My placement experience with AECEO - A journal

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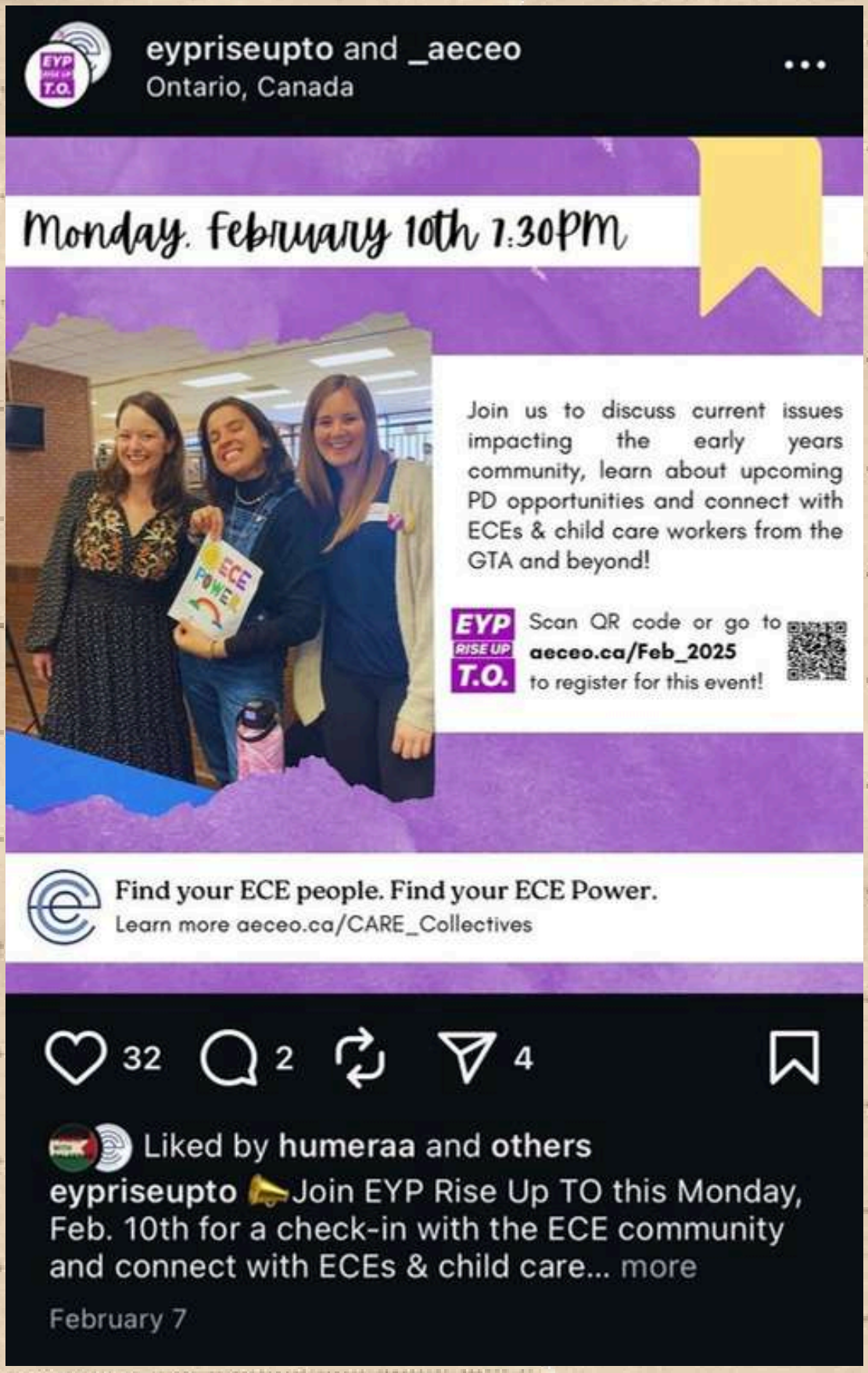
How it all began...

I was very excited to complete my final placement with the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (AECEO). Prior to choosing this placement, one of my professors had inspired me to explore the world of advocacy by sharing her own experiences and introducing me to the organization. Through her passion and dedication to advancing the early childhood profession, I learned how meaningful policy and advocacy work can be in creating lasting change for educators, children, and families. I had the opportunity to choose my own site, and most of my peers chose Toronto District School Board placements. I had already experienced a kindergarten placement, and although it was an invaluable experience, I felt that it was time to get out of my comfort zone and dive deeper into the foundation of the Early Childhood Education sector.

The Interview

After spending a few weeks thinking about what would be a suitable site for me, the AECEO suddenly appeared on my screen. It was an Instagram post announcing a collaboration with EYP RISE UP T.O, inviting Early Childhood Educators to discuss current issues impacting the early years community. “That’s it”, I thought to myself. I decided to reach out to schedule an interview for my upcoming placement. I remember carefully preparing the email, hoping to express how important advocacy and the organization’s mission are to me. I wanted to stand out, I wanted to get a confirmation that I would be doing my placement with them. Waiting for their response felt like an eternity – I was both nervous and eager, truly hoping for the opportunity to be part of their work. When I finally received the acceptance, I was overjoyed and felt deeply grateful for the chance to have an interview. I spent hours on their website reading and familiarizing myself with the work they do. The day of the interview, I wanted to make a strong impression. “I have to do well, I have to stand out”, I kept telling myself. The conversation went better than I expected – Amber was welcoming and genuinely interested in my goals as a student. If my desire to join the team was strong before, it had now multiplied a million times over. A few days later, I received the email confirming my acceptance. I felt an overwhelming mix of relief and gratitude. And of course I called my mother right away, to tell her the news. She knew how much that meant to me, “I knew you would be accepted, you are a star”, she said in Greek with a soft voice of pride. That was the moment I realized I was about to begin a placement that would truly shape my professional growth and perhaps shift my career goals.

AECEO Instagram Post



Placement Goals

- **Learn about the professional standards in the field that support the role of an educator, including policies and advocacy.**

- **Gain a deeper understanding of the job roles in the field of ECE.**

- **Social skills, leadership, and team collaboration in a different setting (not hands-on with families and children).**

Stepping into Advocacy and Policy

On the first day of placement, I showed up full of enthusiasm, not knowing what to expect. I attended a Zoom meeting with all the students, where we were given an overview of how the placement would proceed. In the following days, I focused on completing the student guide and orientation package while attending the scheduled meetings. By doing this, I gained a clearer understanding of the expectations, which allowed me to build professional relationships with the team and fellow students. Unfortunately, by the third day of placement, I started feeling sick, “this can’t be happening”, I thought to myself. I tried to push through, but my fever kept rising and my body began to give out. I hadn’t felt that sick in a very long time. “This is the worst timing”, I told my sister. She reassured me, saying, “It’s ok, Jenny. You need some rest, you are burnt out”. I took a nap. It resulted in 49 hours straight, only walking twice – once to eat and once to use the bathroom. It was exactly the rest my body desperately needed.

Person holding a cup of coffee and then drinking it.
Photograph by Sara Hagale from Instagram

The First Weeks of Placement

Eventually, I recovered and regained the strength and motivation to get back on track. I completed the orientation package and attended my meeting with my field educator to discuss the next steps. She explained that I needed to consider what I hoped to gain from this placement and encouraged me to prepare a major project that would be meaningful and valuable to my learning. “No way!”, I thought as I kept the reaction to myself – I nodded and smiled, eager to show my enthusiasm about the opportunity to choose my own project. The idea was incredible and very helpful for students, but also made me wonder, “What am I going to do?” I found myself going back and forth in my mind, brainstorming possibilities and imagining what could be the best fit for both my interests and the organization’s goals.

The Major Project

I spent the following week reflecting on my goals and intentions for this experience. I talked with other students and consulted the team to gather different ideas and perspectives. “Think, Jenny, think. Why did you want to complete your placement with the AECEO?” I told myself, digging deeper. I went back to the very beginning — remembering my professor who inspired me to consider advocacy. That’s when I realized, “I can be that inspiration to others”. So, I decided to create a presentation to introduce my peers to the AECEO and highlight the importance of advocacy in the ECE field.

The Planning

My field educator instructed me to create a work plan to track tasks, organize the workflow, set clear priorities, and ensure the timely completion of each phase. I prepared a visual schedule with all the tasks and due dates, then created a detailed plan with the goals and expectations, and brainstormed all the steps before beginning work on the project. “But public speaking is not my forte. Is this a mistake?” I thought again and again. I knew I needed to step out of my comfort zone. This project would challenge me to learn something new, and researching the AECEO, policy, advocacy, and current issues in the sector seemed like a valuable opportunity to deepen my knowledge and share it with others.

Finding my rhythm

Over the next few weeks, I immersed myself in working on the major project. My mind was in constant motion—“Contact the professor, attend the meeting, research this, look at that.” A whirlwind of panic and endless thoughts. I spent hours researching and exploring all the possibilities. Slowly, I created an outline and began drafting a rough plan for how the slides might look.

At one point, I realized, “I can’t work on this without developing my script and slides together; it just doesn’t make sense to me otherwise.” So, I reached out to my field educator for guidance. She reassured me that I could approach the work in whatever way felt right and supported me whenever I asked for help. Still, doubts crept in, “But what if my slides aren’t good enough? Is this really enough?” I found myself second-guessing, but her encouragement helped me keep going. By the fourth week of my placement, I had established a routine. On Thursdays, I attended the morning check-in meetings, then worked from home until lunchtime. After that, I walked to the same coffee shop on the Danforth, where I ordered the same thing every time—an oat latte and a chocolate croissant—and worked there until five o’clock.

Change of plans

As I continued working on my project, I found myself falling down a rabbit hole of researching and adding so much information that I lost sight of the project's main purpose. I thought, "I should ask for feedback." That day, my field educator wasn't available, so I reached out to Amber. She replied, "Everything looks great, but what is your main focus? You might need to narrow it down since you only have a few weeks left." She was right. My professor for the field education class had agreed that I could present in week nine of my placement. With this in mind, I decided to start over, focusing primarily on Ontario and highlighting the visions and values of the AECEO.

Start Over

I started over—again. This time, I felt more confident about the information that I should include and remove. So, I added new information that actually supported my focus and trimmed down a lot of the extra content I had piled onto the slides. It felt productive, organizing the information and finally seeing the project take shape. I wrote a brief script to guide myself, then reached out for feedback. After reading through the comments, I made the final changes, feeling a mix of relief and nervous excitement.

Once the content felt solid, I practiced the presentation over and over, timing myself and adjusting little phrases that didn't sound right. I also created resources for the class, wanting to give something meaningful rather than just a slide show. I printed them, added QR codes so students could instantly access more information, and arranged everything neatly—I wanted it to feel intentional and thoughtful.

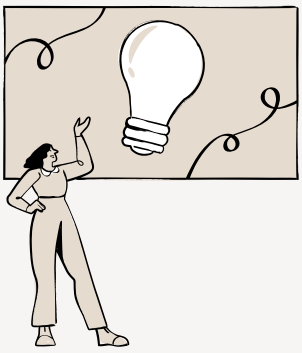
When I finally timed the full presentation and saw that everything fit perfectly, I felt a small wave of accomplishment. I emailed my professor to let her know the estimated time and attached the slides so she could get a clearer picture of what I planned to share. Sending that email felt like a big step—almost like saying, "Okay, this is real now."

A few hours before the presentation

The morning of the presentation, my nerves were completely out of control. I was so anxious that I kept running to the bathroom, trying to steady myself. I wanted to look professional—not just for myself, but out of respect for the AECEO. I was representing them, introducing their visions and goals to a room full of students, and I wanted to do it well. I chose a full grey outfit: a skirt, tights, a cozy sweater, and my black boots, with my black wool coat. I styled my hair in a slick braid, put on my glasses, and tried to convince myself I looked confident, even if I didn't feel it.

I packed everything the night before—my notes, the printed resources, and even the little stick I brought to point at the board. But as the presentation time got closer, my body betrayed me. My hands were sweating, my stomach felt tight, and whenever I tried to speak, my voice sounded a little shaky.

Even so, I wasn't alone. The team, the students, and my professor surrounded me with kindness. They offered encouragement, told me I would do great, and reminded me that I was prepared. In that moment, I felt genuinely grateful—almost overwhelmed by how many supportive women I had beside me. Their words helped, but I was still incredibly stressed. My heart felt like it was racing ahead of me, and all I could do was breathe deeply and hope that once I started talking, everything would fall into place.



The day has come

It truly felt like a roller coaster of emotions—weeks of work, countless drafts, and so much mental energy poured into creating this presentation. When it was finally over, I felt genuinely proud of myself. I had taken the time to prepare thoroughly, to organize my thoughts, and to share meaningful information about advocacy with the class. I really believe something stayed with them. Some students learned new information about the field—things like the CWELCC, the AECEO's Roadmap, and the wage grid in the ECE sector. Others seemed to gain motivation to advocate for their rights, their needs, and their working conditions. And maybe, just maybe, a few of them felt encouraged to step out of their comfort zones and try things they were not yet confident about—just like I did with public speaking.

One of the slides I added was about intersectionality. It gave me a chance to share a bit more about myself and explain why I chose to become an ECE. I reminded them that children's voices matter deeply, and that having even one supportive adult—even for a couple of hours a day—can make an enormous difference in a child's life.

I spoke about how, as a child, I was always seeking validation, wanting to fit in, wanting to be heard and feel loved. I grew up in a home shaped by domestic violence, which filled me with anxiety from a young age. Dissociation became my escape, and school often felt overwhelming. That's why it is so important to remind educators that every child carries a story we don't always see. Every educator was once a child too, yet as adults, we often forget what those little brains and hearts are going through. At the core of it all, children need CARE—genuine, consistent, compassionate care.

Sharing that part of myself felt vulnerable, but it also felt right. It helped connect everything back to why advocacy matters, why our work matters, and why I show up the way I do.

The Presentation

In the afternoon, once the lecture began, my anxiety somehow grew even stronger. I approached my professor quietly and asked whether I would be presenting at the beginning of the lecture or toward the end. “At 1:15—does that work?” she asked. I nodded quickly and said, “Of course, thank you,” even though my heart was pounding. After that, I couldn’t stop checking the time on my phone. Normally, I would take out my laptop, follow along with the lecture, maybe take some notes. But not that day. I left my laptop zipped inside my bag and pulled out the printed notes for my presentation instead.

I tried reading through them to calm myself, but it only made me more anxious. The words started blurring together, so I flipped the papers over and placed them face down on the desk. When the time hit 1:10, my professor suddenly said, “Let’s hear from Jenny now.” My stomach dropped. I looked at her and said, “I think my peers would love a break first.” She glanced at the class and immediately agreed, announcing a short break while we set things up. That small moment felt like a breath of fresh air.

During the break, I laid my notes out neatly and grabbed the rainbow washi tape I brought to put my printed resources on the board. I pulled up my presentation on the projector and chatted with my professor while waiting for everyone to return to their seats. It didn’t completely calm my nerves, but it helped ground me.

When it was time to start, I took a breath and began by thanking the professor and my peers for giving me the space to talk about advocacy. My voice trembled at first, and I could feel the shakiness echoing through my whole body—but by the second slide, something shifted. I started to settle in. I looked around the room and realized my peers were genuinely listening. “What a surprise,” I thought to myself, and that helped make me relax even more.

I continued talking—about advocacy, about current issues in the ECE sector, about what is being done and what still needs to happen. I introduced the AECEO’s vision and mission, and explained why their work matters. I shared parts of my personal journey in the field and during my placement, being honest and open. I also invited the professor and my peers into the conversation, giving them space to share their thoughts and experiences.

Everything flowed better than I expected. It went really well. The presentation felt informative, engaging, and meaningful. And when I looked around the room afterward, I could tell that everyone walked away with something new—whether it was knowledge, motivation, or simply a different way of thinking about their role as future educators.

It was one of those moments where all the stress, preparation, and vulnerability felt worth it. I left the room feeling proud, relieved, and a little amazed at what I had just accomplished.

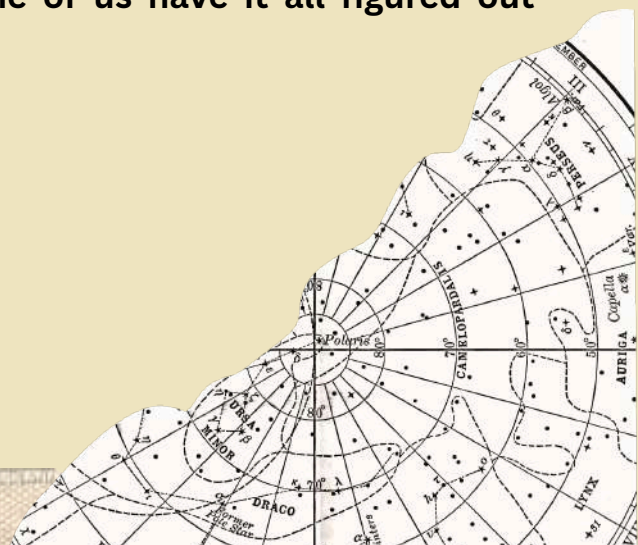
Moving Forward

The next day, we had our check-in meeting with the AECEO team and the other students. As soon as we settled in, one of the students turned to me and asked, “Hey Jenny, how did your presentation go?” I was genuinely surprised. “Oh my goodness, you remember?” I said, and we both laughed. That small moment felt so warm and unexpectedly touching. I already knew the team and the students were terrific, but that simple gesture—someone remembering something important to me—made me feel really seen.

I started sharing how the presentation went, and everyone responded with such positive, encouraging comments. Hearing their kind words made me feel proud and reassured, like all the stress and hard work I put into it had been worth it.

Initially, I thought about writing a formal two-page reflection, something structured and academic. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that the experience didn’t feel like something to analyze—it felt raw, emotional, and deeply personal. So instead, I chose to write it as a journal—a space where I could be honest, vulnerable, and real.

I also hoped that, by writing it this way, future students might someday read it and feel more understood. Maybe they’ll recognize their own mixed feelings—the anxiety, the excitement, the self-doubt, the pride. Perhaps they’ll feel validated in knowing that their emotions are normal, that they’re part of the process, and that none of us have it all figured out because that’s what makes us human.



In conclusion

I want to express my gratitude to the AECEO and OCBCC teams and to all the students from both organizations for making this placement an incredible experience. I learned so much from everyone—professionally, personally, and emotionally. It truly was one of the best workplaces I've ever been a part of. The support, kindness, and sense of community made every challenge feel manageable and every success feel shared.

To future students stepping into this placement, I would like to offer some advice. Don't hesitate to reach out for help or ask questions. Seeking feedback isn't a sign of weakness—it's a sign of growth. Letting the team know when things aren't going as planned can relieve a considerable amount of unnecessary stress, and you'll be surprised by how quickly support will come your way. This placement is not meant to be done alone; the people around you genuinely want to see you succeed.

Also, try things that scare you a little. Whether it's presenting, leading a discussion, or sharing your personal story, stepping outside your comfort zone often leads to the most meaningful learning experiences. Lean into the discomfort, trust the process, and remember that mixed emotions—fear, excitement, doubt, and pride—are all part of becoming a stronger educator.

And if I can offer one more piece of advice: understand the importance of advocacy and policy in early childhood education. Advocacy is what gives educators a voice. Policy is what shapes the conditions in which we work and the environments children learn in. Without advocacy, change doesn't happen. Without policy, our values and visions can't be transformed into real, lasting improvements. Every voice—yes, even yours as a student—has the power to influence how our sector grows, how educators are respected, and how children and families are supported. Getting involved, even in small ways, helps build a stronger and more equitable ECE sector.

Most importantly, be gentle with yourself. You don't need to be perfect to make an impact. You just need to be open, curious, and willing to grow. Future students, you've got this—and you're stepping into a space filled with people who will cheer you on every step of the way.