

Strengthening Educators' Instructional Capacity

A Framework for Crafting High-Quality, Practice-Based Professional Learning and Support

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Overview

This framework is a tool for state education agency staff, district and school administrators, and professional development providers to use when considering the quality of practice-based opportunities provided to teachers within in-service professional learning support.

Contents of This Guide

This document is designed to guide professional development providers and their funders to engage in deliberate planning and reflection related to the full integration of practice-based opportunities within professional learning activities and supports.

Audience

This framework and facilitation guide is intended for use by state education agencies, local districts, and professional development providers.

Purpose

Teachers are more likely to be effective and to stay in the profession when their professional learning experiences are connected to classroom practice (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009; Ronfeldt, 2012). Therefore, there has been considerable pressure and effort to strengthen in-

service professional learning. This framework is designed to guide a decision-making process among state education agency staff, district and school administrators, teacher educators, and professional development providers around improving the quality of teacher professional learning and support by integrating practice-based opportunities—inclusive of the essential features—into existing professional learning efforts.

Facilitation Instructions

The Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) offers a wide variety of free, easily accessible online resources to support teacher and leader preparation and support in implementing evidence-based and high-leverage practices with fidelity. Used comprehensively, these resources can help teacher educators and professional development providers target and focus their efforts so that teachers are more adequately prepared and supported for the realities of the classroom.

STEP 1: Identifying Critical Content and Pedagogy

Deliberate practice is a highly structured activity designed with a specific purpose in mind whereby teachers are offered professional learning experiences that are explicitly aligned to

the teacher standards—what all teachers should know and be able to do. This means that knowledge developed—for example, evidence-based instructional practice—is then practiced. Therefore, an essential and initial step toward strengthening and/or developing practice-based opportunities within professional learning is to identify the evidence-based practices teachers need to support students with disabilities.

Identifying and establishing consistent expectations of instructional practices lies at the core of creating high-quality, deliberate, practice-based opportunities. Of course, these instructional practices will, to some degree, vary according to academic content and student populations; however, the selection of essential knowledge and practices that are supported by evidence and address identified district needs creates a solid foundation for what teachers need to know and be able to do.

There are a number of sources that identify evidence-based practices, all of which are supported by varying degrees of evidence and are designed for teaching specific academic content to diverse student populations.

Evidence-based practices are content specific, developmentally appropriate, and subgroup specific. The CEEDAR Center has developed literacy synthesis and corresponding innovation configurations (ICs), which, combined, summarize the research base and the essential components within the evidence-based practice.

CEEDAR has completed these across 15 areas that are designed to promote the implementation of evidence-based instructional practices in teacher preparation activities. Furthermore, the ICs are designed to evaluate current teacher preparation and professional development by determining the extent to which evidence-based practices are taught, observed, and applied within teacher preparation coursework and field experiences and in professional learning. These ICs can be accessed free of charge at <http://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/tools/innovation-configurations/>.

Although the ICs are designed primarily to determine the extent to which preparation coursework and field experiences ensure that candidates are able to apply the practices with fidelity, the CEEDAR Center has also created a repository of resources that can be used or adapted when designing coursework, field experiences, or professional learning events. These resources, called *Course Enhancement Modules (CEMs)*, are directly aligned to the evidence-based practices and essential components within the ICs and are useful tools to guide faculty and professional development providers in designing strong field experiences. These resources can be accessed free of charge at <http://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/cems/>.

Following are additional resources for identifying evidence-based practices, which can be used in this step of the process.

- What Works Clearinghouse: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>
- Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Practice Guides: <http://ies.ed.gov/>

Content Innovation Configuration

- Scientifically Based Reading
- Classroom Organization and Behavior Management
- Evidence-Based Writing Instruction
- Evidence-Based Math Instruction
- Universal Design for Learning
- Leadership
- Technology
- Inclusive Service
- Significant Disabilities
- Sensory Impairments
- Culturally Responsive Instruction
- Secondary Transition
- Linking Assessment and Instruction

- Best Evidence Encyclopedia: <http://www.bestevidence.org/>
- The IRIS Center, Evidence-Based Practice Summaries: http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/ebp_summaries/

- University of Missouri Evidence-Based Intervention Network: <http://ebi.missouri.edu/>

Finally, there are practices—often described as **high-leverage practices**—that are also grounded in evidence and are designed such that the capacity to implement with fidelity is developed in ALL teachers, regardless of content, grade, or student population taught. Frequently, high-leverage practices are used to teach evidence-based practices. Examples of high-leverage practices are available at TeachingWorks: <http://www.teachingworks.org/work-of-teaching/high-leverage-practices>.

High-quality, practice-based opportunities can be developed and implemented only when common expectations of instructional practices are shared across programs and faculty and from preservice to inservice. Identifying common expectations requires inclusive and thoughtful dialogue, paired with strong facilitation, to ensure that a consensus on instructional practice expectations is reached. Without this consensus, high-quality, practice-based expectations defined in the brief and within this facilitation rubric cannot be achieved.

Prior to engaging in the subsequent steps outlined in this framework, stakeholders should identify the practices (evidence-based and/or

high-leverage) that are aligned to local district needs and integral to teacher success. In the process of identifying these practices, teachers require frequent, repetitive, and scaffolded,

practice-based opportunities in which the instructional practices are infused across all professional learning events and supports to the extent appropriate. Table 1 can be used to

identify the instructional practices the state, district, school and/or program are trying to achieve.

Table 1: Evidence-Based/High-Leverage Instructional Practices

Professional Development Activity	Evidence-Based Practices	High-Leverage Practices

Step 2: Assessment and Consideration of Professional Development Existing and Desired Approach to Creating High-Quality, Practice-Based Opportunities

Once the critical content and pedagogy that teachers need to know have been identified, the next step in the process involves assessing and considering the extent to which high-quality, practice-based opportunities are integrated within professional learning activities. This goes beyond individual professional development days into an assessment of the district/schools entire professional learning system and support because modification in one event, and/or by one or two staff members, will not reach the level of desired—and needed—coordination to acquire the focus, coherence, and duration necessary to ensure ample, practice-based opportunities.

As indicated in the brief, three overarching features are fundamental to professional learning design and to solidify the effectiveness of practice-based opportunities:

- **Focus** is the degree to which opportunities to practice are targeted to the critical content and pedagogy outlined in the teacher standards and those agreed upon to establish through-lines in instructional expectations.
- **Duration** is the length of time that teachers are offered to extend learning and develop mastery of the critical content and pedagogical approaches necessary to meet the needs of a diverse student population.
- **Coherence** is the extent to which common expectations of instructional practice are reinforced and advanced throughout professional learning experiences and support, and the extent to alignment and scope and sequence are considered.
- Identifying cases in which low- or medium-quality indicators for one or more of the three approaches may indicate a need for further examination and review of the professional learning supports to provide deeper analysis and reflection. If initial findings are valid, stakeholders can proceed to Step 3. This analysis can be supported by the CEEDAR Center ICs by determining the extent to which evidence-based practices are addressed and the level of implementation that teachers are expected to employ.

To complete Step 2, stakeholders will use the professional learning assessment rubric in Table 2 to assess the degree to which the three overarching features are (or are not) integral to professional learning efforts. Stakeholders will begin by:

- Using the guiding questions to determine a quality indicator that is aligned to the professional learning approach.

Table 2: Professional Learning and Support Assessment

Use the rubric and guiding questions presented in this table to consider the breadth of practice-based opportunities offered to teachers throughout their professional learning and support experiences.

		Quality Indicators		
		Low Quality	Medium Quality	High Quality
Instructions: To what extent are practice-based approaches, as defined by the three essential features outlined in this table, reflected across the duration of a teachers professional learning experiences?		There is no evidence that the approach is integrated within professional learning experiences. Further examination of professional learning goals and activities may be warranted.	There is some evidence that the approach is integrated within professional learning experiences.	There is strong evidence that the approach is fully integrated within professional learning experiences. Further examination of professional learning goals and activities may not be warranted.
Approach	Questions to Consider			
<p>Focus Description: Critical knowledge and skills essential to effective teaching are targeted across practice-based opportunities within professional learning support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have the leadership team and professional development/TA provider identified critical content and pedagogical practices as reflected in identified needs? Are there demonstrated through-lines in instructional expectations across professional learning supports that are scaffolded to build upon content knowledge and skill level? Are the expectations of practice grounded in evidence, and do they reflect practices for a broad range of students (e.g., students with disabilities, English learners)? 			
<p>Duration Description: Teachers are offered sufficient opportunities to deepen their knowledge and hone their practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has sufficient time been built into each professional learning event to offer teachers the opportunities they need to apply what they have learned? Has sufficient time been built into professional learning to offer teachers the opportunities they need to apply what they have learned? 			
<p>Coherence Description: High-quality and highly structured, practice-based opportunities are coordinated across professional learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are opportunities to practice aligned with and coordinated across the breadth of the professional learning activities and support? To what extent does the professional learning's expectations of practice (content and pedagogical knowledge) align to local district needs and to expectations of practice (e.g., aligned observation rubrics)? 			

Step 3: Analysis of Practice-Based Opportunities

Step 3 involves engaging in analysis of individual, practice-based opportunities provided to teachers within professional learning activities and supports. This activity reflects implementation levels similar to those found in the CEEDAR Center's ICs for course syllabi (<http://cedar.education.ufl.edu/tools/innovation-configurations/>), which can be used to identify gaps in professional learning content and expectations. This step builds upon the previous steps and aids in assessing the manner in which the expectations of content and pedagogical knowledge are reinforced in practice-based opportunities that integrate the essential features of high-quality practice experiences:

- Modeling
- Spaced learning
- Varied learning opportunities
- Coaching and feedback
- Analyzing and reflecting
- Scaffolding

To complete Step 3, stakeholders will use the guiding questions to assess professional learning curriculum and objectives, including the assignments and assessments, to determine the extent to which the essential features of high-quality, practice-based opportunities are implemented.

Please keep in mind the results recorded in Table 2 so that any gaps noted in focus, duration, and coherence are considered within each professional learning activity and supports.

Table 3: Analysis of Practice-Based Opportunities

Essential Features of High-Quality, Practice-Based Opportunities		Questions for Consideration
Modeling (M)	Demonstration of how to design, enact, and evaluate instruction is provided to teachers through multiples means (e.g., faculty or peer demonstration, videos).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To what extent do professional development providers model effective strategies and routines for teachers? ■ What opportunities are teachers provided to observe and analyze expert teachers participating in curriculum planning, teaching, collaborative data analysis, and analysis of instruction?
Spaced Learning (SP)	Teachers are provided sustained and repeated opportunities to practice knowledge and skills acquired in professional learning. Opportunities are scaffolded to deepen knowledge and skills over time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To what extent are practice-based opportunities provided immediately after knowledge and skills have been acquired? ■ To what extent does the professional learning offer multiple, practice-based opportunities to practice skills? How well are these practice-based opportunities scaffolded to deepen expertise over time?
Varied Learning Opportunities (V)	Teachers are provided practice-based opportunities in which they are expected to employ strategies in varying contexts, with a diverse range of students, and under different leadership support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To what extent are teachers offered practice-based opportunities that vary in context (e.g., service delivery models, school demographics), student populations, and under different leadership support?
Coaching and Feedback (C)	Practice-based opportunities integrate explicit coaching and feedback for teachers regarding their practice and provide them with the means for improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Have coaching and feedback been established as an expectation within practice-based opportunities across professional learning activities and supports? ■ Has training been provided for personnel who are expected to provide coaching and feedback? ■ Have processes been established (e.g., feedback guidance and protocols) for use within practice-based opportunities? ■ Do teachers gain practice in providing coaching and feedback within professional learning?
Analyzing and Reflecting (A)	Practice-based opportunities establish expectations and processes for teachers to analyze and reflect upon their practice, their impact on student learning, and any necessary modifications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is there a structure in place for engaging teachers in analysis and reflection and for adapting and modifying practice accordingly? ■ Are teachers provided opportunities to collaboratively analyze student learning data and to use these findings to revise processes, curriculum, and instruction? ■ Is there a structure in place to prompt and target teacher reflection on specific elements of evidence-based or high-leverage instructional practices?
Scaffolding (S)	Teachers are provided with guidance and supports for improving practice, both of which are incrementally removed to promote independence and foster the development of expertise over time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Are teachers provided with more supports in the initial stages of their program, and are supports gradually removed as candidates progress and expertise is cultivated? ■ Are the professional learning activities and supports designed to gradually increase teachers' exposure to complex content, context, and student populations?

Instructions: In your review of coursework and field experience expectations, indicate to what extent specific coursework and field experiences integrate the essential features within practice-based opportunities by checking the essential features present as described on the preceding page; then select the integration level.

Professional Learning	Essential Features						Integration Level			
	Modeling	Spaced	Varied	Coaching	Analysis	Scaffolding	There is no evidence of practice-based opportunities within professional learning experiences	This professional learning experience includes practice-based opportunities that include 1–2 essential features.	This professional learning experience includes practice-based opportunities that include 3–4 essential features.	This professional learning experience includes practice-based opportunities that fully integrate 5–6 essential features.
Induction and Mentoring Support – Specific to Literacy Instruction		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓

Step 4: Strengthening Efforts: Enhancing Practice-Based Opportunities within professional learning supports

The final step in this process involves prioritizing the features of high-quality, practice-based opportunities that can be enhanced in professional learning activities and supports. Professional development providers can use the quality indicators (Step 2) and implementation

levels (Step 3) to select from a number of examples of practice-based opportunities that can be integrated into professional learning. Although the listing of practice-based opportunities is not all-inclusive, it can serve as a starting point.

To complete Step 4, professional development providers should review the practice-based opportunity examples and identify which are

appropriate for inclusion within professional learning activities and supports.

Once potential practice-based opportunities have been identified, professional development providers can use Table 4 to create an action plan for professional learning activities and supports.

Table 4: Enhancing Practice-Based Opportunities

COURSE-BASED				
Example	Action Plan for Implementation Identify course(s) and/or resources for implementation			
	Course(s)	Steps to Planning and Implementation	Timeline	Responsible Party
<p>Case-Based Instruction</p> <p>Teachers analyze cases of instruction across various contexts as a method for advancing their conceptual understanding of new pedagogical content as well as their ability to analyze instruction and student learning (Kagan, 1993).</p>				
<p>Laboratory-Like Experiences</p> <p>Groups of teachers closely observe content, student learners with opportunities to debrief before and after each session.</p>				
<p>Video Analysis</p> <p>Practice in which teachers' instructional experiences are captured on video and used as a tool for professional development providers to engage teachers in observation, analysis, and discussion concerning effective practice.</p>				
<p>Lesson Study</p> <p>A collaborative, practice-based approach that involves teams of teachers in collaboratively (a) analyzing student data, academic standards, and curriculum; (b) planning a lesson based on that analysis; (c) implementing the instruction with assigned students; (d) analyzing the instruction and its impact on student learning; and (e) debriefing about the lesson and discussing next steps.</p>				

