



## *Preparing Personnel*

# ONGOING PRACTICE-BASED OPPORTUNITIES AND FEEDBACK

## Description

Practice-based opportunities allow candidates to integrate content and pedagogy acquired through coursework into practice through strategically aligned field experiences (Benedict, Holdheide, Brownell, & Foley, 2016). They should occur throughout personnel preparation, with candidates reflecting on what they learned, coupled with regular feedback from preparation program faculty.

## Overview

Practice-based opportunities have proven effective for preparing candidates in other fields. For example, both **health care and the military** have found success in aligning learned skills with opportunities to practice in real-time settings to **improve the use of evidence-based practice** (Benedict et al., 2016; OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020; Sookermany, 2012). Like education, these other fields have found that opportunities for practice are **particularly effective** when **coupled with feedback or critiques** (OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020; Sookermany, 2012).

In an education context, practice-based opportunities are most effective when they are--

- carefully **planned and interwoven** with coursework,
- implemented in **high-quality** settings, and
- **reoccurring** to ensure multiple and varied opportunities for feedback (Brownell, Chard, Benedict, & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2018).

These experiences allow candidates the essential opportunity to identify and reflect on ineffective practice (OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020).

In a 2016 brief, the CEDAR Center highlighted that **focus, duration, and alignment** with coursework are three of the most impactful considerations for the successful development of practice-based opportunities in educator preparation (Benedict et al., 2016).

## Research Findings

Research on practice-based opportunities indicates the following:

- Opportunities to practice and receive feedback throughout personnel preparation better expose candidates to children and students with **varying levels of instructional support needs**, including those with disabilities (Benedict et al., 2016).
- Practice-based teacher education leads to candidates having an increased capacity to **adapt** and thus better serve all learners in an educational setting (Janssen, Gross, & Westbroek, 2015; Sayeski et al., 2019).
- Opportunities to practice specific skills and pedagogy are linked to **increased problem-solving** capabilities (Sayeski et al., 2019).
- Practice-based opportunities improve the capacity of candidates to **collaborate** with other practitioners (Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Kiely, 2015).
- Practice-based opportunities allow **both general and special education** candidates to function effectively in a **multi-tiered system of supports framework** (Leko et al., 2015).
- Practice and feedback delivered through diverse methods such as **peer coaching** and **bug-in-ear coaching** have been found not only to be more **cost-effective** but also to positively impact candidates' efficacy and in some cases **student achievement** (Brownell et al., 2019).

### Overview (Continued)

To effectively implement practice-based opportunities, preparation providers should familiarize candidates with knowledge about evidence-based practices and provide feedback through a set of **validated frameworks** for describing and observing such practices (OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020). This feedback should be **goal oriented** and be focused on **balancing direct critique** and building the **capacity of candidates to practice self-reflection** (Cornelius & Nagro, 2014).

### Research Findings (Continued)

Evidence shows that candidates who have experienced practice-based opportunities aligned with coursework are more likely to use **evidence-based practices with fidelity** than peers who did not experience similar opportunities (Chorzempa, Smith, & Sileo, 2019; Mason-Williams, Frederick, & Mulcahy, 2015; OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020).

## Part of a Strategic Approach

As personnel preparation continues to evolve, many diverse methods of incorporating practice-based opportunities and feedback have emerged. Methods built into traditional preparation programs include **bug-in-ear coaching** and **virtual simulation** opportunities, while some nontraditional programs, such as **residency programs**, provide reoccurring opportunities for practice and feedback within educational settings (Benedict et al., 2016; OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020).

## Exemplars

- **Project VIDEO.** This OSEP-funded fellowship administered by the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education and Human Development supports 75 special education and speech–language pathology candidates in serving students with learning disabilities by providing practice-based opportunities and aligned coursework.
- **Project CREED.** Project CREED (Culturally Responsive Exceptional Educators for Diversity) is an OSEP-funded project at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical (A&T) University, where scholarship-funded special education teacher candidates are given the opportunity to practice delivering evidence-based practices and receive ongoing feedback throughout their preparation in a variety of settings, including in high-poverty and low-performing rural and urban settings. By providing opportunities to practice pedagogy and receive feedback in these diverse settings, North Carolina A&T helps preservice candidates become culturally competent educators.

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

## Resource Spotlight

- **[Learning to Teach: Practice-Based Preparation in Teacher Education.](#)** This brief from the CEEDAR Center presents an overview of the essential features of high-quality, structured, and sequenced opportunities to practice in teacher preparation programs. *Learning to Teach* analyzes four innovative methods of providing practice-based opportunities that can be embedded in coursework by teacher educators (microteaching, case-based instruction, virtual reality, and lab-like experiences) and four field-based, practice-based experiences (video analysis, tutoring, lesson study, and coaching). This brief also highlights additional exemplars from institutions of higher education (IHEs) that have effectively integrated practice-based opportunities and feedback into their programs.

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- Identify essential learning outcomes for all students across the course of the preparation program.
- Select evidence-based practices and pedagogical techniques that candidates will be expected to learn and apply before exiting the program.
- Identify criteria to determine whether candidates successfully implemented these evidence-based practices and pedagogy.
- Use a validated framework for observing candidate practice and provide feedback accordingly.
- Work with local education agency (LEA) partner(s) for high-quality and reoccurring field placement settings.
- Have LEAs select high-quality teachers who can serve as cooperating teachers or mentors for candidates during their clinical experiences.
- Determine if the State education agency (SEA) requires evidence that practice-based opportunities are embedded in the preparation programs.
- Have the SEA establish a system for preparation programs to communicate data related to practice-based opportunities back to the State.
- Ensure that the SEA identifies funding sources (e.g., ESSA, Title II, IDEA) to incentivize local or district partnerships with preparation programs.

### Initial Start-Up

- Convene preparation program faculty to collaboratively align syllabi to emphasize repeated opportunities for practicing critical content and pedagogy throughout the program.
- Consider the focus of the practices emphasized, their duration, and their alignment with coursework across the program.
- Train preparation program faculty in the use of the observation and feedback framework.
- Ensure that cooperating teachers in field placement settings can model and provide coaching and feedback on the evidence-based practices emphasized in the coursework.

## Related Services

Practice-based opportunities coupled with feedback have long been implemented as part of related service personnel preparation. Preparation programs across all related service professions place emphasis on providing candidates with opportunities to engage in field experiences in a **variety of educational contexts and student populations** (OSEP Symposium, 2019). Exposing candidates to various contexts offers them an opportunity to gain experience in adapting evidence-based practices to be **responsive to all populations served**. Feedback to candidates about their implementation of evidence-based practices should reflect the appropriateness and effectiveness of the adaptations.

As enrollment in related service personnel preparation programs continues to increase and become more diverse, many programs have started implementing practice-based opportunities in inventive ways (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2019). One innovative program that integrates ongoing practice-based opportunities and feedback into related service preparation is [Project LinkS](#). This OSEP-funded grant at the University of Kentucky aims to improve speech–language pathology preparation by providing explicit training in **telepractice** for the delivery of speech–language services while concurrently embedding ongoing clinical experiences in rural schools through **teleconferencing**. Over the course of the 5-year grant, Project LinkS intends to prepare 40 master’s-level speech–language pathologists who will commit to a 3-year service obligation delivering supports to students with disabilities. More information on this and similar programs can be found on OSEP’s [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).

## Critical Components for Success (Continued)

### Continuous Improvement

- Collect program completion data to analyze the effectiveness of practice-based opportunities.
- Begin identifying indicators of proficiency for practices that candidates struggle to master.
- Convene preparation program faculty to address these indicators and restructure the program as needed.
- Ensure that schools in which field placements take place provide regular and structured feedback to the preparation program.

### Leveraging Lessons Learned

- Convene preparation program leadership, SEA, and LEAs to determine the feasibility of sustaining and/or scaling up effective practice-based opportunities across the State.
- Identify new partnerships between preparation programs and LEAs.
- Share success stories.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

## Early Childhood

While practice-based opportunities in early childhood special education (ECSE) and early intervention (EI) preparation are still emerging, practice-based opportunities and feedback continue to be widely implemented in early childhood fields (OSEP Symposium, 2019). ECSE and EI professionals work in a **variety of settings, including nonschool settings**. Therefore, preparation providers must ensure that their programs feature practice-based opportunities and feedback **across settings** (e.g., home, childcare, preschools). A study of ECSE candidates found that those who had several field experiences **felt better prepared** to serve infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities (Recchia & Puig, 2011). As adequate feelings of preparedness are linked to **increased job satisfaction**, which in turn is linked to **increased retention** of novice personnel, offering opportunities for practice and feedback in various early childhood settings is **essential to address shortages** of personnel serving students with disabilities (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop & Darling-Hammond, 2016). To reduce shortages, preparation program leaders must **collaborate with faculty** to identify all necessary settings **where practice-based experiences** must be **embedded**.

## Stakeholder Spotlight

- **Preparation Program Faculty.** As the party responsible for introducing evidence-based practices to candidates, preparation program faculty play a key role in facilitating opportunities for candidates to apply those practices in their clinical experiences. McDonald, Kazemi, and Schneider Kavanagh (2013) introduced a **framework** for implementing core practices and activities into personnel preparation that many preparation providers have adopted when implementing instruction on evidence-based practices. This framework consists of a cycle: **introducing the practice** to candidates, **preparing candidates** to embed the practice in their clinical experience, the **candidates implementing the practice** with students, and the **instructor analyzing and providing feedback** to the candidates on their implementation of the practice. More information on the role of personnel preparation program instructors in enhancing the availability of effective personnel through ongoing practice-based opportunities and feedback can be found on OSEP's [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).

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