How Practices-Based is our Teacher Education Program?
A Tool for Curriculum Reflection

Purpose

Practices-based teacher education[i] is an approach to preparing beginning teachers that focuses on providing scaffolded opportunities to learn, enact, and become proficient in a set of instructional practices that are critical to beginning teaching. Programs that take this approach share common features, which are described in this document.

This document is a tool designed for use by teams of teacher educators within a program who are interested in exploring a practices-based approach. It is designed to support reflection on what elements of a practices-based teacher education program may already be in place in their programs, and what elements may not yet be in place.

This tool is currently in draft form, and we are hoping to gather feedback to inform its development. If you have used the tool and are willing to share your experience, contact Adina Lopatin (lopatina@umich.edu).

How to Use This Tool

This tool is designed to be used as part of a curriculum reflection activity that could take place within an hour-long meeting. Below is a sample plan for such a meeting. For other possible discussion structures and questions, please see Appendix A.

- <u>Quiet reflection</u> (individually, 10 mins): Participants individually read through the attached questions, placing an "X" on each continuum to indicate where they think the program falls.
- <u>Share out and discussion</u> (whole group, 40 mins): Starting with the first question, participants share where they placed their "X's" and why. Discuss for 5-10 mins, then repeat for the other questions.
- <u>Next steps</u> (whole group, 10 mins): What did we learn from this activity? Where does it leave us? What are we interested in learning more about? Who else needs to be part of this conversation?
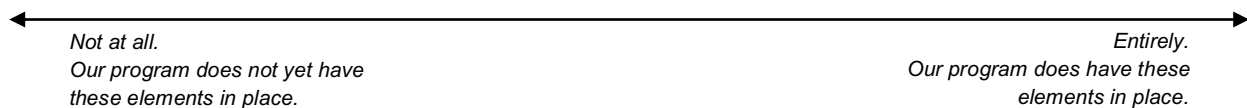
Features of a Practices-Based Teacher Education Curriculum

Below are six questions to help teacher educators reflect on how practices-based your teacher education program is. For each question, read over the description and mark an "X" to indicate the extent to which your program has in place the features described.

To what extent does the program…

1. Rest on a shared vision of what skilled teaching that promotes equity looks like?

Not at all.
Our program does not yet have
these elements in place.

Entirely.
Our program does have these
elements in place.

What this might look like:

- Courses and pedagogies are designed around shared vision of skillful teaching and commitment to the ethical obligations of teaching
- Teacher educators consider what it would look like to enact teaching practices in ways that might *disrupt* and ways that might *perpetuate* inequities, and make these explicit to teacher candidates
- The vision and ethical obligations are revisited regularly within and across courses, and in the feedback candidates receive on course assignment, assessments, and clinical practice

2. Revolve around a manageable number of specific, high-leverage practices[ii] that teacher candidates need to become competent in before graduating?

Not at all.
Our program does not yet have
these elements in place.

Entirely.
Our program does have these
elements in place.

What this might look like:

- The practices are central activities of teaching (i.e. facilitating a discussion, modeling and explaining academic content) as opposed to domains, goals, or student activities?
  - Each one describes a move or strategy that teachers routinely use--a component of the work of teaching
  - The practices demand the exercise of professional judgment, drawing on knowledge and skill, as opposed to being rote procedures or routines
  - Each practice can be unpacked and learned by teacher candidates
- The practices are high-leverage according to an agreed-upon set of criteria, for example:
  - Closely tied to students' learning
  - Enacted frequently
  - Can be articulated and taught, and practiced in clinical context
  - Accessible to a beginning teacher but foundational to developing more advanced teaching capability
  - Useful across a range of teaching contexts, including different grade-levels, subject-areas, and curricula

- The practices emphasize the *relational* aspects of teaching, as opposed to those that happen mainly in preparation for or after teaching (i.e. eliciting student thinking, building relationships with students)
  - They describe strategies that involve interaction with students
  - They require a degree of improvisation or in-the-moment decision making in response to student comments or actions
- The curriculum as a whole is deliberately focused on these practices
  - The practices have been described and articulated in detail
  - Everyone in the program--including faculty (both foundations and methods instructors), field coordinators, mentor teachers, and teacher candidates-- understands them
  - There is a shared language of the practices used across coursework in both foundations and methods, field work, and assessment
  - They are presented to teacher candidates early in the program
  - They comprise the core of assignments in coursework
  - Competence in the practices is tied to grades and/or program completion
  - The number of practices is manageable for the above purposes

3. **Offer teacher candidates ample opportunity to learn and refine their practice in a deliberate and recurring cycle?**

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Not at all.
Our program does not yet have
these elements in place.

Entirely.
Our program does have these
elements in place.

What this might look like:

- The practice is explicitly introduced
  - It is broken down into learnable chunks, or decomposed elements, that name essential features of the practice
  - The decomposed elements, are used to support teacher candidates' ability to notice and refine the practice
  - Teacher candidates are shown representations (i.e. video, model lessons, transcripts) of the practice in which important aspects of them are clearly visible
- Teacher candidates get to *do* the practice repeatedly
  - They engage in simulations (i.e. rehearsals, simulated student interactions, peer run-throughs) *without* K12 students
  - The simulations are structured so that teacher candidates can focus on key aspects of the practice in isolation from complicating factors of an actual classroom
  - Teacher candidates then enact the practices with K12 students

- - The teaching and feedback in field classrooms directly reflect the practices learned in coursework
- Teacher candidates receive coaching and feedback from experts
  - Teacher candidates receive expert coaching and feedback in simulations of teaching as well as actual teaching in the field (i.e. pauses during rehearsal, teacher time out)
  - Teacher candidates are guided through careful analysis of simulations and actual teaching as part of a cycle of learning (i.e. debriefing, analyzing video of their practice, analyzing student work)

4. Prioritize and teach content knowledge that is essential to teacher candidates' ability to skillfully use high-leverage practices in the classroom?

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Not at all.
Our program does not yet have these elements in place.

Entirely.
Our program does have these elements in place.
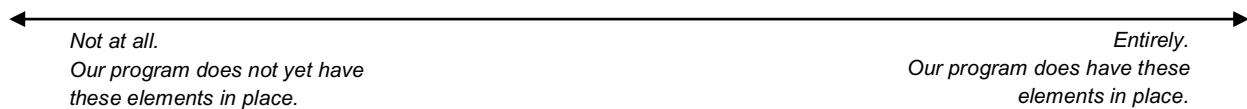
What this might look like:

- Content knowledge is selected according to a set of agreed-upon criteria, for example:
  - Shows up frequently in curriculum, standards or textbooks
  - Important to helping all students achieve worthwhile learning
  - Often a source of difficulty for students
  - Often a source of difficulty for novice teachers
  - Well understood by novice teachers, but only tacitly, such that learning to "unpack" them to make them accessible to students is challenging
- Teacher candidates learn subject-matter knowledge:
  - Topics and ideas in the K-12 curriculum
  - Specialized knowledge useful for teaching (i.e. terms, parts, systems, and rules)
  - Horizon content knowledge (i.e. disciplines' foundational ideas and principles or historical development and significance)
- Teacher candidates learn pedagogical content knowledge:
  - Ways to unpack the curriculum and represent it to others, i.e. what examples to use.
  - How students are likely to think about a topic or task; common student ideas and misconceptions; trajectories of learning specific content.
- Teacher candidates learn social, cultural, psychological and political knowledge

5. Use common performance assessments to measure teacher candidates' progress toward competency in high-leverage practices?

Not at all.
Our program does not yet have
these elements in place.

Entirely.
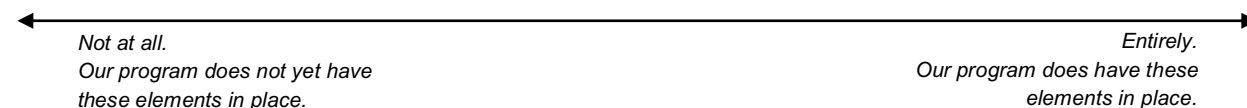*Our program does have these*
elements in place.
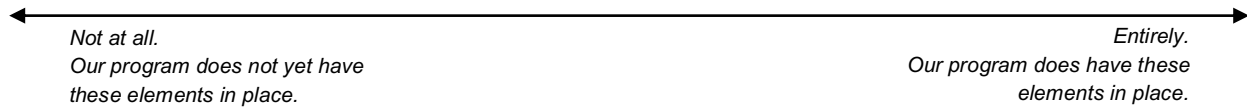
What this might look like:

- Assessments are performance-based, evaluating candidates' enactment, as opposed to knowledge, of focal practices
- Assessments are on-demand, requiring candidates to perform a practice live, not just through formal or informal observation of clinical practice
- Assessments are aligned with the program's vision of skillful, ethical teaching
- Teacher educators have a common understanding of what beginning teachers' proficiency looks like for each assessed practice, which is documented in common rubric
- There is a baseline performance assessment of key practices
- Performance assessments are sequenced at key points in the program to assess teacher candidates' developing competence and provide interventions if needed
- There are stakes attached to candidates' development of competency with the practices. Candidates are required to pass assessments in order to move to the next stage of the program, and graduate. Interventions are available if candidates do not demonstrate competency

6. **Include structures and processes that maintain program coherence and sustainability?**

Not at all.
Our program does not yet have
these elements in place.

Entirely.
Our program does have these
elements in place.

What this might look like:

- The program is organized to support a practices-based approach. Structures are in place to support activities like: pedagogies of enactment, resource-intensive assessments outside of courses, flexible time, mediated fieldwork, collaboration or co-teaching
- Social structures support in implementation, growth, and continued consensus and commitment, such as norming sessions and design committees
- Communication structures and systems support coordination among key stakeholders (i.e., faculty, administrators, mentor teachers, departments, committees, school districts)
- Program administrators continually work to maintain shared understanding of high leverage practices and commitment to the program's vision
- A plan to orient new faculty, staff, mentor teachers and teacher candidates to this framework is in place

Appendix A. Alternative session structure
Discussions of the implications of this work for a given program will vary in scope, depth, and therefore in the time they require. Accordingly, versions of the four tasks below could take place on multiple dates or in a single session.

1. **Quiet reflection**:

   Participants individually read through the attached questions, placing an "X" on each continuum to indicate where they think the program falls.

2. **Individual thinking or writing time:**
   - How did your consideration of the features of practices-based teacher education affect your view of practices-based teacher education and/or the program-level work you might undertake?
   - Which features highlighted in the six questions do you feel are:
     o Present in your program? Absent?
     o Higher priority? Lower priority?
     o Most easily added to the current program?
     o Most problematic to add to the current program?

3. **Small group discussion:**
   Try to reach a provisional consensus on 1-3 features that are potentially high impact for your program. For each feature, consider how it might be integrated or enhanced in your program:
   - When and where (i.e. in what courses, departments, semesters, etc.) do elements of the feature already exist in the program?
   - When and where could this feature be integrated?
   - Who would need to be involved in this work?
   - What other perspectives should be sought out?
   - What do we need to learn more about?
   - What resources could we access?
   - What is a reasonable timeline for this work?

4. **Departmental discussion:**
   Use the questions below to generate discussion, find common ground, and imagine next steps in developing a more practices-based teacher education program in and across department. Chart responses.
   - What did we learn about the practices-based status of our program?
   - Is there consensus on specific features we are interested in working on or learning more about?
   - What resources are needed?
   - Who else should be part of this conversation?
   - What is our next step?

Appendix B. Further reading

Ball, D.L. & Forzani, F. M. (2009). The work of teaching and the challenge for teacher education. *Journal of teacher education*, *60*(5), 497-511.

Forzani, F. M. (2014). Understanding "core practices" and "practice-based" teacher education: Learning from the past. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *65*(4), 357-368.

Davis, E. & Boerst, T. (2014). Designing Elementary Teacher Education to Prepare Well-Started Beginners. Retrieved from teachingworks.org.

McDonald, M., Kazemi, E., & Kavanagh, S. S. (2013). Core practices and pedagogies of teacher education: A call for a common language and collective activity. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *64*(5), 378-386.

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[i] Practices-based teacher education is an approach to teacher education that focuses less on what teachers know and believe, and more on what teachers do. While content knowledge, foundational knowledge, and ethical commitments are necessary components of any new teacher's learning, in a practices-based approach these strands of curriculum are designed to be in service of novices' learning to do the work of teaching. Teacher educators support novices' learning to practice by constructing scaffolded opportunities for learning, enactment, and practice of the core work of beginning teaching (Ball & Forzani, 2009). Practices-based teacher education is sometimes called practice-based teacher education. In this document, we are calling it practices-based teacher education to differentiate it from other practice-focused teacher education initiatives, like extended student teaching or field placements, or locating teacher candidates' learning in K-12 rather than university classrooms (Forzani, 2014).

[ii] High-leverage practices (sometimes called "core practices") are the fundamentals of teaching. Teachers use these practices constantly, and they are critical to helping students learn important content and supporting students' social and emotional development. High-leverage practices are used across subject areas, grade levels, and contexts. They are high-leverage not only because they matter to student learning but because they are basic for advancing skill in teaching. Different teacher education programs may use slightly different sets of high-leverage or core practices; for one example, visit teachingworks.org. To learn more about criteria for identifying high-leverage practices, see Ball & Forzani (2009).