



Northern Lights
College

Early Childhood Education and Care Program (ECEC)

PRACTICUM 1 ECED 109A

Mentor Guide

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook has been developed to help prospective Mentor understand Northern Lights College's team approach to providing valuable practicum experiences for student Early Childhood Educators through a distance education program.

Students are responsible for finding their own practicum sites. They work with the Northern Lights College (NLC) Practicum Instructor and have access to an ECEC Practicum Advisor to ensure a suitable placement is met.

We believe that the practicum should benefit all of those involved. With this handbook, we hope to answer some of the questions that naturally arise.

Please keep this handbook accessible and refer back to it when needed.

PRACTICUM 1 OBJECTIVE

ECED 109A, Practicum 1 focuses on the development of competencies and professional practice in an early childhood setting. Emphasis is placed on students' use of informal and systematic observation to facilitate children's play and development.

GETTING STARTED - NLC PRACTICA PLACEMENT REQUIREMENTS

1. A **Licensed Early Childhood Program** with at least eight children 30 months to school age (6 years of age) in attendance on a regular basis. **Special Consideration Placements** are considered on an individual basis: for example, non-licensed early childhood programs including pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, also some licensed programs such as Montessori, Waldorf and Strong Start programs, along with workplace practica.

NOTE: Special Consideration Practica require extra consideration in that they are either non-licensed or have specific philosophies, policies or contexts that **may** present challenges in meeting NLC practica objectives and assignment requirements. Therefore, clarification of roles and discussion is required to ensure that the Mentor and programs can support the NLC practicum student in completing course expectations.

2. The Mentor holds a current "certificate" to practice from the ECE Registry at a level equal to or above the student's practicum experience. The Mentor's responsibility can be shared between two staff.
3. **The Mentor (or co-mentor) can directly supervise the student during all practicum hours.**
4. A flexible program and staff support to allow students to practice what they are learning in their courses within the philosophy of the centre.
5. Support in completing the student's assignments, including taking non-identifying photos of children's play and a self-assessment video. *The self-assessment video is required by the BC ECE Registry in lieu of a face-to-face visit/observation by an NLC Practicum Instructor.*

Any exceptions, special considerations are to be discussed with the Northern Lights College Practicum Instructor.

Necessary Forms!

1. The student acquires a **Schedule B Criminal Record Check clearance letter**. **This process is expected to have been started upon acceptance into the ECEC program.**
2. The student completes a **Practicum Proposal** Form in consultation with the Placement.

3. The student completes the **Term** information on page 3 of the **Practicum Placement Agreement** form and then provides the **Agency/Placement Organization Representative/Authorized Signatory** with the form to read and provide the Placement Organization information and the required Agency signature.
4. *For Workplace Practica only*, a **Work Placement Agreement Form** is required to be completed **in addition** to the NLC Practicum Placement Agreement Form.

The forms are submitted by the student as per the Weekly Schedule in the D2L ECED 109A course content. The forms must be approved by the NLC Practicum Instructor before placement hours can begin.

Scheduling Placement Attendance:

It is important that Mentors and students discuss and come to an agreement on a working schedule that is compatible for both. (Be sure to schedule around holidays!—STAT holidays, spring break etc.)

Placement Hours:

Winter and Fall Practicum 1 offerings require a **minimum** of 118 hours of practice in the placement spread over a minimum of 10 weeks, approximately 12 hours per week. A maximum of 12 hours of teleconference attendance can be counted towards the 130 hours required. This generally breaks down as 118 supervised hours on the floor with the children, + 12 hours of teleconference which = 130 hours.

Intersessional Practicum 1 offerings are condensed, thus require a **minimum** of 122 hours of practice in the placement spread over a minimum of 6 weeks, approximately 21 hours per week. A maximum of 8 hours of teleconference attendance can be counted towards the 130 hours required. This generally breaks down as 122 supervised hours on the floor with the children, + 8 hours of teleconference which = 130 hours.

This is a general guideline for scheduling placement hours for Practicum 1.

Attendance Sheets:

Attendance Sheets are kept for the duration of the practicum period. The student is responsible for filling out the Attendance Sheets with the dates and times, and the Mentor signs/initials the practicum hours. **It works best when the sheet is signed daily**, as it is hard to remember exact hours after some time has elapsed.

Note: Students must keep copies of their attendance records to be submitted with their convocation application as proof of practica hours toward graduation.

PRACTICUM ROLES

Completion of a practicum requires a team effort and multifaceted support: Mentors, NLC Practicum Instructors, Practicum Students and their Families, Placement Staff and Administrators, Children and their Parents!

In this Handbook, we will look at the roles of the Mentor, NLC Practicum Instructor and Practicum Student.

The Mentor

...has the most contact with the student in a mentoring role. This role can be shared with a Co-Mentor.

Some Considerations:

1. The Placement Centre should be functioning well to support a positive practicum experience for all (for example - It is difficult to extend support to a student if there are significant staff, program, or financial difficulties...).
2. Students look to Mentor and Placement Staff to share knowledge and resources.
3. Students are encouraged to wonder, ask questions, and try out what they are learning in ECEC courses! They will have assignments to complete that require collaboration, support and flexibility on the part of the program, staff and parents.

The Mentor...

- provides the student an orientation to the facility and program, as needed.
- collaborates with the student in completion of the necessary forms.
- and/or Co-Mentor directly supervise the student during all practicum hours.
- models desired behaviour for the student; therefore, practice and attitudes towards the student, children, families and staff are respectful and constructive so that the student gains an understanding of professional behaviour.
- gives clear explanation about what is expected of the student in supporting the placement's program and helps integrate the student as part of the teaching team.
- observes the student's practice using the **NLC ECEC Competency Guide** (*completing mid-term and final rating columns/summary accordingly*).
- facilitates the student's experiences and practice that support competency development. Typically, the student's role in program responsibilities increases with time.
- engages in active listening and provides the student with positive, constructive feedback to facilitate professional development.
- understands that students make mistakes and provides assistance as needed. Much is learned from our mistakes!

- facilitates the student's self-assessment: offers suggestions for improving knowledge, practice, or attitude.
- participates in the **Mid-Term Teleconference (described in Student Evaluation)**.
- supports the student's practicum experience and development of competencies in collaboration with the Practicum Instructor by email and telephone.

Placement Orientation (for volunteer students)

A warm welcome for the student can be established and maintained by:

Meeting with the student prior to the first day to get better acquainted. Exchanging email addresses and telephone contact phone numbers is helpful.

The student's introduction to the centre sets the tone for the practicum. Introduce her/him to the centre. Students indicate that starting a new practicum is like starting a new job. **They need to know the things that you would tell them if they were new employees.** It is helpful if you indicate, from the beginning, what your expectations are. This could include many of the responsibilities and activities that you expect of regular staff. You could let her/him know when you want her/him to arrive (15 minutes early, for example, to get settled and prepared for the practicum day), and that you look forward to supporting her/his practice teaching. For example, ensure the student is aware of the program's essential philosophy and policies and that she/he has an opportunity to ask questions for clarification. Inform the student of the daily schedule and usual transition from one activity to the next. Describe how the program/activities are planned.

On the practical side, students need to know where to put their belongings, staff washroom location, break and lunch policies, if there is a staff room they can use during breaks, where the centre's resources are, equipment policies, what policies and procedures are in place for emergencies, including information on allergies and any other factors that are necessary for her/him to know to ensure children's well-being.

Let her/him know the jobs she/he may do. Initially, the student is a helper/assistant unless they are in a work place practicum.

An assisting role might include the following:

- Participate in the greeting and going home routines. Encourage the student to take the initiative to introduce themselves to parents as they drop off or pick up their child. Initial introductions/greeting can evolve to brief interchanges based on observations of children's interests and "ordinary moments".
- Assist in the dressing/undressing times.
- To assist in setting out equipment, art materials, table toys, clean up, etc.
- Take on a supportive role during group/circle time to begin with: sitting with the children, helping them to focus on the lead educator. When the roles are reversed, staff would then support the student in the same manner.

- Facilitating play and guiding children’s behaviour with support (especially if taken or currently enrolled in HDEC 103 – Child Guidance)
- As students gain more confidence, you are welcome to offer them the opportunity to lead group activities, arrange loose parts, and/or set up invitations to play. This is not required to successfully complete Practicum 1.
- Daily communication to confirm plans supports working as a team. Mentors and students have found it quite helpful to set aside a regular time to briefly touch base: e.g. right before or after scheduled practicum hours.

The Northern Lights Practicum Instructor...

- facilitates the practicum experience with the student and the Mentors.
- encourages the student's professional and personal growth, and gives positive and constructive feedback on course requirements and assignments, as well as the final assessment for the final grade.
- is in contact weekly with the student through teleconferenced classes and individually through email/telephone contact.

Due to the nature of the distance program, the Instructor generally will not visit the student while in practicum. However, Instructors are located in various communities. Therefore, if an Instructor is available in a community, she/he can visit the centre as needed. Several methods have proven successful in monitoring the student while completing practicum requirements through a distance education program. Video recording allows the Instructor to observe the student’s practice and provide feedback.

Email, telephone, text, or Videoconference are utilized for communication and collaboration amongst the student, Instructor and Mentor(s).

The Student...

- begins the **Schedule Type “B” Criminal Record Review** process as soon as possible after enrolling in the NLC ECEC program.
- begins selecting a practicum placement that meets the NLC ECEC Program criteria for practica as soon as she/he prepares to register for a practicum. The HDEC Dept. Chair, ECEC Practicum Advisor and/or a NLC Instructor can be consulted as needed.
- supports the Mentor by making sure she/he has a copy of the **Mentor Guide** and **ECEC Competency Guide (Mentor/Student)**.
- completes and submits a **Practicum Proposal Form** and **Practicum Placement Agreement Form** and, if applicable, a **Workplace Practicum Form** as indicated in the ECED 109A Weekly Schedule (in the student’s ECED 109A D2L Course Content).

- engages in collaboration with the Practicum Instructor and Mentor as needed throughout the practicum experience.
- approaches practicum with a positive and constructive attitude towards learning and a goal to build on her/his knowledge and practice.
- maintains a professional attitude towards confidentiality at all times, does not discuss confidential aspects of the centre, staff, children, families, other students, or practicum, etc., outside of practicum course requirements.
- **is expected to demonstrate professional behaviour** concerning punctuality, communication, dress, conduct: use of cell phones, refraining from socializing with staff, smoking, chewing gum, drinking coffee/tea etc., when supervising children.
- **is expected to email the Practicum Instructor and call the Mentor by 8 am (as early as possible) in cases of sickness or inability to attend placement as scheduled in her/his Practicum Proposal.** Students should not attend their placement if ill or due to injury are not able to interact fully with children.
- arranges a convenient time to meet with the Mentor daily to discuss the program, practicum requirements, share experiences and seek feedback. This is part of supporting the Mentor in her/his mentoring role.
- collaborates with her/his Mentor(s) and Practicum Instructor to establish a date and time that works best to meet with the Instructor for **a Mid-Term Review Teleconference call (as per the course Weekly Schedule) and Final Review teleconference call (as needed).**
- completes the **Observation/Photo/Video Consent Form** and uploads it to the designated dropbox before/as Assignment 1 is submitted.
- adheres to all policies and procedures that the centre has in place for observation photos and videotaping. In all circumstances, the student strives to record observations specifically and objectively.
- understands observations and non-identifying photos are completed for the purpose of learning about and supporting children's play and development—not evaluating children or their development.
- does not discuss any aspect of the observations outside of class or with anyone other than the Mentor or Instructor.
- **understands that the video assignment is for self-assessment purposes and ensures all copies/files are deleted after the assignment has been marked by the Practicum Instructor.** The Practicum Instructor destroys any hard copy discs sent by Canada Post.
- **is prepared to support the placement program's philosophy, and participate as fully as possible in all areas of the centre's program in consultation with the**

Mentor and Practicum Instructor. (Consideration is given based on student knowledge, skills, practicum schedule and ECE course assignments.)

- is expected to try out new ideas and practice what she/he is learning through courses in collaboration with the Mentor and staff-as necessary.
- is encouraged to take advantage of opportunities to attend staff meetings, provided the time is not excessive. Attendance (discuss actual hours with Instructor) can be counted towards practicum hours.
- is responsible for seeking explanation, feedback and suggestions from the Mentor(s) and/or the Practicum Instructor as needed.
- considers how to support the other adults in their roles at the centre. (The practicum experience should be mutually beneficial!)
- discusses matters she/he feels are ethically questionable with the Mentor and NLC Practicum Instructor without delay.
- is expected to seek guidance from her/his NLC Practicum Instructor in the case of suspected child abuse, Northern Lights College adheres to the guidelines for reporting abuse as found in *The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect* as well as *Taking Care: A Child Abuse Prevention Manual for Canadian Early Childhood Educators*. Suspected abuse will be reported.

GENERAL PRACTICUM POLICIES & PRACTICE

Confidentiality

Students and Instructors of Northern Lights College Early Childhood Education program follow strict guidelines regarding confidentiality. All discussions regarding practicum requirements are confidential in nature. Students are **not** to discuss any aspect of their practicum outside of the parameters of the course. Breaches in confidentiality could be viewed by the placement centre as a reason to discontinue the practicum experience. Northern Lights College adheres to the guidelines for reporting abuse as found in *The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect*.

In the interest of safety for all those concerned, a student should not be left alone with a child or children, meaning that the Mentor or other staff maintains overall supervision within sight or sound. The intent is that students should not be placed in a supervisory role. **The only exception is when a student is also working in the centre.** Then the role of staff member supersedes that of a student for safety purposes.

In Case of Illness

As stated earlier, **students are expected to email the Practicum Instructor and call the Mentor by 8 am daily in cases of sickness or inability to attend daily practicum sessions.**

Students should not attend their placement if ill or due to injury are not able to interact fully with children. Mentors who believe the student is too ill to be at the centre are encouraged to send the student home. Once the student is well, hours can be rescheduled to make-up absences.

Dress Code

Students are expected to conform to the dress code of the placement centre, to be professional and respectful in their appearance. Please inform the student of your requirements in this area.

Students are expected to wear/model appropriate dress for the weather! **Inside shoes are expected to be worn indoors in case of emergency evacuation.**

Students are expected to wear their name tags while completing practicum hours, even if in workplace practica, as it helps to remind parents and staff when the employee is also in a student role. This helps to alleviate some confusion with parents and visitors to the centre and promotes awareness of the student's and program's commitment to professional development and quality early childhood education and care.

Facilitating Students' Practice

Please inform the student of the centre's policies in regards to how she/he is to be addressed by the children: (for example – first name, Miss, Mrs. or Mr.).

Initially, students will be involved in an assisting role until they are able to work independently under supervision.

Right from the start, students are encouraged to practice positive and constructive guidance. Constructive guidance begins with providing children with unconditional attention (building positive caring relationships with the children).

Students are expected to develop the habit of scanning (sweeping the room with their eyes) a minimum of every three minutes and be aware of the total number of children in attendance at any time.

Students are expected to eventually participate in all areas of the centre's program.

Students are encouraged to practice the following:

- Respectful facilitation of children's critical thinking, exploration and discovery as co-players.
- Spontaneously implement **back-pocket ideas/resources** in response to children's needs, interests, explorations, and current curriculum.
- Support activities planned by staff (group time activities, art, outdoor activities, etc.)
- Participate in/support routine staff duties: cleanup, snack time, etc.

- Take initiative to plan and facilitate open-ended learning invitations that respond to the children's interests and supports their play and development.

It is hoped that Mentors can support students in taking initiative to engage in these curriculum activities and provide ongoing feedback on a daily basis.

Guiding and Caring

- The NLC Guiding and Caring course is built on the premise that children are capable and caring, that developing caring and respectful relationships with children is the foundation of constructive guidance.
- Please discuss the program Guidance Philosophy with your student and how you communicate your expectations and guide children's behaviour. (You are encouraged to ask your students about the constructive guidance approach they are learning in their NLC Guiding and Caring course!) Students use the **BC Health Planning Guiding Children's Behaviour booklet** located at <http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2003/com015.pdf>.
- Encourage the student to consider the role of the environment in guiding children's behavior. For example, what does the student notice about traffic patterns, amount of space, indirect guidance (e.g. 4 chairs out means there is room for 4 children unless there is flexibility within the program to add more).
- Encourage the student to engage children in problem-solving/conflict resolution as soon as she/he is ready!
- Please invite the student to discuss with you any questions she/he has as she/he strives to understand how staff decide on approaches to guiding children's behaviour. A direct invitation would help your student feel comfortable to take the initiative to ask questions!

Other NLC Course Expectations

As part of their course load for the term, students may be expected to plan and carry out specific activities in the practicum centre for other courses they are enrolled in. They are expected to collaborate with their Mentor in facilitating a time, space, and basic materials to carry out their activities. Any extraordinary materials or equipment needed for an activity will be provided by the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the materials are available.

Student Evaluation

In order to facilitate the process of evaluation and maximize the learning experience, there are three methods of evaluation.

- 1) **ECEC Competency Guide:** This Guide is designed so that it can be used individually by the Mentor and the student. It is based on the **Child Care Sector**

Occupational Competencies Assessment Tool updated May 2004 by the ECE Registry prepared for the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council.

The Mentor uses her/his copy of the ECEC Competency Guide to keep track of her/his student's developing competencies as a mentor.

The student also has a copy of the ECEC Competency Guide to self-assess her/his competency development.

Any questions regarding the ECEC Competency Guide not cleared up by the student should be directed to the Practicum Instructor.

- The **Midterm Assessment Column and section Comments are completed before the Mid-Term Teleconference (see below)** which includes the Student, Mentor(s) and Practicum Instructor. This teleconference is arranged by the student. **Unless requested by the Instructor, the Competency Guide will not be submitted at this time.**
- The **Final Assessment Column and section Comments and Summary are completed** near the end of practicum. The student sets up a meeting with her/his Mentor to collect and discuss practicum progress, goals and clarify perspectives. This helps the student make plans for future practicum placements.
- The student submits her/his Attendance Sheet and self-completed ECEC Competency Guide electronically within a week after the practicum is completed. Hard copy of the ECEC Competency Guide, completed by the Mentor are gathered by the students scanned and uploaded electronically or Xpress posted to the Practicum Instructor.

Another Submission Option: Mentors can complete the Competency Guide electronically and email it directly to the Practicum Instructor.

- 2) **Participation:** The Practicum Instructor evaluates the student's participation in weekly teleconference classes and the Mid-Term Teleconference.

The Mid-Term Teleconference: The **student** collaborates with her/his Mentor(s) and Practicum Instructor to establish a date and time that works best to meet with the Instructor in a teleconference call (daytime or evening from individual home phones/computers or together at the placement by computer/speaker phone). A toll-free number and access code is utilized via BlueJeans or cell phone numbers is utilized via Facetime. The practicum Instructor guides the discussion to focus on the student's strengths, practice to focus on, and goals for progress in the second half of the practicum. Practicum design oriented questions are answered.

If desired by the Instructor, Mentor or student, additional teleconferences may be scheduled to discuss ongoing progress.

- 3) **Assignments:** The student submits four Reflective Journal Assignments which include the following:

- **Professional Reflections** – written reflections on the students' practicum experiences that facilitate competency development and awareness of the structure of a childcare program.

- **Observations** focused on helping students learn about and support children's play and development.
- **Competencies in Practice Video** – helps the student practice self-assessment and reflect on the ECE's role in supporting children's play and development. Provides an opportunity for the practicum instructor to virtually observe the student's practice at her/his placement.
- **ECEC Competency Guide (Mentor/Student)** – one is completed by the student and another by the Mentor; the focus is on the student's practice.

Students are welcome to explore setting up invitations to play, leading a group time, and/or adding loose parts to play areas; however, it is not an expectation for Practicum 1. Depending on the courses already taken or work experience, students may wish to use practicum time to build on these skills. Reflections on these experiences may be added to the comment sections in the Competency Guide.

IN CLOSING...

It is hoped that the **Mentor Guide** has been helpful as you consider mentoring a Northern Lights College student in her/his goal to complete this first practicum in our Diploma ECEC Program.

Mentors are valued for their support in providing students with the opportunity to build on their experiences, practice and professionalism.

Should you accept this opportunity, we look forward to teaming up with you!

Thank you for your consideration and best wishes as you continue your own journey as an Early Childhood professional.