If We Want Excellent Teachers, We Need Excellent Teacher Educators

In 2016, five newly-formed Teacher Preparation Transformation Centers began bringing together teacher preparation providers and K-12 school systems to share data, knowledge and best practices. These Centers–EPIC/Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR), TeacherSquared, U.S. PREP and TeachingWorks—are developing, piloting and scaling effective teacher-preparation practices to ensure that more teacher candidates graduate ready to improve student outcomes in K-12 public schools. This brief, the second in a series that the Centers will release over the next few months, focuses on a single challenge: *identifying the practices, tools and resources that teacher educators must employ to prepare the novice teachers they teach for success on day one.*

◆ Introduction

In our roles leading different education organizations, each of us has been working to improve the way new teachers are prepared. Despite different contexts, we realized we faced a common challenge to our improvement efforts: We needed access to research and tools to ensure that teacher educators–teachers of teachers–are supported to effectively prepare novice teachers.

The Teacher Preparation Transformation Center initiative created a unique opportunity for us to work together in ways that we had not done in the past. The initiative brought together networks of teacher education programs all working to improve their practices. It opened our eyes to what is possible when diverse organizations coalesce around a common challenge. Five of us–Sarah Beal (U.S. PREP), Meagan Comb (EPIC), Kaycee Salmacia (TeacherSquared) and Shari Dickstein-Staub (NCTR) with Nicole Garcia (TeachingWorks) in an advisory role–committed to work together, and with our colleagues in the field, to create a practice-based vision of what it takes to be an effective teacher educator. In this brief, we are excited to share the work we have done together over the past eight months of collaboration.

"We presented the Teacher Educator Practice Framework to a group of faculty early this summer. I think a comment from one of our faculty speaks volumes about the potential of this work. She said, 'I loved the opportunity to weigh in on teacher educator effectiveness. It's not something that ever gets discussed but is at the crux of everything we do. I can't wait to see what comes of it."

**Meagan Comb
EPIC**

| Kaycee Salmacia TeacherSquared | Meagan Comb EPIC | Shari Staub NCTR | Sarah Beal U.S. PREP |

As we began working together, we focused on a big challenge: how can we ensure that teacher educators—teachers of teachers—are prepared to support novice educators?

We were and continue to be conscious of the fact that there has been far greater clarity about the knowledge and skills that K-12 teachers must bring to their profession than those that teacher educators must bring to theirs. Sarah Beal, who served as a teacher, K-8 instructional coach, and teacher educator, reflected on her experience:

> *How can we ensure that teacher educators—teachers of teachers—are prepared to support novice educators?*

> *"As a teacher, I knew what good teachers did: They, for example, differentiate instruction for their students, create respectful learning environments and consistently assess their students' knowledge and skills. I remember engaging in professional learning with grade- and non-grade-level peers. During these collaborative opportunities, I not only learned new ideas and teaching strategies, but I also gained insight into what my students had learned before they entered my classroom and what they were expected to know and do as a result of taking my class.*
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> *When I first became an instructor for pre-service teachers, however, I realized quickly that there was no system in place for developing the practices I would need to be a skilled teacher educator. Teaching adults and preparing new teachers was new for me. I did not have a strong grasp of what effective practice looked like in this new role. And, other than a course evaluation survey I sent out at the end of each semester, I had no tools to tell me if I was preparing my teacher candidates to be classroom-ready."*
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> **Sarah Beal**
> **U.S. PREP**

As we've talked with teacher educators all over the country, we've learned that Sarah's experience is not unique. The lack of clarity about effective practices affects more than teacher educators who are course instructors like Sarah. It has an impact on all those who play a significant role in teacher education (see sidebar below). Whether they are university professors, site coordinators, clinical instructors or mentor teachers, teacher educators can benefit from having clearly articulated practices, access to professional development and aligned tools and resources that promote self-reflection, collaboration and continuous improvement.

◆ A Commitment Coalesces into a Work Group

Once it became clear that we were united in our commitment to addressing this common challenge, we had to create a plan of action. We formed a working group and began meeting in February 2017. Early conversations led us to a shared aim: to develop a framework for a set of teacher educator practices as well as data gathering and professional development resources to support teacher educators as they implement the practices effectively. We believe that strong enactment of these practices will help teacher educators prepare novice practitioners to be successful teachers of record on day one. **If we want excellent teachers, we need excellent teacher educators.**

◆ Setting Goals and Getting to Work

With the work group's purpose in mind, we established four goals.

- **Goal One**: Develop a common set of teacher educator practices
- **Goal Two**: Develop a set of teacher educator data-gathering tools
- **Goal Three**: Design teacher educator-aligned professional development materials, resources and experiences
- **Goal Four**: Pilot and test teacher educator practice-aligned tools and resources in the field

Goal One: Develop a common set of teacher educator practices. We began our work by scouring the field for definitions of effective teacher educator practices. We solicited input from more than 100 teacher preparation programs, and we conducted a landscape analysis to identify research and resources focused on effective teacher educator practice.

After synthesizing the information, we created a draft set of practices and solicited feedback from teachers and teacher educators in the field for feedback.

Our work group then met in person. Each representative brought the information she collected from her research and networks. Over two days of meetings and productive debate, the group culled the list of possible teacher educator practices to 12 core practices organized into three domains: "plan," "implement" and "improve." We defined each practice and broke it into its component parts. Figure A, which excludes the detailed lists of components for each practice, includes the domains, practices and definitions.[1]

Who are Teacher Educators?

"We see teacher educators as people who play a formal role in the training of novice teachers. They are people who provide instruction or who give guidance and support to novice teachers, and who thus render a substantial contribution to the development of novices into competent teachers. Teacher educators may hold roles such as: course instructors, professors, site coordinators, coaches/clinical instructors, P-12 mentors, or P-12 instructional leaders. This definition does not include those who support novice teachers in roles such as informal mentors or coaches, P-12 leaders who do not work in an instructional leadership role, research professors, professional development providers, or teacher scholars." Excerpted from: Identifying What Great Teacher Educators Know and Do

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[1] The complete framework, which includes components, is here.

Figure A: Teacher Educator Practice Framework

TEACHER EDUCATOR PRACTICE FRAMEWORK: PRACTICES AND DEFINITIONS	
Practice	**Definition**
Plan	
Design Rigorous Learning Experiences	Design and/or select learning experiences that meet novice teachers where they are and engage them in rigorous instruction to ensure they meet programmatic standards and expectations for performance.
Bridge Theory and Practice	Make deliberate and explicit connections between theory and P-12 classrooms and students.
Assess what Novices Know and are Able to Do	Assess what novice teachers are able to do through their performance on tasks that mirror the actual work of teaching and the skills they have been taught.
Construct Coherent Learning Experiences	Contribute to a coherent learning experience for novice teachers in order to provide a seamless, integrated and progressive learning trajectory.
Implement	
Establish a Productive Learning Environment	Create and maintain a safe space that supports risk taking, views error-making as part and parcel to the work of learning to teach, challenges ideas, and leads to the development of respectful relationships with and between novice teachers.
Communicate and Maintain Rigorous Expectations	Assume professional responsibility for novice teacher performance in relation to a set of program standards by clearly communicating about and upholding those standards.
Make the Work Teachers Do Explicit	Make the work that teachers do (e.g. enacting practices, using content knowledge, and making in the moment decisions) explicit for novices by naming the work, modeling, and making thinking and decision-making visible.
Provide Multiple Opportunities for Practice	Facilitate intentional and repeated opportunities for novice teachers to practice teaching in safe and varied learning environments. Practice opportunities increase in complexity and authenticity over time and lead novices to meet programmatic standards and expectations for performance.
Provide Targeted and Continuous Feedback	Engage in frequent cycles of concrete, actionable, and timely feedback that clearly communicate novices' strengths and growth areas, that are grounded in programmatic standards and expectations for performance, and that are followed up upon by both teacher educators and novice teachers.
Promote Principles of Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, and Social Justice	Actively address patterns of inequity by modeling principles of diversity and inclusion and promoting equity and social justice in the daily work of teacher educating. Use this lens to inform all other practices.
Improve	
Use Data to Improve Novice Teacher Practice	Gather multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data about novice teachers' practice and use those data for the purpose of improving their practice at multiple points throughout a course and/or school year.
Improve through Continuous Learning	Use data, research, best practice and professional resources in order to reflect upon, adapt and improve practice.

With our completion of a field-ready framework, we accomplished our first goal: We codified a set of teacher educator practices that the providers with whom we work will soon be piloting.[2]

Goal Two: **Develop a set of teacher educator data-gathering tools.** As we worked on the framework, we began developing aligned data gathering tools to help teacher educators understand and improve their practice. These tools—developmental rubrics and candidate perception survey questions for each practice, along with an observation protocol for one of the practices—will help teacher educators identify their own strengths and areas for growth and facilitate conversations with peers about improving their practice. We are piloting them with our providers this school year, and are currently developing additional observation protocols that will join the other tools in the field by next spring.

Goal Three: Design teacher educator-aligned professional development materials, resources and experiences. Our Centers are in the privileged position of being able to coach and support teacher preparation providers all over the country. We plan to kick off the design phase of our professional development work this fall. Each of our member Centers are tackling this work in different ways:

- NCTR will create professional development materials designed to improve mentor performance and focused on three of the framework's practices: *make the work teachers do explicit, provide multiple opportunities for practice* and *provide targeted and continuous feedback.*
- U.S. PREP will develop professional development resources specifically related to the practices of *make the work teachers do explicit, provide multiple opportunities for practice* and *improve through continuous learning.*
- TeacherSquared will support educators across the country through a professional development institute related to the practice of *using data to improve novice teacher practice.*
- EPIC will present a Calibration Workshop Series designed to help teacher educators *provide targeted and continuous feedback.*
- TeachingWorks will provide professional learning sessions and materials, as well as teacher educator coaching and support focused on the following practices: *make the work teachers do explicit, provide multiple opportunities for practice* and *provide targeted and continuous feedback.*

> *"Prior to joining this working group, I was used to doing my work in isolation. This allowed me to move quickly, but without diversity of thought. I've particularly appreciated how quickly this group has gelled as a team, and how committed our members have been to creating something helpful for our field. Working across different contexts has made our work stronger and more inclusive."*
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> **Kaycee Salmacia**
> **TeacherSquared**

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[2] We acknowledge that the Teacher Educator Practice Framework is not inclusive of everything teacher educators need to know and be able to do. For example, we believe that pedagogical content knowledge, content knowledge for teaching, and professional dispositions about teaching, learning, and learning to teach are essential components of a teacher educator's work, and in many ways comprise a pre-requisite knowledge base for enacting the practices we name. There are also structural supports that must be in place at the institutional and program levels (i.e., access to teacher candidate performance data, a clear vision for effective teaching and learning, etc.) to help teacher educators develop practices that when implemented prepare teacher candidates for success in the classroom.

Goal Four: **Pilot and test teacher educator practice-aligned tools and resources in the field**. TeacherSquared, NCTR and U.S. PREP are launching pilots of the *Framework* this fall, employing the newly-developed tools with sets of providers who will provide us with the feedback we need so that we can continue to improve the resources. All U.S. PREP coalition partners, for instance, will pilot professional development resources related to *make the work teachers do explicit, provide multiple opportunities for practice,* and *improve through continuous learning*. EPIC will pilot a certification mechanism that assesses the ability of supervisors to provide high-quality feedback and support to teacher candidates. TeachingWorks is informally piloting the tools with teacher educator professional development providers to inform wrap-around supports for the tools and accompanying teacher educator support resources.

◆ Engaging You in Our Work

We believe that it is possible to improve the way the field prepares novice teachers to enter the profession. We can do this better when we are working together—people who come from different organizations and different backgrounds—who share a common desire to continuously improve.

We hope you see the same possibilities.

Together we can learn what it takes to transform teacher preparation so that teacher educators have resources to help them on their journey toward excellence. Their students—our nation's future teachers—need them to get there. The more we work together and the more we learn from each other, the better their chances for success will be.

We are excited about the *Framework* and the tools we're developing to support them. If you would like access to these tools, other news about our work on teacher educators or updates on the broader work of the full community of practice, please contact us.

"We are excited to embark on the journey to create teacher educator practice-aligned professional development materials across Centers and in collaboration with our providers. We feel this component of our work is a tremendous opportunity to learn from and with the teacher educators in our networks and the field, and are thus hoping to create experiences that will allow us to co-design materials and capitalize on the wisdom and expertise these teacher educators bring. Engaging our peers as co-designers will help to ensure the utility and relevance of the resources we develop."

Shari Staub
NCTR