

Tips for Working in Schools – Education Field Experiences

Professionalism

Because a field placement is like a job, you should dress and behave accordingly. That means wearing clothes that make you look more like a teacher than a college student. In the school you are an “adult” more than you are a “college student” and, since you represent Bates, you should be careful not to use inappropriate language or do anything that would reflect badly on you or the College. Please be aware that neither teachers nor students are allowed to wear hats or chew gum and you should observe this rule as well. Please refrain from making telephone calls or text-messaging during your placement hours. Try to be a friendly adult role model for the children rather than their friend.

Introductions

Contact your teacher by e-mail to set up a placement interview. Enter the school by the main entrance, introduce yourself to the secretary, sign in, and get a visitor’s pass. You will be directed to the teacher. On subsequent visits always remember to sign in and get a visitor’s pass, please.

Reliability

Our program's credibility rests upon students' commitment to, and maintenance of, a regular schedule. Please become familiar with the school calendar and the Bates calendar. When there are discrepancies, let your teacher know as far ahead as possible. Since the field experience is more like a job than a class, you shouldn't “cut” it to study for a test the way you might do for a class at Bates. If you absolutely cannot teach at your scheduled time, you should, at the very least, email or phone your teacher *in advance* and offer to make up the time. In addition, it is a good idea to show up a few minutes early for each session. Transportation is available through the service-learning shuttle.

Confidentiality

Everything you observe in schools is confidential. Do not use teacher and student names in casual conversation in the community. (In your journal entries you should use pseudonyms for the teacher and students.) By all means, express your concerns about children to your host teacher, but make sure that you do so in privacy.

Mandated Reporter Law

Maine state law requires that any adult aware of a potential child abuse concern report it to an authority. If a child says anything to you that makes you feel he/she may be in physical or emotional danger, **pass that information on to your host teacher and professor the same day.**

Maintaining Boundaries

It can sometimes be tricky to know where and how to set boundaries with children. Remember that your role is to be a “helping adult role model” rather than a best buddy. If you are overly familiar with the children with whom you are working, you will have a tougher time getting them to focus and take you seriously. With older students, who may be close to you in age, it is even more important that you distinguish yourself as a mentor/role model. Occasionally, you may encounter situations where students flirt or ask inappropriately personal questions. When you are in a difficult situation, use your best judgment. You can frequently get feedback after the fact by opening the conversation with a comment such as “I wasn't sure if I did the best thing in the situation with _____. Would you have preferred I handle it differently?” Finally, there is no single way to handle any situation. Consider the context, various perspectives, and do your best.

Health/Hygiene

Children and schools are, by their nature “germ factories”. Adults new to this environment are very susceptible to contagion. Wash your hands frequently, wear your hair pulled back, and avoid head to head contact. Also, be aware of universal precautions, designed to prevent transmission of HIV, hepatitis B virus, and other bloodborne pathogens when providing first aid or health care. Universal precautions are achieved by using protective barriers such as gloves, gowns, and protective eyewear when administering first aid.

Questions

Above all, don't hesitate to check with school staff or Bates faculty or staff if you have any questions. Doing so can prevent significant problems from developing. We expect this will be a wonderful experience for you and are eager to support you.

Assistant Director, Community-Based Learning

Ellen Alcorn, Harvard Center for Community Partnerships, 161 Wood Street, 786-8235, ealcorn@bates.edu

CONTACTING YOUR HOST TEACHER

1. Send an e-mail to the teacher introducing yourself, and ask if you can schedule an interview to discuss doing your fieldwork in his/her classroom. Remember, this e-mail is the first impression the teacher will have of you. Be brief but specific about yourself, the course you are taking, and your experience. Suggest two or three times you can meet within the next week. Elementary teachers frequently prefer before 8:30 a.m. or after 3 p.m. Middle and high schools start and end an hour earlier.
2. Confirm the reply the teacher sends you and make arrangements to meet. (Consult the shuttle schedule before you finalize arrangements.)
3. Go to the meeting as you would to an interview. Be prepared to talk about what you want to get out of the classroom and the course you are taking. Give the teacher the field experience evaluation sheet s/he will complete at the end of the semester. Set up a schedule and begin visits as soon as possible.
4. Upon returning to campus, send an e-mail thanking the teacher for his/her time, confirming your schedule, and saying you look forward to working with him/her. (We hope you do!).
5. Honor your commitment!
6. If you have not received a reply to your initial e-mail in *3 full school days*, please contact the Harward Center for Community Partnerships. Any questions, however small, can be directed to Ellen Alcorn at the Harward Center (x8235, or e-mail, ealcorn@bates.edu).