

## **Core Practices Promoted in the University of Connecticut's Teacher Education Programs+**

**Adopted 1.15.2015**

Building on the work of the Core Practice Consortium, the teacher education programs at the University of Connecticut have identified the practices below as the “core practices” we seek to develop in our teacher candidates. These practices are core—to teachers’ work and for our program—because we believe that they are particularly critical to promoting learning for K-12 students, teachable within the combination of university courses and clinical experiences we provide, and foundational for the subsequent learning and growth that teachers will do during their in-service years [1].

These are practices we seek to develop across all of our programs; in other words, all teacher candidates in our programs will learn how to facilitate discussion, even if the nature of the resulting discussions will look different if it occurs among elementary students engaged in scientific inquiry or among high school seniors engaged in a Socratic seminar. Teacher candidates will also develop other practices that are specific to their discipline or role.

We have attached numerals to the practices to facilitate identifying them; these numerals are not intended to either rank order the practices according to their importance or

indicate a sequential order in which they should be taught in our programs.

Mastering these practices at a level that equips pre-service teachers to begin their careers requires that they can implement the practices in ways that respond to the multiple kinds of diversity that exist in their classrooms. Such diversity includes race, culture, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, language(s) spoken, and socio-economic status. We also prepare teachers to work with students with special learning needs, including those with individual educational plans and gifted students. We believe that attention to such diversity is implicated throughout the practices below rather than being a stand-alone practice. It should be noted, however, that in some instances we have specifically highlighted racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity and have also identified some practices that explicitly evoke a social justice or equity pedagogical stance. We intend that teacher candidates will understand the implications of the mosaic of human difference for the implementation of these practices. For economy of language, we have chosen not to highlight specific kinds of difference within these brief explanations of the practices. In selected places, we have chosen to use language like “for all students” or to use the term “social groups” to draw attention to those practices that are particularly important to unpack in terms of their

relevance to creating equitable outcomes and access for all.

Finally, we agree with a proposal from those in the Core Practices Consortium that individual scholars and teacher education programs should not continue inventing all of their own practices or own language, as the field cannot build on prior work as easily if all of its participants continue to adopt their own definitions, terms, and conception of appropriate outcomes [2]. Thus, we have sought to use or adapt practices published by the University of Michigan [3]. Those practices below followed by a double asterisk represent practices for which our wording is either directly taken from TeachingWorks or adapted in ways we deem non-substantive. Practices followed by a single asterisk were those that we altered in somewhat substantive ways from their presentation in TeachingWorks OR that we developed ourselves but for which we borrowed some facet or language from the TeachingWorks site. Practices without asterisks are ones we have identified on our own.

In the end, we constructed a vision of core practices that made sense to us while seeking to use as many of the practices and as much of the language as seemed reasonable and helpful to promote cross-field understanding, comparison, and research. This should be a living document that evolves as the national conversation about such practices continues to unfold, as professors and practicing teachers

continue to work with our pre-service teachers and each other, and as we have other reasons to continue our conversation about a critical core of practices appropriate for a beginning teacher.

## **PLAN**

### **1. Identify appropriate student learning objectives**

Teachers will establish objectives that target the specific kinds of understanding, skill, and language students should develop as a result of individual lessons. Choice of content objectives are informed by: the larger unit or course objectives; curricular standards set by the school, district, state, or federal requirements; the teachers' understanding of the specific content and broader discipline; and the teachers knowledge of students' current understandings, skills and abilities, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These objectives, in turn, will inform the teachers design and/or implementation of classroom activities and assessments. Teachers first identify content objectives. They then identify language objectives to support the core content targeted by content objectives and/or the classroom activities being used (see the next practice).

### **2. Design and sequence research-based pedagogical activities that include strategies, activities and approaches that are responsive to cultural, linguistic, ability and other student differences.**

Teachers select--and modify--instructional activities and materials designed to achieve their objectives for all the students they are teaching. Their choice of activities and materials--and their decisions regarding how to modify either--is informed by their knowledge of their students as both individuals and members of cultural and social groups (see practices 5, 7, and 8 below). Pedagogical activities should be based on scholarship in the field, including research-supported knowledge of student learning and effective assessment as well as research on how students learn in the different subject areas. When designing and sequencing activities, teachers also seek to create opportunities for all students to master foundational concepts in a discipline before moving on to more advanced ones, and provide multiple opportunities to practice while initially providing more supports.

### **3. Plan to make content explicit through explanation, modeling, multiple representations, and examples**

Making content explicit is essential to providing all students with access to fundamental ideas and practices in a given discipline. Effective efforts to do this attend to the integrity of the discipline and to students' likely interpretations of it and recognize the contributions of diverse individuals and groups to the development of the discipline. They include strategically choosing and using representations and examples that integrate a variety of cultures and groups to

build understanding and remediate misconceptions, using language carefully, highlighting core ideas while sidelining potentially distracting ones, and making one's own thinking visible while modeling and demonstrating.

### **4. Plan learning opportunities that teach content through inquiry.**

Engaging students in inquiry and other related practices such as disciplinary argumentation, problem solving, and problem posing, is essential to providing all students with access to fundamental ideas and practices in a given discipline. Teachers carefully adapt and design lessons and activities that engage students in these practices, which afford opportunities for sense-making, wrestling with and sorting out common misconceptions, and considering multiple perspectives, points of views and approaches. Teachers' planning reveals their understanding of the complexity of student participation in inquiry and related practices and provides ample support for students to learn *how to do* these practices and improve their capacity to enact and learn from these practices over time. Teachers' planning further attends to individual differences, group dynamics, and students' backgrounds and comfort level in taking risks as they engage in these sophisticated learning practices.

## **IMPLEMENT**

### **5. Implement and adjust learning activities in pursuit of worthwhile objectives and in response to students**

Teachers implement appropriate pedagogical strategies to begin, support, and extend student learning, with emphasis on strategies known to be effective with common patterns of student thinking. During a lesson, teachers foster student engagement with the goal of providing equitable access to new material and opportunities for practice to all students. They adapt instruction in response to what students do or say while staying focused on the intent of their lesson objectives.

### **6. Elicit and interpret individual student thinking**

Teachers pose questions or tasks that encourage students to share their thinking about specific academic content in order to evaluate student understanding, guide instructional decisions, and surface ideas that will benefit other students. To do this effectively, a teacher draws out a student's thinking through carefully chosen questions and tasks, considering and checking alternative interpretations of the student's ideas and methods. This includes attending to the linguistic demands of the questions and tasks, and adapting those questions/tasks appropriately for all students. [4] Interpretation of student thinking also requires understanding of the

knowledge students bring with them from their in- and out-of school experiences.

### **7. Establish norms and routines for classroom discourse central to the discipline**

Each discipline has norms and routines that reflect the ways in which people in the field construct and share knowledge. These norms and routines vary across subjects, but often include identifying premises and assumptions, building arguments, considering confirming and disconfirming evidence, generating alternative explanations, and showing one's thinking in detail. Teaching students what disciplinary norms and routines are, why they are important, and how to use them is crucial to building understanding and capacity in a given subject. Teachers may use explicit explanation, modeling, and repeated practice to do this [5]. Teachers use multicultural instructional examples as pedagogical bridges to connect disciplinary norms and patterns of task engagement and organizing with more specific knowledge and practices common within the cultural groups to which their students belong.

### **8. Use knowledge of students as individuals and members of cultural and social groups to inform instruction**

Learning is more likely and more lasting when it builds on what individuals already know and when teachers know their students both as

individuals as people with personalities, interests, histories, and talents and as members of culturally and socially-defined groups. Thus, teachers develop methods of knowing their students and the communities to which their students belong and use this knowledge to inform instruction<sup>1</sup>. Teachers find methods of actively building up required background knowledge for sub-groups of students who would not be able to access rigorous content without it<sup>2</sup>. Teachers incorporate students' cultures and experiences to expand students' intellectual horizons and academic achievement. They attend to the different communication styles of the cultural groups to which their students belong to help students access content and skills and develop the capacities to style or code-shift so that they can communicate in

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<sup>1</sup> Teachers acquire information about students' interests and knowledge through surveys, review of student portfolios, feedback from teachers and parents, conversations before class, participation in extracurricular or community events, and classroom activities that allow learners to express themselves and their interests.

<sup>2</sup> Attention to building on and building up background knowledge facilitates students' construction of knowledge, producing rich and well developed conceptual understanding rather than rote memorization. Attention to other aspects of learners also helps teachers make content more relevant and relatable, and develops trust and relationships that can further facilitate student commitment to learning.

different ways with different people in different setting for different purposes [6].

## **ASSESS**

### **9. Select and use equitable assessment methods to check understanding and respond in ways that support student learning**

Teachers select, develop and use assessments that effectively measure students' learning and attend to their individual academic, social, cultural and language proficiencies and needs. They actively and deliberately use a variety of these methods to assess what students are learning during and between lessons. Teachers critically evaluate these methods to identify and remedy potential bias. Frequent checks provide information about students' current levels of competence and help the teacher adjust instruction during a single lesson or from one lesson to the next. They may include a range of formative and summative assessment strategies. Teachers use data to adjust instruction.

### **10. Provide oral and written feedback on student work**

Effective feedback helps focus students' attention on specific qualities of their work; it highlights areas of both success and those needing improvement; and delineates ways to improve. Good feedback is timely, specific, not overwhelming in scope, and focused on the

academic task, and supports students' productive perceptions of their own capability. Giving skillful feedback requires the teacher to make strategic choices about the frequency, method, and content of feedback and to communicate in ways that are understandable by students.

### **ANALYZE**

#### **11. Reflect on instruction and student progress, including questions of ethics, equity, and next areas for professional growth**

Teachers study their own teaching and that of their colleagues in order to improve their instructional practices for whole group and individual progress. Analyzing instruction may take place individually or collectively and involves using evidence to identify salient features of the instruction and to make reasoned hypotheses for how to improve. Teachers demonstrate ethical practices [7] and are sensitive to issues of status and equity within the classroom including an understanding of the biases and assumptions inherent in school knowledge, negotiate patterns of inclusion and exclusion, and are sensitive and knowledgeable about individual and group dynamics [8].

### **ESTABLISH A POSITIVE AND SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

#### **12. Establish and reinforce consistent routines and positively stated behavioral expectations**

Teachers maximize engaged learning, create a safe and positive learning environment, and minimize disruptions and distractions through establishing consistent routines and positively stated behavioral expectations. Teachers deliberately foster positive and reduce negative interactions with and between students and create opportunities for positive inter-group relationships. Positive interactions are encouraged through establishing explicit and positively stated expectations of behavior, explicit instruction in appropriate behaviors, and positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviors. Teachers' use of such expectations—and methods of reinforcing them—are informed by school-wide behavioral expectations and practices if available. Teachers also organize time, space, and materials strategically and deliberately teach students organizational and instructional routines. This can include demonstrating and rehearsing routines and maintaining them consistently.

#### **13. Promote cognitive, emotional and social engagement**

Teachers maximize students' cognitive and emotional engagement in the learning process.

Teachers present content and skills in ways that make them more relevant to students' lives, cultures, and concerns and help students become critical consumers of information. Teachers create opportunities for students to ask their own questions, to engage in inquiry and discovery, and to construct their own meanings through speaking and writing their own thoughts. By having students meaningfully engage with content and skills, teachers create opportunities for students to become active partners in constructing their own understandings of both content and of the nature of various disciplines.

**PROMOTE DEMOCRATIC  
PARTICIPATION & COMMUNITY**

**14. Facilitate a whole-class discussion**

In a whole-class discussion, the teacher and all of the students work on specific content together, using one another's ideas as resources. The purposes of a discussion are to build collective knowledge and capability in relation to specific instructional goals and to allow students to practice listening, speaking, and interpreting. In instructionally productive discussions, the teacher and a wide range of students contribute orally, listen actively, and respond to and learn from others' contributions.

**15. Facilitate smaller group collaboration**

Teachers create smaller groups and work with them when instructional goals call for in-depth interaction among students and in order to teach students to work collaboratively. To use groups effectively, teachers strategically assign students to groups, choose tasks that require and foster collaborative work, issue clear directions that permit groups to work semi-independently, and implement mechanisms for holding students accountable for both collective and individual learning. Teachers use their own time strategically, deliberately choosing which groups to work with, when, and on what.

**16. Invite students to engage in socially meaningful action.**

Teachers promote the kinds of deeper and critical thinking and communication skills required for thoughtful participation in democratic life and invite students to engage in socially meaningful action in their classrooms and beyond. This includes helping students identify how social, cultural, political, and economic forces influence social, academic and personal outcomes for students within their schools and the larger society so that students can articulate and challenge how these forces align and interact. Attention will be given to helping students develop and acquire a critical vocabulary (i.e. institutional racism, ableism, sexism, racism, heteronormativity, classism, etc.). Teachers help students understand that

knowledge has moral and political elements and consequences, which may obligate them to take social action to promote freedom, equality, and justice for everyone [9].

## **COLLABORATE AND COMMUNICATE WITH FAMILIES, COLLEAGUES AND COMMUNITY**

### **17. Collaborate with a parent or guardian**

Regular communication between teachers and parents/guardians supports student learning. Teachers communicate with parents to: share information about students' academic progress, behavior, or development; seek information and help; and request parental involvement in school. These collaborations and communications may take place in person, in writing, or over the phone. Productive communications are attentive to considerations of language and culture and designed to support parents and guardians in fostering their child's success in and out of school [10]. Such communication helps both parents and teachers learn, build trust, and create information that can support how teachers and parents proceed to support specific learners.

### **18. Collaborate with other professionals, including advocacy for self & students**

Teachers routinely collaborate with fellow teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and specialists within and beyond the school. This

collaboration helps teachers improve their own and others' practice, to assess classroom and institutional structures, and to advocate for conditions where all students have access to knowledge and the greatest amount of student learning can occur [11]. Collaboration entails skillful communication, which is succinct, respectful, and focused on specific professional topics in both oral and written formats [12].

### **19. Establish and maintain respectful relationships with larger communities to support students' learning and well-being.**

Teachers with knowledge of and respectful relationships with the communities in which schools are located can support student learning. Teachers identify community funds of knowledge, resources and assets and integrate them into the curriculum while enhancing students' investments in their communities.

## **References**

- [1] Ball & Forzani, 2009; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009)
- [2] (see McDonald, Kazemi, and Kavanagh, 2013)
- [3] University of Michigan, Elementary Teacher Preparation Program, Teaching Works, <http://www.teachingworks.org/work-of-teaching/high-leverage-practices>
- [4] Adapted from TeachingWorks
- [5] Adapted from TeachingWorks



[6] Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, Research and Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

[7] Adapted from TeachingWorks and Boston Teacher Residency *Instructional Vision, Gateways, and School-based tasks*, author.

[8] Grossman, P., Hammerness, K. & McDonald, M. (2009) Redefining teaching, re-imagining teacher education, *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 15(2): 73-289

[9] Banks, J.A. (2014). *An Introduction to Multicultural Education, Fifth Edition*. Boston: Pearson, Allyn & Bacon.

[10] Adapted from TeachingWorks

[11] Adapted from TeachingWorks

[12] Adapted from TeachingWorks

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Susan Payne, Ann Traynor, Suzanne Wilson, Michael Young

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*IB/M School Partner Steering Committee Members:*

Andrea (Annie) Kuhn, Grade 2 Teacher, Buttonball Lane School, Glastonbury, CT  
June Cahill, Academic Dean, E.B.Kennelly School, Hartford, CT  
Russell Sills, Principal, Windsor High School, Windsor, CT

*IB/M Lead Teachers/Site Coordinators:*

Jessica Luntta, Mayberry School, East Hartford  
Mary O'Connell-White, O'Brien School, East Hartford  
Dawn Steigelfest, Hebron Avenue School, Glastonbury  
Sandy Nicholas, Smith Middle School, Glastonbury  
Kristen Taverne, Glastonbury High, Glastonbury  
Nicolle Bratkovics, The Sport and Medical Sciences Academy, Hartford  
Sue Irvine, Southeast Elementary School, Mansfield  
Janet Pagoni, Goodwin Elementary School, Mansfield  
Martha Davis, Annie E. Vinton School, Mansfield  
Brenda Moulton, Mansfield Middle School, Mansfield  
Karen Parulo, E.O. Smith, Mansfield  
Shirley Cowles, Sage Park Middle School, Windsor  
Marge Renno, Windsor High, Windsor  
Brendan Tormey, Center Elementary School, Willington  
Deb Ostein, Hall Memorial School, Willington  
Tami Bombard, Natchaug Elementary School, Windham  
Stephanie George, North Windham Elementary School, Windham  
Sheila McCracken, Windham Center School, Windham  
Kathy Koljian, Windham High, Windham

*IB/M Schools as Clinics Committee Members:*

Mary Lou Duffy, Principal, Hartford  
Sarah Diggs, Director of Professional Learning, Hartford  
Autumn Baltimore, Talent Development Manager, Hartford  
Marcia Huddy, Professional Development Supervisor, East Hartford  
Bruce Silva, Superintendent, Region 19  
David Harding, Superintendent, Willington  
Anthony Gasper, Deputy Superintendent, Windham  
Rosemary Tralli, Assistant Superintendent, Glastonbury  
Heather Elsinger, Talent Development Director, Manchester  
Vonetta Romeo-Rivers, Director of Performance, Evaluation & Talent Development, Manchester  
Mary Lou Ruggiero-Colwell, Principal, Manchester