

Eyes Wide Open: Evolving Practicum Collaborations

S. Mayne Devine

Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, University of Guelph,
Guelph, Ontario

Supported by the Agri-Food and Rural Link KTT program, funded under the OMAFRA-University of Guelph Partnership.

What is Practicum?

Practicum courses are a unique component of the Bachelor of Science degree for students in the **Child Youth and Family Major** and the **Adult Development Major**. Students take the practicum courses in both their third and fourth years of study. Third year students spend 12 hours a week for 12 weeks in placement while Fourth year students spend 16 hours a week for 12 weeks. Students are in the field in either the fall (Sept- Dec) or winter (Jan- Apr) semesters.

Student Contributions

The practicum experience provides students an opportunity to work along side professionals, receive ongoing feedback and supervision. It is this experience that enables students to integrate what they learn in the classroom with professional practice. Students contribute to the community organization by enabling them to extend their services to the community through the provision of services and the completion of a project.

familyrelations & appliednutrition
Science in Practice

Examples of Community Projects

- Create a resource binder
- Revise volunteer training manuals
- Design pamphlets
- Conduct a literature search on a topic area
- Create an evaluation form
- Work with clients offering one on one support and co-facilitate groups
- Develop and implement recreation programs

Placement Contributions

The practicum supervisor provides on-site supervision for the student and is vital to the success of the placement and learning for the student. The practicum supervisor provides an environment that supports student learning and, in collaboration with the course instructor, provides feedback to the student to enhance skill development.

Community Practicum Supervisors

- Support student's orientation to organization
- Provide student with opportunities to participate in routine work activities
- Assign specific tasks/activities that the student will be responsible for such as plan, implement, and evaluate activities
- Meet with student to discuss progress and complete practicum evaluation form

Community Partners

Some of our community partners that provide placements to the Students in our Child Youth and Family Majors and Adult Development Majors.



- Promotes and supports literacy amongst families and adults (19 and over)



- Improves the quality of life for those with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, and their caregivers.



- Provides information, material aid, and support to individuals with an unplanned pregnancy.



- Promotes healthy development of children and youth through a variety of mentoring programs.

DUNARA

- Provides 24 hour supportive housing facility for individuals in need of psychiatric rehabilitation.



- Working with our community to provide access to health programs and services and create opportunities for people to improve their well-being.



- Provides continuing, palliative, and rehabilitation care as well as community outreach programs to various populations.



- Provides value-based programs and services that teach the importance of caring, honesty, respect, responsibility and inclusiveness.



- Free, telephone based listening, support, referral and Crisis assistance

Challenges and Strengths

The five developmental stages of a practicum reflect the challenges and strengths of the practicum experience from the student, course instructor (university), and practicum supervisor's (placement setting) perspectives.

Anticipation Stage or "Where will I be placed?"

This stage occurs before the practicum begins. This is the matching phase where the student experiences one of the following:

1. Open to possibilities

Students are flexible and respond to the needs of the community or organization.

2. Expresses a desire for a particular setting

Can be a challenge to place a student if supervisor does not have what they are looking for or if several students want the same thing.

3. Unsure about doing a placement

This student is ambivalent and runs the risk of dropping the course and leaving the placement setting in the lurch.

Practicum coordinator secures the placement for the student and community partners commit to taking a student and articulate their priorities. Students are informed of where they are placed and the student may:

- Become excited and begins to anticipate what it may be like.
- Become disappointed and begins to anticipate what it may be like.
- Experience some nervousness and ask themselves questions like "Can I handle this?"

Disillusionment Stage or "This is not what I thought it would be like"

This stage occurs when the student is in the placement. Disappointment occurs when discrepancies emerge between what the student anticipated and the reality of their placement. The larger the discrepancy, the greater the disillusionment.

Students can stall out here and endure the placement, but are counting the days until it ends. This can be difficult for the practicum supervisor who may decide to terminate the placement.

Confrontation Stage or "Who's motivating me?"

At this stage, students challenge themselves to take responsibility for their learning. The student may have to step outside their comfort zone and rise to the occasion. Students may also challenge the supervisor to ensure they have opportunities to learn

The practicum supervisor provides appropriate learning opportunities (too easy/too difficult) and the right amount of support (too much/not enough). The supervisor can also challenge the student to "step up" if they are not performing to reasonable expectations.

The course instructor may do a field visit at this time to support both the student and placement supervisor to resolve any difficulties the student and/or supervisor might be having.

Competence Stage or "The 2nd half of the placement"

At this stage, students know what the expectations of the placement are and experience themselves as able to fulfill these expectations. They can demonstrate new levels of skill in their work with clients / patients. The student is proud of their work and builds confidence.

Students can work more independently and practicum supervisors provide less support. The course instructor may do a field visit to enable the student to showcase new skills and abilities.

Culmination or "The ending of the placement comes all too soon"

At this stage, students are often sad to leave and may volunteer to stay on in order to see a project through or help out. People in the organization are sad to see the student go.

The programs the student developed or worked within may need to end as there may not be anyone else available to work on them. Clients may no longer get the additional support that the student was able to provide until the next practicum cycle begins.

