

Master of Teaching Year 1, Practicum 1: Inquiry, Observation, Active Engagement & a Gradual Release of Responsibility

Practicum #1 provides Year 1 Teacher Candidates (TCs) in OISE's Master of Teaching (MT) program with their first experience in the context of a practicum as a TC. This document is intended to provide some suggestions on what TCs might do in the early part of their first evaluated MT practicum.

Practicum #1 includes the following:

1. Practicum Preparation Days (PPDs), and
2. Practicum.

Both #1 and #2 above involve TCs being full-time in the placement setting, and the [week-by-week expectations chart](#) outlines the guidelines for the PPDs and the practicum.

Acknowledging Year 1 Practicum 1 is the first experience in an MT practicum, TCs and Associate Teachers (ATs) are invited to plan scaffolded learning opportunities for the TC that support the gradual release of responsibility towards teaching whole groups.

TCs are invited to take the initiative and responsibility to plan out each day with their specific learning interests and questions in mind, and share these plans with their AT. TCs are also encouraged to document their learning from their early practicum experiences in a manner that enables them to share their learning with their AT and Faculty Advisor (FA), and in a manner that best suits them, e.g., some TCs might take notes throughout the day in a notebook, or reflect once at the end of each day on a device. The flexibility in how the ideas in this document are used is intentional to meet the individual interests, needs and levels of different TCs, their ATs, and the practicum classroom/program.

Although each of the three “habits of mind” and practice are closely intertwined, this document is divided into the following 3 parts:

Inquiry – Observation – Active Engagement

Inquiry

The Practicum Preparation Days and the first weeks of Year 1, Practicum 1 provide an opportunity for every TC to explore and better understand the professional context of the practicum setting. This includes students, classroom, school and community contexts. Articulating questions at the beginning of a TC's practicum journey, followed by exploration, analysis, reflection and goal setting reflects the *teacher as researcher* stance that is critical for successful and effective 21st century teachers. This stance is reflected in the following MT Program Expectation: *Adopt an inquiry-oriented stance that is grounded in research and evidence-based practice.*

How?

1. **Questions** (about students, classroom, school, community): Start jotting down your questions during PPDs, and continue this throughout the practicum. Date your questions.
2. **Inquire/Explore:** How might I learn about/explore this question? Note your actions/methods/next steps to explore your questions.
3. **Findings/Learnings:** What did I find? What did I learn? Note key learnings, insights. Your learnings might generate new questions, so note those as well.
4. **Reflections:** Note thoughts, reflections, new questions, next steps and goals.

Observation

The following list of ideas and guiding questions can be used to frame TC experiences during Practicum Preparation Days and Week 1 of the first MT practicum. TCs are encouraged to observe with curious, analytical minds, take observation notes, and be aware of the various lenses and biases that they have while engaged in the process of observation and note-taking.

1. School and Classroom Expectations, Routines and Procedures

Take some time to explore, observe and note the expectations, routines and procedures of your practicum classroom

and school as they relate to:

- School and classroom schedules.
- Transition times – entering school, entering and leaving the classroom, hallway time, moving to other classrooms, recess, snack/nut break, lunch, and various classroom transitions (e.g., from whole group teaching to groups, or individual work, from a shared carpet space back to tables/desks, activity centers, beginning and ending lab work, etc.)
- Class and student materials: How are supplies and materials organized? Distributed? Shared?
- What are the expectations of students related to using and taking care of supplies, materials, notebooks, textbooks, pens, pencils, computers, pencil sharpeners, etc?
- Expectations and/or routines related to washroom, hand washing, storage of personal items in lockers, cubbies and desks.
- Procedures related to fire drills, lock downs, assemblies, etc.
- Extra-curricular activities: What is happening in the school? What is the process to begin a new activity?
- What are the policies and procedures guiding extra-curricular activities in this board? This school? From the union?
- Staff communications, meetings, announcements, union communications.

2. Getting to Know Students

Understanding the students in your classroom is a key foundation to planning and teaching them effectively. Although getting to know students should continue every day in a classroom, the following ideas might help focus a TC's exploration during the early parts of Year 1, Practicum 1:

- Take a community walk to explore the neighbourhood in which the school is located.
- Closely observe individual students for extended periods of time. What are their interests, strengths, tendencies, behaviours, etc.?
- Find natural opportunities to talk with students to further get to know them.
- Consider sharing something about yourself with the class as a way to build student-teacher relationships, and invite the students to share their interests with you.
- After taking some time to observe individual students, observe the class as a whole. What are the patterns you notice related to their interests, attention span, behaviours, attitudes, etc.

3. Classroom Community, Expectations and Management

- Setting up a classroom community, communicating expectations, and establishing routines are all part of managing a classroom.
- Investing in preventative management strategies contributes to fewer classroom management challenges. The following questions are intended to help a TC identify the range of both preventative and responsive classroom management strategies in your practicum classroom.
- What has contributed to the establishment of a classroom community? (e.g., expectations, norms, routines, etc.)
- What preventative strategies does the teacher employ to develop a positive climate of learning in the classroom?
- How are expectations about behaviour communicated?
- Are there examples of expectations that are differentiated to meet the diverse needs of the students?
- What are the various strategies your Associate Teacher employs in response to off-task behaviour and/or misbehaviour? Focus on the low-key, sometimes invisible, responses of the teacher, e.g., slight change in tone of voice, asking student a question, moving to be in close proximity to student who is talking during instruction, etc.
- What effective strategies are employed when low-key management responses fail to stop the misbehaviour?
- What are the board and school procedures and policies related to reporting bullying, discrimination and harassment.

4. Planning, Instruction and Assessment

Learning to teach is a complex, developmental process that involves knowing which pieces of the puzzle are to be put on the table (and considered), and then knowing how to put the various pieces of the puzzle together. This process pulls on many different bodies of knowledge, including knowledge of human development and pedagogical content knowledge. The following ideas and guiding questions are intended to support a Teacher Candidate's exploration of the complexity of planning, teaching and assessing during the first steps of their practicum journey in the MT program.

- Observe your AT teach, and if possible observe other teachers in the department or school. Make note of the various components of each lesson, e.g., How is the lesson started? What instructional strategies are employed to 'hook' the students, engage all students, and build on previous experiences of students? Make note of the timing of each part of the lesson. What sorts of groupings (whole class, small group, pairs, individual) are used, and consider why? How does the teacher close or consolidate the lesson?
- What types of questions does the teacher ask? Write down and then analyze the exact words of key questions asked in the lesson.
- Write down the questions the students ask. Analyze what their questions communicate to the teacher.
- What learning skills are being developed in the lesson?
- How are resources, technology, materials and/or manipulatives effectively used in the lesson?
- Identify ways the teacher differentiates based on learners' strengths and needs (content, process, product, learning environment).
- Observe students with a very keen and detailed eye during independent work. What patterns do you see? What kind of work engages students, keeps their interest? What strategies are employed to support students during independent work?
- Make note of the various forms and strategies of assessment that takes place during a lesson, e.g., diagnostic, formative, summative, and as/for/of learning.
- Following the observation of a lesson, review the relevant Ministry curriculum document and situate the various elements of the lesson within the curriculum document. Note what was evident in your observation, and identify what aspects of the curriculum document you will explore in follow-up observations.

Active Engagement

The Practicum Preparation Days and Week 1 of Practicum 1 are intended to provide each TC with a rich, full and **active** learning opportunity. Although TCs may not be teaching whole class lessons, there are a variety of ways for TCs to be actively engaged with the students, classroom program and school community. Below are some ideas:

- Work one-on-one with students
- Support small groups of students
- Assist AT in lessons and activities
- Co-plan or co-teach a lesson with the AT
- During non-instructional times, TCs can:
 - i) Assist AT in supervisions
 - ii) Analyze observation notes
 - iii) Review school and board policies
 - iv) Draft lesson plans for the following week