Practicum Site where the Advisor will observe the student’s practice, provide feedback to the student, engage in conversation with the Mentor Educator and monitor progress towards completion of practicum assignments. The Practicum Advisor will have a recognized Early Childhood Education diploma or degree with three years of experience working in a regulated child care setting or pre–primary program.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Practicum courses are a part of the NSCECE Diploma program of studies. The role of practicum should be clearly understood by the student, the Mentor Educator and the Director representing the Sponsor Workplace Practicum Site. The expectations of the practicum experience are in addition to the employee’s typical job responsibilities. The Practicum experience is where students demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have attained through coursework. This may differ in approach and implementation from the Workplace Practicum Site philosophy and practice. It is essential that the student’s learning needs be protected to prevent job responsibilities from creating barriers to their successful completion of the practicum expectations. At the same time, the Sponsoring Workplace Practicum Site has the right to expect that their employees will organize their time to ensure that the work they are being paid to do is done. The Workplace Practicum is a partnership where the Site, the Mentor Educator, the Advisor and the student work together to ensure both needs are being met.
2. The student will be expected to go beyond their work role to incorporate the assignments and expectations as outlined in the Practicum Package. Students must expect to put in additional hours beyond their normal work day to adequately complete all of the practicum requirements. The student will need to attend pre–arranged mandatory seminars with their Advisor. These will take place throughout the semester as scheduled by the Advisor. They will occur in the evenings in an online format.

3. NSCECE accepts that all four Workplace Practicums could possibly take place within the student's own Practicum Workplace Site. Referring back to one of the core values of NSCECE, there is significant benefit to having experiences with a variety of ages. A maximum of **two** practicums can be completed within the student's own classroom. The Practicum Site will agree to support the student by providing opportunities to complete two practicum experience in a classroom outside of the student's own. Should the Practicum Site not be able to support this criteria, then a Workplace Practicum might not be a viable option for all four of the placements.
4. It is within the discretion of the Practicum Coordinator to require the student to gain diverse experience outside of the workplace during a practicum by completing a visit at one of the NSCECE lab schools. The Practicum Coordinator will work with the workplace to implement this in the least disruptive way.
5. All parties are asked to explore and be aware of possible effects on working relations. The practicum can be a very rewarding opportunity for all if careful attention to work relationships is considered before the initiation of the practicum. The goals for the practicum must include attention to the working relationships involved. The Mentor Educator must be able to provide objective, specific feedback based on what is observed in direct relation to the practicum criteria and not on previous experiences.
6. All parties are also asked to consider the effects on children and families when staff are in classrooms other than their own. Even though the staff may know the children and families, it could cause a small disruption to their care. Centres should be aware of how to mitigate these effects and prepare the families for this type of experience.
7. As a student, a certain number of hours per work week will be allocated to practicum responsibilities. If there should ever be a conflict over roles, the role of the staff supersedes the role of the student, while the student is working at the centre.
8. Workplace students and Mentor Educators should address any additional conflicts of interest – for example, caring for the student's own child in a Workplace Practicum – and should consider how they will handle such problems and whether such arrangements could impact the practicum experience or future employment.
9. Some work arrangements are not suitable for a Workplace Practicum experience. For example, a student who is hired to support a specific child or children with diverse abilities is deemed to have responsibilities that do not lend themselves to separating their work and student roles. A float position where a staff member supports many rooms with coverage for breaks and absences might not be suitable either. Such situations may be considered on a case-by case basis if the employer and student can agree on release time where the situation can be supported by other staff during the student's required weekly hours of practicum time.

10. If the employee or the workplace terminate the working relationship before the completion of the required hours, the practicum placement will not be successful and the student will receive a grade of NCR (non-credit repeat). The student will have to pay to retake the practicum course at the next available opportunity. This type of arrangement cannot be easily transferred from one workplace to another.
11. Many workplace students are comfortable with their skill level, however, workplace students are to utilize the practicum opportunity to take their practice to the next level. An additional bonus is that staff who are engaged in practicum often positively increase the overall level of practice in a centre, as new knowledge is gained or good practice is reaffirmed.

In addition to General Considerations, the Practicum Roles and Responsibilities (starting on page 12) should be considered by the workplace sponsor and by the student in reaching their decision to proceed, in order to safeguard the integrity of a Workplace Practicum.

CRITERIA FOR POTENTIAL STUDENTS

- Have to be employed for at least 30 hours a week at a licensed child care centre. (Verification letter from employer will be required).
- Have one year of full-time employment (minimum of 1,080 hours) in a licensed child care centre or pre-primary program at the time of application to the course. Details will need to be verified in writing by the employer.
- Must be able to participate in regular online seminars with a Practicum Advisor over the duration of the placement.

AN APPROVED WORKPLACE PRACTICUM SITE MUST:

1. Meet all regulatory requirements that are applicable to the type of setting.
2. Have a signed, written agreement with the early childhood education training program that outlines expectations, roles, and responsibilities when hosting an employee or student
3. Give the employee or student the opportunity to complete their practicum in a room and age group other than the one they typically work in.
4. Provide a level 2 or 3 ECE other than the one the student typically works with to function as the Mentor Educator.
5. Support the Mentor Educator and student in performing their roles and fulfilling the expectations of the practicum.

If the site is not able to meet the Workplace Practicum criteria, the training program may work with the potential Workplace Practicum site to provide a statement related to the challenges and how they intend to mitigate them. In some cases, this may not be possible, and the workplace may not be a suitable site.

TIME LINES

Each practicum will be allocated a certain amount of hours in the work week that is centered on practicum duties.

Practicum I will occur over a span of ten weeks

Practicum II will take place over a span of ten weeks.

Practicum III will take place over a span of ten weeks.

Practicum IV will take place over a span of ten weeks.

APPROVAL PROCESS FOR A WORKPLACE PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE

1. The Centre submits an application to be approved as a Workplace Practicum Site. Application requests can be sent to sharrison@nscece.ca. *Note that potential workplace will need to submit an application each time a student wishes to complete a Workplace Practicum. A previous approval does not guarantee approval again as circumstances, staffing and other factors influence the ability for a centre to support this process.*
 - a. The Practicum Coordinator will then arrange to meet with the Administrator at the workplace. This meeting will consist of interviews with the Administrator, potential Mentor Educators and the potential student, a tour, observation of practice and compiling of documentation such as a parent handbook, behaviour guidance policy, philosophy and other relevant documentation.
 - b. If the centre is approved, the Administrator will be notified, and the prospective student can then start the application process.
 - c. If the centre is not able to meet the Workplace Practicum criteria, NSCECE will work with the program to provide a statement related to the challenges and how they intend to mitigate them. In some cases, this may not be possible, and the workplace may not be a suitable site.
 - d. If the site does not receive approval for any reason, the NSCECE Practicum Coordinator will inform the student of other options for completion of the practicum.

2. The student submits an application to complete a Workplace Practicum. The student who wishes to enroll in a Workplace Practicum Course will submit the appropriate application form along with the corresponding admin fees to info@nscece.ca.
3. If the student meets all the criteria and is approved to participate in a Workplace Practicum, the student will be assigned a Practicum Advisor from NSCECE. This Advisor will correspond with the student, outlining expectations and providing dates for seminars and portfolio submissions.

PRACTICUM IS AN IMPORTANT COURSE

NSCECE students complete 544 hours of practicum (510 field placement hours and 34 hours of practicum modules and seminars). NSCECE offers students the opportunity to acquire hands-on training and knowledge with children of all age groups through four (4) practicum field placements. Each student has the chance to develop their skills and gain real-life work experience in early years settings where they work alongside Early Childhood Educators with children from infancy through school age and with children who have additional support needs.

Practicum provides students with the opportunity to learn about the realities of work in early childhood classrooms while demonstrating the core dispositions and capabilities that are essential to Early Childhood Educators. Practicum students form important relationships with young children and families while also developing and demonstrating emerging skills in observation and documentation, positive behaviour guidance, and planning and implementing curriculum.

NSCECE students study, develop and implement a holistic, play-based approach to pedagogy based on the learning goals and objectives of Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework. Practicum students synthesize child observations, and their child development and curriculum knowledge, through the use of inquiry and a reflective planning cycle. Field placement personnel provide role modeling, mentoring, and feedback. Practicum Advisors oversee each practicum. They support reflective practice and offer practical guidance during seminars and on-site visits.

PRACTICUM ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Practicum Advisors (NSCECE faculty) visit each student twice during the semester. In addition to these on-site visits by the Practicum Advisor, students receive coaching and feedback at regular practicum seminars.

Students also plan regular meetings with their Mentor Educator to discuss their progress. The Mentor Educator will be asked to offer regular feedback and to complete the feedback form at midterm and the end of practicum. Discussions should reflect the student's strengths, emerging skills and areas of need. Equally important to this process is the student's ability to critically reflect on his or her own growth and development, to establish goals and to seek guidance and support.

There are many people involved in the successful mentoring of our students. Below are some of the ways each person contributes to the process.

Mentor Educators should:

- Plan to work directly on the floor with the student.
- Feel that objectivity is possible.
- Plan to have on-floor and reflection time with the student.
- Attend an orientation session where responsibilities and mentoring strategies will be outlined.
- Designate work time which will incorporate practicum competencies and opportunities.
- Pre-set daily and weekly planning and debriefing discussion times with the student.
- Inform families of what is happening and why.
- Inform other staff of what is happening and why.
- Plan to support students as they explore alternate “ways of knowing and being” as they study current research on teaching strategies and styles.
- Be willing to discuss what opportunities or flexibility the workplace will offer to assist student achievement of this goal.

Students should:

- Be able to attend to practicum responsibilities while working – this may require additional time and organization.
- Be open to constructive feedback from their Mentor Educator who is also their co-worker or supervisor.
- Accept that they are in a learning mode and that the Mentor Educator may create teaching situations in order to assist students in achieving practicum objectives (e.g. a Mentor Educator may note that the student needs to gain skills in large group developmentally appropriate circle

times and may request that the student observe a circle, to reflect upon the activity, share insights and learning, and implement new strategies in several student conducted circle times).

- Only document hours when another ECE is on the floor and as the student, they are not the sole charge of the room. This means students will not be able to document beginning/ end of days/ break times or lunch hours when they might be alone or in sole charge.
- Understand that practicum will add additional workload to the staff members who are working at the centre.

These are only a few of the Workplace Practicum considerations. There may be other considerations depending on the workplace and individual needs. A Workplace Practicum can be a valuable experience for the student and the centre and it is important to ensure all possible protocols are in place to protect both the student and the practicum placement.

The Practicum Advisor will:

Re: Placement/Mentor Educator

- * Familiarize self with the philosophy of the program and inform the Mentor Educator of practicum goals and expectations.
- * During each practicum visit, discuss with the progress of the student with the Mentor Educator.
- * Discuss any problems that arise promptly with student and Mentor Educator.
- * Serve as a resource and mentor for Mentor Educator.

Re: Student

- * Visit, observe and provide feedback to the student at least twice during each term.
- * Support reflective practice by discussing progress with the student and helping the student identify strengths and areas of need.
- * Support the student in communication with the Mentor Educator and the centre.
- * Assist students in planning appropriate experiences.
- * Assist students in developing reflective skills and the ability to analyze the experiences they plan as well as their interactions with the children.
- * Complete feedback notes/comments and discuss with student. Leave a duplicate copy with the student.
- * Monitor student's practicum portfolio and write concise comments. Initial planning sheets for each student.
- * Conduct self in a professional manner while representing NSCECE.
- * Maintain confidentiality of children, students and program staff.
- * Maintain a professional working relationship with placement personnel, parents, students, and families.

The Practicum Coordinator will:

- * Hold an initial orientation with the student prior to practicum to discuss practicum expectations and responsibilities.
- * Approve placement sites and provide the Memorandum of Understanding.
- * Keep communication open with placement sites. Act as a liaison between placement and student.
- * Be available for consultation during posted office hours.
- * Ensure that the required number of hours is completed.
- * Determine final grade based on: overall performance, suggested grade from Practicum Advisor, and required documentation.
- * Be available to students to discuss progress and concerns.
- * Be available to Advisors to discuss student progress and concerns.