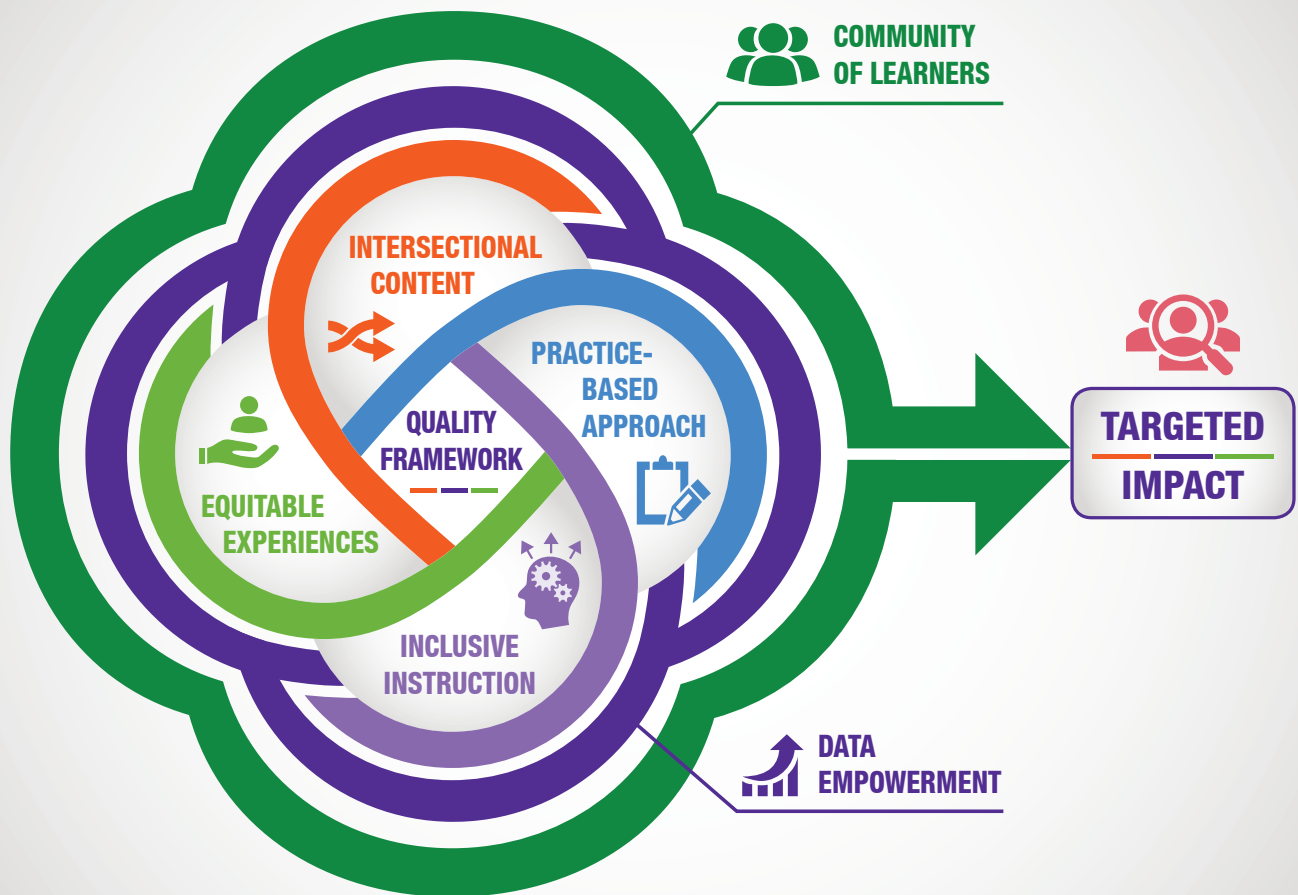


Brief: Inclusive Instruction



A Higher Standard

Suggested Citation:

Alvarez McHatton, P., Moody, J., Kohler, K., & Lisic, E. (2023). *BranchED Framework for the Quality Preparation of Educators: An Inclusive Instruction*. Peachtree City, GA: Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity.



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Published by Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity, an imprint of M.E.B. Alliance for Educator Diversity, Inc., 100 World Drive, Suite 101, Peachtree City, GA 30269.

<https://www.educatordiversity.org/>



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Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity (BranchED)

Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity, or BranchED, is the only non-profit organization in the country dedicated to strengthening, growing, and amplifying the impact of educator preparation at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), with the longer-range goals of both diversifying the teaching profession and intentionally addressing critical issues of educational equity for all students. Our vision is for all students to access diverse, highly effective educators.

This goal is accomplished through application of our *Framework for the Quality Preparation of Educators*¹ (the Framework), which outlines a roadmap to create teacher preparation programs that meet the needs of our increasingly diverse student body. The Framework seeks to build equity-oriented educator preparation programs that prepare educators to reflect, respect, and reify the value of the diversity of America's PK12 school children. It offers educator preparation providers (EPPs) a common vision of what high quality, culturally sustaining educator preparation is, and a coherent and sustained approach to implementing evidence-based practices that accomplish vitally important educational equity work.

BranchED Framework for Quality Preparation of Educators

BranchED created the first and only evidence-based framework for the quality preparation of teachers which addresses diversity as a fundamental component of quality. While we assert that each institution has a unique context, we believe that certain key elements are fundamental across all programs, such as: mutually beneficial partnerships with PK-12 and community stakeholders; a coherent, content-rich curricula; culturally and linguistically relevant and sustaining pedagogy; scaffolded and authentic opportunities for practice; genuine community engagement; and equitable opportunities for students to thrive. BranchED's framework is the lens through which we support EPPs' continuous improvement and innovation efforts. It is the bedrock of all organizational activities.

The Framework was developed through a multi-state process that began in the summer of 2016 and proceeded through the end of 2018. This included a review of the literature on existing practice in teacher preparation and an array of one-on-one interviews with over 50 faculty and leaders of EPPs, representatives of advocacy organizations, teacher groups, and state program approval and licensure department personnel. Subsequent focus groups helped to clarify and strengthen the Framework and its principles. A Charette and a Critical Friends Group, both consisting of prominent thought leaders in teacher education reform within and beyond MSIs, were leveraged to garner specific feedback on the Framework and its RoadMap documents.

BranchED's Framework is unique in that it does not focus on candidate competencies nor philosophical orientation. Rather, it focuses on six design principles that high-quality educator preparation programs implement to ensure graduates are competent and confident educators able to leverage, not fear or ignore, the differences among their students. Two of these design principles (**Community of Learners** and **Data Empowerment**) provide the foundation for the remaining design principles: **Practice-Based Approach**, **Inclusive Instruction**, **Equitable Experiences**, and **Intersectional Content**.

Each of the design principles was based on contemporary mixed methods research in the fields of teaching and teacher education.^{2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12} Each is defined in terms of the critical shift it calls EPPs to make and is operationalized by a set of indicators that help to guide continuous improvement efforts. The Framework is asset-based, formative, and designed for the purposes of continuous improvement, rather than compliance. It is not a one-size-fits-all model; rather, its' design principles serve as critical focus areas in which providers can concentrate their improvement efforts.



Design Principles



Quality educator preparation is catalyzed by a broad-based **Community of Learners**. The Educator Preparation Provider (EPP) establishes a community of learners through leadership, shared responsibility for candidate learning, and professional collaboration.



Quality Educator preparation is **Data Empowered**. The EPP has an active culture of inquiry, utilizing an authentic and ongoing cycle of evidence-based improvement that begins with asking thoughtful questions, moves through organizational learning and action, and ends with an evaluation of the effectiveness of actions taken.



Quality educator preparation is grounded in **Intersectional Content**. Before program completion, candidates demonstrate mastery of content related to learners, learning, subject matter, content knowledge for teaching, pedagogical knowledge, assessment, and engagement with families and communities. Such knowledge is dynamic, constructed and overlapping.



Quality educator preparation is experiential and incorporates a **Practice-Based Approach**. The EPP purposefully engages candidates in direct experience of teaching (practice) and focused reflection, in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop the capacity to contribute to diverse communities.



Quality educator preparation fosters **Inclusive Instruction**. Inclusive pedagogy minimizes or removes barriers to learning or assessment and supports the success of all learners, while ensuring that academic standards are not diminished. Such pedagogy includes the integration of culturally and linguistically sustaining practices, social and emotional learning, cognitive science, and trauma-informed care.



Quality educator preparation ensures **Equitable Experiences** for all candidates. The EPP provides a multi-layered, holistic system of candidate-specific research-based supports, just-in-time interventions, and enrichment experiences that are informed by data and identification of candidate-specific needs. These academic and social supports are regularly provided and actively monitored to determine whether activities are effective in meeting candidates' needs and enabling their achievement.



Quality educator preparation achieves **Targeted Impact**. The EPP demonstrates the overall impact and value of its preparation program on its candidates and graduates such that they are competent and confident in their ability to bring about positive academic gains for PK-12 students, especially students of color and low-income students.



Introduction to the Brief

■ *Overview of the Brief*

This brief is one in a series, in which we revisit each of the design principles to ensure continued relevance to quality educator preparation and provide additional information on each based on the literature. In this brief we highlight the design principle titled: ***Inclusive Instruction***, as defined by BranchED. We believe inclusive instruction minimizes or removes barriers to learning or assessment and supports the success of all learners, while ensuring that academic standards are not diminished. Such pedagogy includes the integration of culturally and linguistically sustaining practices, social and emotional learning, cognitive science, and trauma informed care. We begin by providing an overview of what comprises inclusive instruction based on the literature. Next, is an examination of each of the indicators that are integral to this design principle followed by a description of how one EPP embeds the constructs of inclusive instruction into its practices.

■ *Intended Users*

This brief is intended for EPP leaders and teacher educators, whom we define as individuals who play a role in the preparation of teacher candidates by providing instruction or guidance. Teacher educators may hold roles such as: Teacher Education faculty and Arts and Sciences faculty employed by a university, site coordinators, coaches/clinical instructors, PK-12 school-based teachers (e.g., mentor, coordinating teacher), and PK-12 administrators. PK-12 educators may find this brief applicable to their own practice.



Inclusive Instruction

BranchED defines inclusive instruction as instruction that minimizes or removes barriers to learning or assessment and supports the success of all students, while ensuring that academic standards are not diminished. We believe inclusion and rigor are threads in the same cloth.¹³ We see inclusive instruction as an overarching umbrella encompassing multiple pedagogical frameworks that when implemented exemplify quality inclusive instruction leading to positive student academic and affective outcomes.

EPPs who exemplify the principal of inclusive instruction embody the belief that all students can learn when provided with challenging and relevant content presented in a variety of ways with necessary supports/scaffolding to ensure access, participation, and benefit for all students. Such instruction acknowledges and builds upon the funds of knowledge possessed by students, families, and communities and ensures diversity is evident by including texts and contributions of diverse individuals as well as diverse perspectives and ways of knowing.

Indicators of Inclusive Instruction

High quality educator preparation programs foster inclusive instruction that is learner-centered and differentiated to ensure access, participation, and benefit for all students as well as the integration of culturally and linguistically sustaining practices within all learning opportunities. Such programs set clear expectations, are equity focused, and employ an asset-based approach that capitalizes the strengths of candidates while encouraging their improvement. The figure below details the indicators associated with an EPP that exemplifies the belief that all students can be successful when provided with the supports necessary to meet and exceed high expectations.

Clear Expectations	The EPP establishes, articulates, codifies, develops, monitors, and evaluates clear expectations for the high-quality instruction of both university- and school-based teacher educators.
Equity Literacy	University- and school-based teacher educators know what diversity, inclusion and equity are; understand why it is an essential aspect of a teacher's preparation; and are equipped to effectively integrate cultural and linguistic competence content into courses they teach, clinical experiences, and other learning opportunities.
Instructional Design	University- and school-based teacher educators design lessons and use instructional materials that offer examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in the subject area or discipline.
Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies	University- and school-based teacher educators model the use of culturally sustaining pedagogies that recognize the diversity of candidates and take intentional steps to enable all candidates to access course content, to fully participate in learning activities, and to demonstrate their knowledge and strengths in assessment.
Affective Engagement	University- and school-based teacher educators help candidates to draw connections between preparation tasks and candidate's affective attraction to the profession (i.e., candidate's sense of purpose).
Asset-Based Feedback	University- and school-based teacher educators offer candidates constructive, improvement-oriented critiques, within the context of appreciative, strength-oriented feedback, thereby capitalizing on the strong suits of candidates while encouraging their improvement in well-defined, standards-aligned areas.

■ *Clear Expectations*

In a learner-center environment, EPPs establish, codify, monitor, and evaluate clear expectations for high-quality inclusive instruction, which exemplifies high expectations for all students.^{14,15} As expressed by Vincent Tinto, “High expectations are a condition for student success, low expectations a harbinger of failure.”¹⁶ Expectations are communicated to students both implicitly and explicitly through syllabi, assignments, grades, and discussions, which subsequently impact student performance. Thus, instructional environments in which teacher educators “consistently communicate to students that success in academic work is expected and attainable (p. 23)” result in improved student outcomes.¹⁷

Equity focused EPPs clearly communicate the expectations for all teacher educators and stakeholders to hone their practice through individual professional development and to demonstrate a commitment to high quality instruction that is learner centered. In such an environment, teacher educators are active in updating their knowledge on salient educational issues for teacher education, engaging in critical dialogue about those issues in relation to their personal beliefs and the local context, and developing a reflective approach to their practice.¹⁸

■ *Equity Literacy*

Per Paul Gorski,¹⁹

“*The foundations of equity literacy are a commitment to deepening individual and institutional understandings of how equity and inequity operate in organizations and societies, and the individual and institutional knowledge, skills, and will to vigilantly identify inequities, eliminate inequities, and actively cultivate equity.*”

Equity literacy is a comprehensive approach for creating and sustaining equitable spaces and recognition of the need to dismantle persistent barriers to achieving educational equity. It begins with critical reflection and equity consciousness leading to courageous action.²⁰ Thus, teacher preparation that attends to equity literacy ensures graduates possess strong content knowledge, pedagogical expertise to effectively teach the content such that all learners can access and successfully engage with the content and believe “in the importance of equity and the commitment to ensuring all children receive an equitable and excellent education (p. 3).”²¹ For this to happen, EPPs must ensure that all of their graduates have a deep understanding of equity, critically reflect upon their own prejudices and biases, understand and acknowledge the existence of historical, systemic, and institutional biases and inequities, and build on their reflection to identify ways they can create equitable practices.

■ *Instructional Design*

Inclusive instruction consists of lessons and instructional materials that offer examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in the subject area or discipline. Culturally and linguistically diverse materials serve as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. They allow the reader to view “worlds real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are



also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror” through which students can see their lives and experiences as “part of the larger human experience.”²²

A recent meta-analysis²³ on how culturally responsive materials support student learning suggests “a lack of representation and narrow and stereotypical portrayals,” which prevents students from gaining a full understanding of the role and contributions of diverse groups to the American narrative. Hence, the lack of representation results in missed opportunities for many students to have mirrors of themselves or to have windows that provide a fuller understanding of diverse individuals/groups. Further, inclusive instructional materials create a sense of belonging, which has been found to positively impact retention and completion rates and increases motivation and enjoyment in studies.²⁴

In addition to representation of diverse racial/ethnic groups, inclusive instructional materials also provide opportunities for students to be exposed to diverse perspectives. Doing so fosters a classroom climate of respect and understanding in which students stretch and grow as they are exposed to new ideas and perspectives.²⁵

■ *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies*

Culturally sustaining practices are humanizing practices, centering students of color, marginalized populations, and multiple perspectives. Culturally sustaining practices parallel the way inclusive instruction operates in that learning is reclaiming and sustaining, rather than eradicating and/or demanding conformity; it is about building on the cultural understanding and experiences of students. This view of learning unapologetically asserts a commitment to asset-based views of students and communities of color and counters messages and systems that elevate monolingual and monocultural norms of educational achievement. Culturally sustaining pedagogies asks, “What if the goal of teaching and learning with youth of color was not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms, but rather was to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize their cultural practices and investments?” (p.3).²⁶

Seeing students as the subjects of their learning, as opposed to objects waiting to be filled with facts and knowledge is also at the core of culturally sustaining pedagogies. The role of the educator in this is to find out students' knowledge and expertise and create conditions where they can function as intellectual leaders or resources for learning.

■ *Affective Engagement*

The concept of engagement is multidimensional and multifaceted and has been defined in a variety of ways. In general, engagement encompasses behavioral, cognitive, and emotional or affective aspects, which collectively reflect students' approach to learning.²⁷ Affective engagement pertains to students' feelings about educational institutions, teachers, and peers.²⁸ Level of engagement and emotional response to learning are important in that both have been found to positively impact progression and completion. Further, helping candidates to draw connections between preparation tasks and their affective attraction to the profession (i.e., candidate's sense of purpose) similarly has a positive impact on their commitment to the profession.²⁹

■ *Asset-Based Feedback*

Asset-based feedback emphasizes and leverages what students can do rather than what they can't do. This is important given our penchant to "attend to, learn from, and use negative information far more than positive information (p. 383)," which is referred to as negativity bias.³⁰ Aspects of asset-based feedback include positive connections to students, acknowledging and affirming the demands of the task(s) being asked of the student and their ability to meet that demand, and specific feedback that is actionable. This contrasts with weakness-oriented feedback which provides little in the way of hope and/or specific actions. Shifting to an asset-based feedback approach requires the person providing the feedback to surface what is present that can be built upon (i.e., what is working well?) and providing clear, actionable feedback on areas for growth.

What is Looks Like in Practice

CASE STUDY IN THE FIRST PERSON

Texas A&M University - San Antonio

We at the College of Education & Human Development, Texas A&M University-San Antonio, a Hispanic Serving Institution, are committed to educational opportunities for candidates who are seeking completion of baccalaureate and graduate degree programs.

Located on the south side of the city, the College of Education and Human Development serves the needs of the region by preparing qualified professionals to assume positions of



responsibility and leadership in a global society as well as giving back to our local communities. Whether as aspiring teachers, school leaders, or mental health professionals, our common link is our desire to serve. What makes us unique is our emphasis on building deep local partnerships within districts and communities, which provide opportunities for our students to gain hands-on experience with potential future employers. Many of our candidates continue to stay and serve in their placements, obtaining employment beyond their time at our university. Our district partners are one of the many highlights of our programs, whether year-long residencies or clinical teaching.

We were selected by BranchED as subject matter experts to be part of a larger team to create an inclusive instruction rubric for educator preparation providers to examine their curriculum, defined as the totality of student experiences in the educational process, to ensure it focuses on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. This rubric would exemplify the indicators essential for EPPs to make the critical shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered thus ensuring barriers to learning are addressed without diminishing academic standards. Central would be an equity focus that ensures culturally responsive and sustaining practices are employed within both the university classroom and the PK-12 classroom.

It was an eye-opening experience to see inclusive instruction manifested in its truest form. While we are an HSI, we uncovered we still have a way to go toward equity, diversity, and inclusion. We used this process to proselytize our desire to see all candidates, no matter the complex intersectionality, have their voices heard and their communities represented. As a young university, we came to bring transformation and disrupt the norm; faculty were eager to improve.

The faculty in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction was tasked with redesigning the EC6 (Early Childhood thru Sixth Grade) teacher certification; it was the opportune time to discuss the criteria of the Inclusive Instruction Rubric and Implementation Guide. Through the iterative cycle of new degree planning and course redesign, we were able to highlight the tenets of the rubric with diversity, equity, and inclusion at the forefront.

As we move to a more inclusive model of instruction and support for our teacher candidates, we look both within and outside of our institution. TAMUSA has a strong partnership with 7 local school districts in South Bexar County that are committed to inclusive pedagogy. A few field supervisors working within the partnership schools were also 'critical friends' who had a heightened awareness of the need to support our linguistically and culturally diverse teacher candidates and the students they work with in their clinical placements.

One of the many lessons learned was the importance of patience with the process, especially during times of transition at the university. Another lesson was to ensure alignment with all the stakeholders (e.g., field supervisors, faculty, staff, cooperating teachers, etc.). When meeting with outside partners it is critical to include them in the process. EPPs and colleges of education do not effectively work in silos, and it is essential to have all stakeholders committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion at the onset.

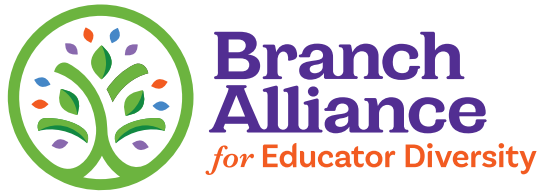


Conclusion

This brief described the design principle of *Inclusive instruction*. It underscored and expanded on each of the original six indicators associated with this principle: *Clear Expectations*, *Equity Literacy*, *Instructional Design*, *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies*, *Affective Engagement*, and *Asset-Based Feedback*. Clear Expectations makes explicit the importance of maintaining high expectations for all students along with provision of the supports necessary to ensure all students succeed. Equity literacy ensures that barriers to achieving educational equity are addressed through purposeful action. Instructional design emphasizes the necessity for all learners to see themselves and others represented within the curriculum and to be exposed to diverse perspectives. Further, inclusive instruction exemplifies humanizing practices that build upon the funds of knowledge all students and communities possess. This is further demonstrated through asset-based feedback that emphasizes what students can do and how they can build upon that to address areas of growth. Inclusive instruction is essential to ensuring all learners have access to and benefit from high quality, equity focused instruction.

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