OECD Initial Teacher Preparation Study

Promising practices

TeachingWorks: A practice-based approach for preparing teachers in the United States
This case study describes a “promising practice” drawn from an OECD review of Initial Teacher Preparation in the United States on 25-28 October 2016.

The OECD review team identified a number of “promising practices” in each country. These practices may not be widespread or representative, but seen in the context of other challenges, they represent a strength or opportunity to improve the country’s initial teacher preparation system – and for other countries to learn from them.

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Promising practice 4.
TeachingWorks: A practice-based approach for preparing teachers in the United States

Context

Based at the University of Michigan, TeachingWorks is among the lead organisations in the Unites States that is working to define the core work of teaching—the essential practices and tasks that must be done well for all students to learn—so that it may be better taught to beginning teachers (DeMonte, 2017[1]). Established in 2011, the mission of TeachingWorks is to create a system for teacher preparation and professional training that ensures equitable access to effective teaching practices in Michigan and across the US (Teaching Works, 2018[2]).

In the state of Michigan, during the 2003-2013 period, students’ performance in early literacy fell behind most of the other states. For example, in relation Michigan’s relative rank in fourth-grade reading proficiency among white students, Michigan moved from thirteenth to forty-fifth in the nation. State students also suffered a dramatic drop in eighth grade Hispanic students’ relative rank in maths – from fourth to forty-third. Further, Michigan was, in 2013, among the last six states for improvement in fourth-grade reading (Lenhoff, Arellano and Joy, 2015[3]).

This decline, however, was not uniform across schools. As shown in Figure 1, some high-poverty elementary schools had students who far exceeded state averages in achievement. This demonstrates that it is possible to provide effective teaching and turn around Michigan’s declines. The imperative of TeachingWorks is to ensure that every school has teachers who are able to enact effective teaching practices. TeachingWorks approach to research and professional training is based in the recognition that teaching is a complex practice that needs specialised knowledge, insight, and capability, and those competences can and must be effectively taught through practiced-based teacher education.
What does the University of Michigan approach to teacher preparation entail?

**Clinical Practice**

The initial teacher education (ITE) programmes at the University of Michigan (UM) are informed by TeachingWorks and operate in close partnership with local K-12 schools. Strong links between research and practice are prioritized. Teacher candidates progress through the programme in cohorts of 20 to 30 candidates and complete academic coursework and guided experiences in schools. The secondary programmes at UM, for example, use an approach called Learning and Teaching the Disciplines through Clinical Rounds to integrate the content knowledge and practices that teachers need to teach specific subjects. Candidates present a video of their teaching practice and deeply analyse it with peers, school-based mentor teachers, and university faculty course and field instructors. The approach began in 2005 and has grown in five content areas: social studies, mathematics, science, English language, Arts and world languages.

**High-leverage practices**

TeachingWorks puts a strong focus on the development of professional practice and training. A key pillar in this approach is the teaching of high-leverage practices (HLP). These practices are understood as the core capabilities of the work of teaching and represent the “best bets” about those skills that are central to foster learning and promote equity. The challenges when trying to develop strong teacher training is the lack of consistency of professional language, the lack of or contradictory evidence of teaching effects, the opportunities available for grounding teacher education in practice, and the need of a new generation of assessments of teaching practice (Loewenberg and M. Forzani, 2012[4]). The importance of HLP comes from two propositions: first, knowing content and caring about students is not enough, teachers need to be able to effectively implement what they know.
Second, teacher competences need to be specific and assessable, rather than general benchmarks for good practice. Box 1 briefly lists the HLPs identified by TeachingWorks.

### Box 1. TeachingWorks High-Leverage Practices

1. Leading a group discussion.
2. Explaining and modelling content, practices, and strategies.
3. Eliciting and interpreting individual students’ thinking.
4. Diagnosing particular common patterns of student thinking and development in a subject-matter domain.
5. Implementing norms and routines for classroom discourse and work.
6. Coordinating and adjusting instruction during a lesson.
7. Specifying and reinforcing productive student behaviour.
8. Implementing organizational routines.
9. Setting up and managing small group work.
10. Building respectful relationships with students.
11. Talking about a student with parents or other caregivers.
12. Learning about students’ cultural, religious, family, intellectual, and personal experiences and resources for use in instruction.
15. Checking student understanding during and at the conclusion of lessons.
16. Selecting and designing formal assessments of student learning.
17. Interpreting the results of student work, including routine assignments, quizzes, tests, projects, and standardized assessments.
18. Providing oral and written feedback to students.
19. Analysing instruction for the purpose of improving it.


### Networks and partnerships

At the state level, TeachingWorks is part of two networks of university-based teacher preparation programmes in Maryland and Michigan. Although each network focuses on their distinctive interests and needs, for example, in 2017 the Maryland Program Network (MdPN) worked on disrupting biases against children of colour and helping beginning teachers recognise the potential of all children, they also address common challenges such as the development of a common language and understanding of the high-leverage practices.
Across the country, TeachingWorks collaborates with more than 70 university-based and residency teacher education programmes, both focusing on the application of HLPs and improving teacher education pedagogies.

Figure 2. TeachingWorks reach

![Map of TeachingWorks reach](source)


**Video resources and streaming seminar series**

More than 1,800 instructional videos are available on a dedicated site to illustrate what high-leverage practices look like in real classroom situations. These 200 hours of video footage feature 11 of the 19 TeachingWorks’ HLPs, organised in 3 collections: elementary mathematics laboratory, measures of effective teaching extensions, and video exemplars. Moreover, the livestreaming of the seminar series provides an opportunity for practitioners and scholars together to reflect about diverse challenges in education and innovation. During 2018, the seminars reached more than 2,000 attendees and viewers.

**Why is it a strength?**

The OECD review team in its visit to the United States on 25-28 October 2016 concluded that the TeachingWorks approach to preparing teachers was a strength in that it:

- **Improves the quality of clinical experience.** TeachingWorks focus on providing teacher candidates with high quality clinical experience, rather than just increasing the quantity of the clinical training. They recognise clinical faculty, offer residency programmes and partner with schools to support this.

- **Builds consensus on core practice.** The University of Michigan has developed a prioritised set of key practices and content that teachers need to be able to teach regardless of context, and has created an organisation, TeachingWorks, to provide professional development and performance assessments to other providers and teachers in these high-leverages practices and content.
How could it be improved?

The OECD review team also noted that:

- **Change and co-operation at scale is a challenge.** It is difficult to change and spread good practice in a decentralised and highly autonomous system. Not all faculties, K-12 schools, and districts are ready to build strong partnerships with each other, and implement high-leverage practices and content with fidelity. Helping other providers to change may require a different set of strategies and skills than operating your own programme.

- **High-leverage practices need to be explicitly linked to research evidence and updated accordingly.** Robust and valid evidence on teaching practices continues to be challenging and relatively scarce. TeachingWorks’ high-leverage practice should be connected with the research base from where these originate and regularly revised and rethought based on new evidence. Further, the way these practices are taught and disseminated lays the foundation for TeachingWorks to contribute with the production of new evidence on their effectiveness in particular contexts and on pedagogies for teacher educators.

For more information


