School of Education

Postgraduate Certificate in Education Primary

Nursery Placement Handbook

MPG095

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Overview of the Nursery Placement
Information for Settings

The aims of the nursery placement are:

- to allow the students to develop practitioner skills and knowledge addressed so far in the course
- to develop the students' skills of observation and assessment, reflection and analysis
- to enable students on the 3-7 age range route meet the NCTL requirements to be familiar with the curriculum and pedagogy of the Key Stage before that for which they are training.

It is important that the students become immersed in the work of your setting during the two days. They will also need time to complete the set tasks outlined in this handbook. This preparatory work will inform discussions and further work in university sessions. Students are more likely to achieve the placement aims if they can agree a clear timetable with the manager in the setting.

Timetable of activities

Day 1
Students should:

- be introduced to the nursery, its staff, its routines and its health and safety procedures
- agree a timetable for the two days
- identify and agree with the Nursery Manager which child to carry out observations on
- work with children
- assist in the day-to-day tasks such as reading a story, clearing up
- Complete Tasks 1 and 3.

Day 2
Students should:

- work with children
- assist in the day-to-day tasks, such as reading a story, clearing up
- complete Tasks 1 and 2 (and 3 if not completed on Day 1).

In their own time, students will write up their notes of the three tasks. All students will have had a briefing before the placement (see below the key points).

Guidance for students: making the best of your time

- Arrive in good time. On the first day this should be by 08:30. Arrival on the second day should be agreed with the manager of the setting and may be as early as 08:00.
- Leave at an appropriate time. On the first day this should be no earlier than 16:00. On the second day the setting may ask you to work until 17:00.
- Arrive dressed in appropriate clothing. Although you need to be smart, remember you may spend much of the day on the floor or working with messy materials.
- If you are unable to attend because of ill health, inform the setting as soon as possible then ring the Partnership Office on 01904 876663. NB: these days are part of your statutory time in school.
- Be a part of the nursery team. Remember that the first priority of staff in the setting is the children and not you.
- Be organised. Focus on what you need to do, think about what you are doing, bring materials and documentation and work hard.
- Learn from the Early Years professionals. Ask questions and make notes but not to the detriment of their time and the needs of the children.
Tasks for Students
Task 1: Observing Children

Learning objective:
- to increase practitioner observation skills
- identify evidence of schemas and child development

Introduction
One of the main aims of your Nursery Placement is to help you understand the importance of child observations. You have already begun to understand the experience of a setting from the child’s point of view through observations made during your experiential placement. Your Nursery Placement will build on your knowledge and will also support you in finding out about and understanding young children’s development and learning. You are expected to read about making observations before your placement.

Observation Tasks
During each of the two days, you should carry out an observation of one child using the naturalistic observation method (two observations in total). This may be two different activities or the child may return to the same activity each day and develop it further. Read about making naturalistic observations if you are unfamiliar with these.

You will need to discuss the task, the child you will observe and the arrangements/timetable for making the observations with the Nursery Manager.

You should also make observations of the following if they occur in the setting:

1. Sustained Shared Thinking
   Andrews (2012) describes this as ‘an episode in which two or more individuals work together to solve a problem using intellectual skills and understanding.’ It can be child or adult initiated but should then be led by the child. It is crucial that the interaction is ‘shared’ and that both adult and child contribute to the thinking. Vickery (2014) suggests that:

   "...practitioners engage alongside children in their play they sustain and share in children’s thinking by following children’s lead in conversation, modelling curiosity in formulating questions, suggesting additional or alternative resources."

   Vickery (2014, p.27-28)

   You should:
   - observe how practitioners engage in sustained shared thinking with children
   - engage in episodes of sustained shared thinking with individuals or groups of children
   - note down objective observations of these episodes
   - reflect upon how sustained shared thinking contributes to children’s developing understanding

2. Schemas
   Piaget viewed schemas to describe the basic unit of intelligent behaviour. It is an active process which sorts information into simple categories. Schemas are not fixed but evolve and develop with experience. Atthey (2004) states that children’s schemas can be identified through their play as patterns of repeatable actions.

   You should:
   - observe children and identify patterns of repeated behaviour which could relate to schema theory. The patterns should be observed across a range of activities
• reflect upon how these repeated behaviours are contributing to children’s developing understanding

3. Private Speech
Whilst engaging in activities children often talk to themselves, this has been termed private speech. Crowley (2014) describes how Vygotsky (1987) saw this as an important tool for regulating children’s behaviour and how it allows children to ‘reflect on their situation, organise their behaviour and select courses of action.’ When children become more skilled such speech is internalised.

You should:
• note down episodes of children’s private speech
• reflect upon how this private speech might be contributing to the child’s cognitive development

4. Child Development
Children develop within areas of the physical, cognitive, social, emotional and moral. All activities in the nursery setting will be aimed at developing one or more of these areas.

You should:
• observe children engaging in activities in a range of provision areas and identify which areas of their development are being developed. For example, two children building a tower with blocks will be developing physical skills in handling the blocks, problem solving skills (cognitive) in making the tower stand up and social skills through their collaboration.

Ethical considerations

You must ask the Nursery Manager whether you need to gain the permission of the child’s parent or carer for the observations. Photographs are not a requirement of the task but if it is appropriate to take photographs, you must seek the permission of the Nursery Manager.

Preparation for an observation
You should prepare this in your own time or during an agreed break in your activities in the setting. You may decide a focus for the observation beforehand, e.g., some aspect of physical development or social interaction. You may also discuss this with the Nursery Manager. Collect everything you need and prepare appropriate pro forma. Collect all necessary background information and record this before you start the observation. The child’s real name should not be used. Find a comfortable position where you have a sufficient view. Be unobtrusive: don’t make eye contact. The observations do not require you to engage with the child. Be objective and leave your interpretations until after the observation.

After the observations
This will take place in your own time. You will reflect on each of your observations and make notes on the following:
• How was the child learning?
• What was the child learning?
• How does the environment support the child?
• What was your role and developing skills as an observer?
• How useful were the observations?
• How useful were other observation methods used, if appropriate?

References
Task 2: Plan an Activity for Cognitive Development

Learning objective:
- to develop your understanding of how 0-5 year olds think and learn
- relate this to constructivist learning theories

Introduction
The Nursery Placement offers you the opportunity to investigate children’s learning. These investigations and observations, together with the observation data from your experiential placements, should give you a clearer view of how young children learn. Activities will be similar to those that experienced practitioners plan for learning.

Preparation
Plan a short activity which you think will support an individual child’s cognitive learning. You will need to think about appropriateness and relevance for the child. Talk through your ideas and the best time to carry out this activity with the Nursery Manager. Prepare and bring any resources with you if you are unsure of the resources available in the setting. Write an outline of the activity and ensure you have space to make notes. Ensure you are observing behaviours and language used, including your own.

After the activity
Make further notes on the activity in your own time. Reflect on the success of the activity in supporting the child’s cognitive learning. If you feel that the activity was not successful as a learning opportunity for the child, amend it for a small group of 2-3 children. Agree a time when you can conduct the activity again with 2-3 different children.

Make observations of how the group of children approached the activity. Note the behaviours and language used, including your own.

Reflect on the success of the activity in supporting the children’s cognitive learning. What do you notice about their interaction with each other? Make notes on the activity in your own time. Review the reading and workshops in the MPG095 module that focus on constructivist learning theories. Begin to make tentative conclusions by linking theory to practice and summarise these in your notes. Identify what you have learnt from this placement and how your thinking may have changed.
Task 3: Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum

Learning objective:
• to develop your knowledge and understanding of the EYFS curriculum

Introduction
The EYFS curriculum is set out very differently to the National Curriculum for Key Stages 1 and 2. You should be familiar with these differences and the expectations of 0-5 learners, as well as the guidance provided for practitioners on how to organise learning and play.

Preparation
Read the document ‘Statutory Framework for The Early Years Foundation Stage’ prior to the placement. Make notes of any questions you have about the way the curriculum is set out and organised. Available at:

Task
Talk to practitioners about the principles underpinning their planning. Ask questions to help your understanding of their approach to planning. Make notes of key points. Suggestions for questions might be:

• What drives their planning?
• How do the needs of the children fit into the EYFS curriculum documentation?
• How does the children's need to learn through play work in relation to planning, i.e. does the nursery 'follow the child' or does the child's play follow the nursery's planned themes or is it a mixture of the two?
• How do practitioners try to find out what a child knows and understands and what is preoccupying their thinking? How does this fit into their planning?
• How does the nursery 'information to parents' reflect the EYFS philosophy?
• What is understood as 'progress' and how do practitioners measure this?

Additional tasks
3-7 route students should also complete the following task. 7-11 route students may wish to if you have time.

• With support from an experienced nursery practitioner if necessary, use the nursery planning pro forma to plan a small group activity making reference to the EYFS documentation.