

# Building Blocks Framework



Deans for Impact set out to see what it takes to prepare teachers who are good on day one, and on the path to be great over time. Through a qualitative research project that involved visits to 18 programs in 13 states, we found that programs that prepared confident, skilled teachers shared four common elements -- modeling, practice, feedback, and alignment -- that draw upon scientific learning principles. We believe programs can better prepare future teachers by focusing on these essential Building Blocks to create more coherent, consistent candidate experiences that are anchored in practice and aligned to a common vision of effective instruction.

## MODELING



Important teaching practices are modeled for teacher-candidates and broken down into component parts so teacher-candidates understand “why” they work.

### Key elements

- Opportunities to model practice are intentionally selected to focus on practices important for novice teachers.
- Teacher-educators are strategically selected based on their ability to model effective pedagogy.
- Observations of model teaching are structured in ways that provide “worked examples” for candidates by focusing their attention, breaking the practice down into component parts, making the “why” explicit, and helping candidates connect it to their own practice.
- Programs have structures in place to support mentor teachers and program faculty in describing their practice in order to make their instructional decisions explicit and understandable to candidates.

### Questions to consider

- Are opportunities for candidates to observe model teaching focused on high-priority teaching practices for candidates?
- How does the program strategically select teacher-educators to ensure candidates have models of effective pedagogy?
- How are opportunities to observe model teaching structured to help focus candidate attention, make key components of practice and instructional decision-making transparent, and help candidates process and internalize the most important aspects of the model?
- How are teacher-educators supported in developing their capacity to make their instructional decisions explicit?

## PRACTICE



Opportunities for practice are intentionally woven throughout a teacher-candidate's experience, and increase in complexity over time.

### Key elements

- Practice opportunities are designed intentionally, deliberately sequenced and of increasing complexity over time.
- Practice opportunities are woven throughout the curriculum, alternating abstract concepts and concrete examples.
- Candidates have opportunities to practice without K-12 students -- such as approximations -- to intensify the focus of practice.
- Candidates have opportunities to practice with K-12 students to improve their technique and learn how to adapt their practice to different contexts and in real time.
- Practice opportunities are focused on a particular aspect of teaching and tied to well-defined, specific, and measurable goals connected to student learning.

### Questions to consider

- What opportunities do teacher-candidates have to practice instruction, starting from the beginning of the program?
- Are practice opportunities integrated into coursework to allow candidates to immediately apply what they are learning?
- Do candidates' practice opportunities increase in complexity and authenticity over the course of the program?
- Does the program vary the focus, setting, and scope of practices opportunities depending on the specific developmental goals for candidates?

## FEEDBACK



Teacher-candidates receive specific, timely, and actionable feedback – based on a shared vision of effective teaching – across their experiences.

### Key elements

- Feedback is specific and targeted, focusing on one or two areas of improvement that are most likely to increase student learning.
- Feedback is timely -- and is given as soon as possible after practicing a specific skill.
- After feedback is given, there are opportunities to practice the skill again, with the novice supported to adjust performance based on the feedback.
- When providing feedback, teacher-educators use consistent language, aligned to a common vision of instruction.
- Programs normalize the giving and receiving of feedback by using protocols, verbal cues, building mindsets and other techniques that make teacher-candidates more receptive to giving and receiving feedback.
- Progress based on feedback is tracked over time.

### Questions to consider

- Do feedback structures focus candidate attention on a few specific high-priority goals, paired with repeated opportunities to improve practice?
- What structures are in place to provide candidates with frequent, timely feedback on their teaching practice over the entirety of the program?
- What tools and structures are in place to create and maintain a common language for feedback?
- How does the program cultivate candidate mindsets and skills necessary to receive and incorporate feedback into their practice?
- How is feedback (and progress based on that feedback) tracked and shared both with teacher-candidates and teacher-educators?

## ALIGNMENT



Programs carefully design the arc of preparation to create a coherent experience for every candidate they prepare.

### Key elements

- The program has a purposefully sequenced curriculum that builds from basic skills to more sophisticated ones and revisits these skills at multiple points as candidates progress toward mastery.
- Teacher-educators understand how the learning experiences they facilitate fit into the overall program, and make explicit how these experiences connect to what teacher-candidates have previously learned -- and what they will learn in the future.
- The program has structures in place to reduce silos among teacher-educators and establish a common vision, expectations, and language.
- Programs have systems to allow teacher-educators to understand each teacher-candidate's progress through the program in addition to his/her performance in specific courses.
- Teacher-educators are as focused on improving their practice as they expect candidates to be, and they use data about candidates' development to guide their own improvement.

### Questions to consider

- Are the program's courses and experiences strategically sequenced to build candidate mastery of specific high-priority practices?
- Do all teacher-educators -- including program faculty, fieldwork supervisors, and mentor teachers -- understand the arc of a candidate's learning and their role in that arc?
- What structures are in place to ensure consistency (in pedagogical quality, language, expectations) across teacher-educators?
- Do all teacher-educators -- including program faculty, fieldwork supervisors, and mentor teachers -- have information on each candidate's development throughout the program?



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