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From Theory to Practice: A Department-Wide Approach to Faculty Development and Practice-Based Pedagogy[1]

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Abstract

Future educators need opportunities to refine professional skills during preparation, and practice-based pedagogy (PBP) plays a central role. This study explores the outcomes of a department-wide initiative to expand PBPs across educator preparation programs. Five faculty from diverse disciplines participated in sustained professional development, engaging in collaborative exploration, curriculum redesign, and iterative reflection. Using an action research design, faculty incorporated PBPs while 135 students contributed data through journals, course evaluations, and exit interviews. Thematic and constant comparative analysis revealed that candidates showed greater engagement, improved application of theory, and increased confidence in enacting professional skills. Faculty reported benefits such as stronger collaboration, purposeful use of rehearsal and video, and decomposition of standards into actionable practices. These outcomes advanced departmental goals of enhancing educator readiness and student participation. Findings underscore the value of sustained faculty support and collaborative, programmatic approaches to PBPs for effective educator preparation.

Keywords: Practice-based pedagogy; educator preparation; faculty professional development; student engagement; action research

1. Introduction

As the demand for high-quality educators grows across the United States, educator preparation programs face increasing responsibility to graduate candidates who are ready to enter the profession effectively. One way these programs can produce highly qualified educators is to intentionally focus on practicing the work of educating during preparation programs instead of simply discussing the work of educating. Yet, university-level courses in education have traditionally maintained focus on disseminating theory, modeling practices, and demonstrating best practices in more discussion-based formats (Ball & Forzani, 2009). What gets left out of this space is sustained candidate practice, interaction, and skill iteration (Ball & Cohen,

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1999). This leaves some to figure out essential aspects of their profession only after entering the workforce (McDonald, Kazemi, & Kavanagh, 2013).

In response, teacher educators have taken up practice-based approaches to educator preparation (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Reisman et al., 2019). While these ap proaches may differ in some ways, such as whether or not they include a particular focus on core practices (Ball & Forzani, 2009), they are unified in their calls to include more opportunities for candidates to practice their profession (McDonald, Kazemi, & Kavanagh, 2013). Central to this shift is the idea that learning occurs and endures through practice embedded within coursework.

Grossman and colleagues' (2009) operationalized practice-based teaching by outlining which essential practices may be rehearsed by educators in supportive settings. Through the design and use of approximations of practice, or participation in rehearsals and simulations of practice in supportive environments, candidates gain additional practice in both authentic and created environments. This approach supports the inclusion of practice-based pedagogies (PBPs)

in teacher education, and lends insight into the utility of practice-based preparation for educators across a variety of disciplines through the use of shared sets of PBPs. To promote classrooms where candidates are provided with safe spaces to enact the core practices of their profession, faculty may benefit from comprehensive professional development (PD) and support (Ball, Sleep, Boerst, & Bass, 2009). Faculty may also benefit from the backing of their departments and colleagues, as well as from the willing participation of their students. As with all new pedagogical approaches, faculty also benefit from opportunities to practice, in this case engaging in the work of practice-based teaching themselves.

Unfortunately, much of the PD offered to higher education faculty tends to be self-driven, mandated, fragmented in nature, or based on a department's particular programmatic needs/faculty interests (Cohen & Hill, 1998). With departmental support for practice-based teaching and active student participation, faculty leads can set programmatic goals towards course reform, allowing faculty to work together towards large-scale reform. This promotes students experiencing opportunities to practice across their programs, rather than as fragmented experiences occurring in a handful of courses. Thus, increasing practice becomes a programmatic and departmental focus to ensure high quality instruction for all students, regardless of program.

An action research approach provides a useful framework for advancing this work, enabling faculty to critically examine and revise their teaching while contributing to a broader research conversation (Stringer, 2008). This study examines how a department-wide initiative supported faculty in integrating practice-based pedagogies (PBPs) across diverse programs, highlighting both the benefits and challenges of collaborative course reform. By documenting these processes, we aim to contribute to literature on systematic, department-level approaches to PBPs, addressing gaps noted in prior work (Peercy & Troyan, 2017).

2. Research Context

Over the course of one academic year, faculty from {Institution Name} committed to exploring the impacts of PBPs on teaching and student experiences across educator preparation programs. We were eager to develop leadership capacity among colleagues within the work of practice-based course reform. As such, faculty instructors from five different programs across a department of education were recruited to participate as program leads in the practice-based PD. Participants included faculty members and program coordinators from elementary education, secondary education, speech language pathology, school psychology, and educational leadership and administration.

Once formed, the leadership team set three goals for our work to: (1) convene a team of faculty within the department regularly to engage in practice-based education in our courses to hopefully lead to larger programmatic reform; (2) participate in and lead our own program faculty through PD in PBPs to build capacity; and 3) participate in reflective leadership sessions to share outcomes and provide support to one another in revising our courses to be more practice-based. Together, these goals could support articulation

and development of an explicit focus on more active student participation in educator preparation courses, a shared goal of the programs and department.

Before engaging in the PD and course reform, it was first necessary for the leadership team, under the guidance of the department chair, to select a common set of PBPs that the department would adopt and utilize with candidates across programs. The goal with this selection was to: 1) create guidance around a larger department goal about effective, participatory instruction; 2) support a common language for faculty and students across courses and programs; and 3) implicate a common PD experience that would turn the department's collective

attention onto improving candidates' skillsets through increased participation and practice in courses. The leadership team chose to focus on the three PBPs of rehearsal (Grossman et al., 2009), simulated student interactions (SSI; Grossman et al., 2009), and video (Ball, 2013; Ghousseini & Sleep, 2011). In our work, rehearsal represents opportunities for candidates to participate in coached run-throughs of core practices in small or whole group contexts. SSIs allow candidates or faculty to "play" the role of a scripted student or adult so candidates could practice in small groups or the whole class. Finally, focus on the use of video determines that faculty utilize video in a multitude of ways beyond just showing "best practices."

The three-part PD series was co-designed by faculty from the department to engage in these three PBPs over the academic year. It included support and co-facilitation by a notable organization focused on practice-based educational approaches (see Acknowledgement section). Participation in the PD was elective, and each full-day session (i.e., 3 days throughout the academic year) involved faculty across all programs in the department. As program standards and skills required by candidates varied across the five programs, determining particular core practices candidates would ultimately practice within their program courses was a subsequent focus of this work. However, it is worth noting there was never a goal among the leadership team to agree upon a common set of core practices, allowing each program autonomy over which practices to focus.

The first session was held early in the fall semester, and began with an overview of practice-based education as an approach to educator preparation (Ball & Cohen, 1999). There was an intentional focus on the learning cycle (Lampert et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2013), so as to position the work of practice within the larger framework of educator preparation. Following this instruction, programs split into their own groups and participants engaged in a

critical analysis of their own program standards and ways in which they could provide practice with said standards. This inherently led to an activity on the decomposition of program standards and a re-selection of core practices that programs would have candidates practice across courses (Ball & Forzani, 2009). Finally, there was extensive work with the pedagogy of rehearsal (Grossman et al., 2009), including opportunities to see, practice, and debrief the pedagogy before engaging in planning for a trial run in our classes with one of the practices we selected.

During the second PD, the focus was on the use of simulated student interactions across programs (Grossman et al., 2009). This included the use of simulation in both teaching and coaching contexts. There was deep work with the pedagogy of SSI, again including opportunities to see, practice, and debrief the pedagogy before engaging in planning for a trial run in our classes. A group practice opportunity with SSI was also incorporated that involved simulating the shared practice of educators appropriately talking with families and collaborating with specialists. This was a powerful moment, as participants across programs began to see overlap in development of our simulations.

The final PD cultivated faculty's expertise with use of video within a practice-based approach to teaching (Ball, 2013; Ghousseini & Sleep, 2011). The issue of using video to "see" best practices inside a class was problematized, as we agreed that novice candidates may lack the professional vision to see what more experienced faculty see. Thus, within program teams, faculty explored possibilities that existed within their courses for the use of video and the ways in which they could acquire or make the video resources they may need. For example, we participated in two iterations of the use of video where we paused to rehearse or even simulate our "next move" as if we were the educator in the video. This pushed our collective vision

of using video and exemplified the ways in which all three pedagogies could be combined to enhance candidate practice.

After each PD session, the five program leads engaged in open-ended debriefs, meeting for approximately 45 minutes in faculty focus groups. These were unstructured ways for faculty leaders to debrief key learnings from the PD days, plan for next steps in their programs, and support one another with coaching and resources. In this critical and supportive space, we were studying and improving our own methods of teaching through collaboration across programs. Engagement in this space could include a review of potential practice-based activities and/or units, subsequent observations of each other's' practice, and a constant return to the larger programmatic and departmental goals of practice and equity to investigate how this work could push that forward.

The aim of this study, then, is to explore the impacts of faculty engagement in this shared PD series focused on practice-based teaching on course and/or programmatic reform efforts. We seek to further open the "black box" that exists around the processes educators engage in to prepare or deliver practice-based experiences to their candidates (Peercy & Troyan, 2017, p. 28). Thus, this paper delineates these processes and explores the affordances and challenges offered by engaging in collaborative, practice-based course reform. This study also highlights how a department-level approach to PBPs can address gaps in faculty PD and contribute to more systematic implementation of practice-based education (Peercy & Troyan, 2017).

3. Relevant Theoretical Frameworks

To explore our work on educator preparation through the use of PBPs across programs, it is useful to situate our approach to practice-based education within current frameworks for practice. Research on the utility of practice in teacher education provides support for incorporating practice into candidates' preparatory experiences. Additionally, scholarship on PD highlights the conditions necessary for faculty to adopt PBPs effectively. To support our targeted PD aims regarding PBPs, a review of practice-based PD lends insight into our work. Finally, an action research lens frames this work as both self-study and programmatic inquiry (Garbett & Owens, 2016).

Recent literature has further nuanced these perspectives. Philip et al. (2018) caution against positioning practice as "core" in ways that may sideline justice-oriented aims in teacher education, arguing for a broader conception that integrates equity work as a fundamental focus. Building on this, Zeichner (2021) and McDonald & Zeichner (2020) advocate for re-centering equity as a core element of practice-based education, urging teacher preparation programs to consider how PBPs can explicitly engage with issues of diversity, inclusion, and justice. Other scholars highlight that equity-focused enactments of PBPs provide candidates with opportunities to reflect critically on their pedagogical decisions, particularly how these decisions may either reproduce or disrupt inequities (Garcia & O'Donnell, 2020; Goering & Morrell, 2021).

3.1 Practice-Based Preparation

Drawing from sociocultural theories of practice, the concept of practice represents a complex interplay between knowing, being, and doing. Incorporating this perspective, McDonald and colleagues (2013) asserted prospective educators require practice opportunities within an established framework for preparation in order to actively engage in the application of theory. In these practice-based settings, teaching experiences are designed within a learning cycle (Lampert et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2013), coordinated with university coursework, and preservice educators are closely mentored. In this sense, the learning cycle becomes the framework by which educators are prepared. This cycle moves candidates through four phases toward a more advanced level of competence with a particular practice. First, a teaching practice is introduced to candidates through a model enactment within a unit of instruction. The candidates then prepare to enact a practice by seeing or participating in approximations of this practice through a rehearsal or simulation. After they enact the practice themselves, they finally engage in the process of analyzing and revising the practice.

To enact the core practices of a profession within a learning cycle, the practices of significant importance within that profession must be thoughtfully chosen and deconstructed. Our decision to focus on particular core practices embedded within our own state program standards aligns with the learning cycle, as well as research on core practices (Ball & Forzani, 2009). Our program standards represent layered and complex collections of educator moves which define our professions, but are often abstract and decontextualized for candidates. Embedding work with specific core practices into university coursework provides future educators with sets of lived experiences from which to pivot their future, in-the-moment interactions in more high stakes situations (Lampert, 2010). Further, it provides an important bridge between what novice educators know and what they are able to do through practice or enactment (Kennedy, 1999). An important by-product of this quality preparation of future educators could be better outcomes in their work with students or other sensitive groups.

To move programs away from surface work with practice-based preparation, we engage with McDonald and colleagues (2013) assertion that educators must simultaneously take up a set of PBPs pedagogies alongside their program's adoption of core practices. The choice to ground candidate practice in common pedagogy promotes a more collective work with practice, and situates the work in a quest for better understanding how candidates enact the vital practices of their profession (McDonald et al., 2013). This pedagogy, or the purposeful way in which we prepare future educators, is represented in the various activities provided to candidates during which they can practice. For example, the use of rehearsal, SSI, or video creates moments wherein candidates can practice the challenging aspects of their profession in a supported and safe space for successful application in future situations.

Studies examining the effects of practiced-based approaches to teacher education have found positive impacts in teacher preparedness (Reiseman et al., 2019), teaching efficacy and student gains (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009), understanding of teaching practices (Bottoms, Ciechanowski, & Hartman 2015), and self-reported gains in confidence and positive teaching experiences (Wilcox-Herzog & McLaren, 2012). Recent empirical studies strengthen the rationale for PBPs. Reisman et al. (2019) documented improvements in candidates' ability to facilitate disciplinary discussions, while Grossman et al. (2021) emphasize that approximations of practice help bridge the gap between coursework and field placements. Boyd et al. (2009) found practice-based preparation linked to student achievement, and more recent work has connected PBPs to teacher identity development (Forzani, 2021). Taken together, this evidence underscores the multifaceted benefits of integrating PBPs across programs and disciplines.

From this work of practice-based teacher preparation, we expand notions of practice based teacher preparation to practice based educator preparation to account for all the program professionals we may more effectively prepare through practice. Prospective educators across a number of programs may also benefit from practicing the work of their profession instead of just learning or talking about it. Further, faculty in higher education may benefit from supported and sustained opportunities to try out various PBPs, just as candidates may benefit from their own increased opportunities to practice.

3.2 Collaborative PD in Higher Education

Effective PD provides educators, including teachers and educational leaders, with learning opportunities that deepen their knowledge and enhance the skills necessary for success in their roles (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). High quality PD is collaborative, content-focused, intensive, sustained over time, grounded in feedback and reflection, and closely connected to instructional practice and student learning outcomes (Borko, Koellner, Jacobs, & Seago, 2011; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Marrongelle, Sztajn, & Smith, 2013). Such experiences offer educators opportunities to rehearse new skills in supportive settings that promote reflection, refinement, and collegial feedback (Wei et al., 2009; Whitcomb, Borko, & Liston, 2009). When embedded in a collaborative model, PD enables educators to engage deeply with new content and apply it meaningfully in practice, supported by a collegial community. Recent scholarship emphasizes that faculty PD in higher education must mirror these same principles. Kennedy (2019) stresses that effective teacher educator development requires iterative, practice-focused cycles similar to those provided for candidates. Further, Darling-Hammond et

al. (2020) argue that higher education institutions should intentionally design PD to foster collaboration across departments. Additionally, Gelfuso & Dennis (2019) highlight that inquiry-based faculty learning communities can sustain meaningful change. These findings suggest that faculty, like their candidates, benefit from opportunities to rehearse, reflect, and refine their pedagogical approaches.

In addition to collaboration and practice, high-quality PD often incorporates inquiry cycles that help educators build capacity around new pedagogical strategies (Pella, 2015). Similar to the learning cycle framework (Lampert et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2013), inquiry cycles engage educators in a continuous process of enacting, analyzing, reflecting on, and revising newly learned practices. This cyclical structure encourages deep reflection and supports sustained instructional change aimed at improving student outcomes (Borko et al., 2011). These inquiry-based models may take various forms, such as professional learning communities, book studies, inquiry groups, and lesson study, but they all center on active, reflective professional learning experiences.

Our use of a collaborative PD model, focused on course, programmatic, and departmental change, aligned naturally with an action research approach (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). Throughout the PD sessions and subsequent implementation of practice-based units, faculty collected and analyzed data related to their teaching and candidate outcomes. This iterative process of data collection, analysis, and reflection allowed for evidence-based decision-making and collaborative refinement of our practice, supporting both individual and collective growth.

Despite a growing body of scholarship on practice-based teacher education, few studies document department-level initiatives to expand practice opportunities systematically (Peercy & Troyan, 2017). We argue that there is significant value in mobilizing faculty around this shared mission, as diverse voices and experiences across programs can enrich and support a department-wide vision for practice-based preparation. By mobilizing faculty across programs, this study demonstrates the potential of shared PD initiatives to advance a collective vision for practice-based preparation while acknowledging both the affordances and challenges of scaling PBPs across diverse contexts.

Although faculty across programs engaged with a common set of pedagogies during PD, each program adapted and implemented these approaches in ways that reflected their unique disciplinary standards and goals. This flexibility illustrates the adaptability and utility of PBPs across contexts, while also highlighting both the affordances and challenges of integrating practice-based approaches at scale. Ultimately, this work contributes to the growing evidence base supporting PBPs and offers insights into how departments can structure faculty development to advance practice-based educator preparation.

4. Methods

This study utilized action research as a methodological approach to focus on the systematic inquiry undertaken by the researchers to examine their own practice (Parsons & Brown, 2002). Using a qualitative approach to inquiry, the educators were five faculty members who participated in a three-part PD series. Although each faculty member also engaged in changes to their respective programs, the team of faculty members engaged in collaborative action research as they worked together to understand and implement PBPs across programs. By engaging in collaborative action research, faculty were able to contribute to their own professional learning, improve their own teaching practices, and engage in work that moved toward common programmatic and departmental goals (Sagor, 1992).

4.1 Sampling Procedures & Participants

Faculty were recruited through departmental invitations and discussions led by the department chair. Selection criteria included: 1) tenure-track status to ensure program stability; 2) representation across at least five distinct educator preparation programs; and 3) willingness to commit to three full-day professional development sessions during the academic year. Five faculty members volunteered, two from teacher preparation (elementary and secondary education) and one each from educational administration, speech-language pathology, and school psychology. This cross-program sampling was intentional to capture

variation in disciplinary standards and to explore the transferability of PBPs beyond K–12 teacher education.

Faculty participants included three women and two men, with one to five years of faculty experience and varying prior exposure to PBPs. Each was teaching or developing courses within their program (e.g., elementary science/math methods, secondary math or English methods). The core practices identified for practice in these courses included designing lessons (elementary, secondary), facilitating discussions (elementary, secondary), eliciting student or participant thinking (elementary, secondary, school psychology), modeling content and ideas (elementary, secondary, speech pathology), communicating effectively with families and stakeholders (educational administration, school psychology, speech pathology), and providing feedback (educational administration). All participants provided informed consent.

Student participants were drawn from courses taught by the five faculty members. Of approximately 170 enrolled students, 135 (about 80%) provided informed consent to participate. This group included around 100 students from elementary and secondary education programs, and smaller cohorts from educational administration, speech-language pathology, and school psychology. Participation rates reflected program enrollment rather than selective recruitment, ensuring that the sample captured the diversity of candidates naturally present across programs. Students represented a range of academic levels and specializations, providing multiple perspectives on the integration of PBPs into their coursework. All participation was voluntary and had no impact on course grades.

4.2 Data Sources & Collection

Data were collected during the fall semester of the academic year from a variety of faculty and student sources. As the goal of the data was to provide insights into specific aspects of the PBPs, all data sources were analyzed to address the aims of this study. As the nature of this study involved instructors studying their own practices, the practices of their colleagues, and student response to the changes made in their preparation programs, the researchers sought participants' active consent to participate and offered the option to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Faculty participants from elementary education and secondary education are the authors of this paper.

4.3 Faculty Data

Faculty data consisted of three faculty focus groups and a narrative survey (see Appendix). The focus groups were used as a way for faculty to debrief after engaging in shared, practice-based PD experiences. These focus groups were also a way for faculty from different programs to discuss how they envisioned these pedagogical practices developing within their programs. Public notes were taken and shared as a summary of these meetings. The narrative survey was conducted at the end of the academic year as a way to capture faculty members' thoughts and actions as a direct result of the PD experience.

4.4 Student Data

Student data were collected from 135 consenting participants across the five programs, with approximately 100 of these responses coming from the elementary and secondary program. The students were all taught within courses in the focal faculty members' discipline. Student data consisted of student journals/reflections, course evaluations, and end of program exit interviews. Student journals/reflections were assigned in all elementary and secondary methods courses and were directly related to the pedagogies and practice-based actions students engaged in during the academic year. For example, candidates were often asked to reflect upon their successes and challenges with enacting a skill, to analyze the feedback they were provided regarding their enactments, and/or to determine their next steps with practicing or improving with that skill in the course or field. End of the semester course evaluations collected in all 5 programs and exit interviews were conducted in the elementary, secondary, and educational administration programs. Faculty took notes during these exit interviews to later look for mention of PBPs in student responses. Neither course evaluations nor exit interviews were tailored to ask about the PBPs; instead, the researchers analyzed these data to look for mentions of the PBPs.

5. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the qualitative data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This flexible approach allowed us to capture both recurring themes and unique program-specific insights without the confines of a predetermined coding scheme. Data sources included student journals, faculty narrative surveys, exit interview notes, course evaluations, and focus group transcripts. The use of thematic analysis was well-suited to our study because it accommodated the autonomy of the faculty team and the variability across programs (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

To reveal deeper patterns, we employed a constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), breaking down the data into discrete meaning units, then collapsing those units into broader categories. This iterative process involved moving back and forth between data and emerging codes to refine and consolidate themes. As described by Taylor and Bogdan (1984), this process supported simultaneous coding and analysis, enabling us to generate concepts, examine their properties, and integrate them into a coherent explanatory model. Codes were developed inductively but later aligned with our research questions on the impact of collaborative PD around practice-based teaching.

We also drew from Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña's (2014) strategies of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification to systematically manage and interpret the qualitative dataset. Memos were written throughout the analysis to document analytic decisions, reflexive insights, and potential researcher bias (Charmaz, 2014). This reflexivity was critical given that the researchers were also participants in the PD. Themes were validated through multiple strategies: 1) Triangulation: Data from faculty, students, surveys, and coursework were cross-checked to confirm consistency of themes (Patton, 2015); 2) Member checks: Faculty participants reviewed interim findings and confirmed or clarified interpretations (Birt et al., 2016); 3) Peer debriefing: Findings were shared in departmental meetings to obtain external feedback and challenge assumptions; and 4) Inter-rater reliability: Two researchers independently coded 25% of the data, achieving agreement above 85% after discussion of discrepancies. This multi-layered approach enhanced trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017), ensuring that findings were grounded in the data and replicable in similar departmental contexts.

6. Results

To explore the outcomes of this study, a summary of how each program took up and implemented the PD experiences in the context of their own programs is first presented. Table 1 highlights some high-level adjustments faculty in each program made during the year of PD and collaboration, as reported in their narrative survey (see Appendix).

Across all programs, faculty shared both affordances and challenges within the work of incorporating PBPs into their courses and programs that were condensed into research themes. These themes, described below, detail common faculty and student experiences relevant to the aim of this research. Data from participating faculty members and students indicated that the increased opportunities to practice particular core practices of their profession during class time supported the application of theory and active engagement. In many instances, there were multiple student data points or reflections to support faculty assertions.

6.1 Faculty Affordances

All faculty participants reported taking up aspects of the PD experiences focused on PBPs. The training provided opportunities for faculty to "transfer practice-based opportunities to the courses that they teach," and they "supported faculty's growth and inquiry." Through this training, faculty were able to "reflect on their old ways of teaching and incorporate new and innovative ways of facilitating candidates' learning by providing scaffolded opportunities for coached practice in methods classes" through the use of rehearsals, simulated student interactions, and video. The programs mutually acknowledged the value of the opportunities to learn in the moment, get a true feel for the different pedagogies, and give and receive feedback to candidates and colleagues. Secondary faculty called out the particular usefulness of the PD opportunities in" bringing together coaches and course instructors and providing opportunities to discuss

how effective teaching practices translate in either setting." All program faculty expressed a desire to examine and expand the use of PBPs into courses beyond the ones they are currently teaching.

Collaboration was another widely recognized benefit. Faculty from all programs also acknowledged the value of working together across programs and within a focused leadership team to accomplish their aims. Secondary faculty appreciated the ways other faculty shared their knowledge and resources. Many noted it was helpful to have "a support system of others who were also going through the process of integrating practice-based teaching in their courses." School psychology and educational administration faculty appreciated, specifically, the "mentorship of other faculty members in teacher preparation programs" who could support them in re-envisioning the transfer of practice based pedagogies into their broader educational preparation realms.

Several programs also identified decomposing standards as a critical first step. In the elementary education, school psychology, and speech pathology programs, faculty reported "decomposing their program standards into a practicable size" and then "mapping these across all courses to plan for timely practice in the candidates' program experiences." This process relates to the work of choosing core practices on which to centralize practice opportunities within the classroom space (Ball & Forzani, 2009). An additional goal for the breakdown of school psychology standards was "to determine the actionable components of the standards that could be viewed with a rubric." In school psychology, faculty also noted deconstructing the standards for the program also aided in the development of the course sequence and specific course expectations.

Video use emerged as another key affordance. Across the elementary education, secondary education, and educational administration programs, faculty noted "an increased and more intentional use of video" as a PBP. Many remarked they planned to consider "shifting to using video as an initial step in practicing course concepts." In secondary education, specifically, faculty recalled "utilizing videos in a new way by having students record themselves modeling a simple task and then reflecting on their models using a feedback tool." Again, all programs agreed there was a need to be more intentional in how concepts were presented within the learning cycle. Thus, videos were utilized to acquaint candidates with a new skill in an intentionally scaffolded way.

Finally, within the narrative survey, elementary and secondary faculty reported that the PD prompted many adjustments in their math, science, and language arts/English methods courses, in particular. The inclusion of rehearsals (with live coaching support from clinical coaches and teaching faculty) occurred in elementary and secondary math, science, and language arts/English methods. Multiple practice-based units were integrated across these courses that incorporated core practices of math, science, and English teaching, the learning cycle, and PBPs such as rehearsal, SSI, and video. These adjustments marked a broader shift toward embedding practice consistently within methods instruction, strengthening connections between theory and enactment.

6.2 Faculty Challenges

Despite the successes of the PD, faculty also identified several challenges during and after the learning series. The most frequently cited difficulty involved onboarding new faculty to teaching and to the integration of PBPs. As this work demands time, commitment, and a shift in pedagogical mindset, not all faculty were initially invested. Presenting findings from this study at program and department meetings was viewed as one way to encourage broader participation, highlighting successes and offering support to new colleagues interested in these approaches.

Structural issues also posed obstacles, particularly in secondary education where many methods courses were taught by adjuncts. In these cases, curricular shifts depended largely on tenure-track faculty unless adjuncts could be mentored through the process of revising their courses to include PBPs. These factors highlight the importance of sustained departmental support and mentoring structures to ensure consistent adoption of PBPs across programs.

6.3 Student Outcomes

Although student outcomes were not the primary focus of this study, student data added credibility to our findings and strongly supported the inclusion of practice-based opportunities in coursework. As student data were reviewed across all five programs, it was largely in support of the inclusion of practice-based opportunities in classes. Candidates noted the practice-based exercises were "incredibly helpful" and "productive in honing their skill," especially in the opportunities they presented to "practice in a safe space," "receive immediate feedback," and "redirect by incorporating the changes that were suggested." Candidates noted they found faculty support and encouragement offered in spaces of practice to be "profoundly helpful." They appreciated they were "never made to feel like they were failing in any way," but were required to "consider the pedagogical choices they were making in real time."

Student data across all programs indicated candidates appreciated being able to work through challenging teaching practices in a practice-based format. As one candidate stated about the opportunity to rehearse: "Once I began, it quickly occurred to me that this opportunity was designed to allow me to grow rather than to show what I can do already." In course evaluations and student reflections across programs, many students stated activities such as rehearsing and/or modeling were beneficial and productive ways to spend class time. One teaching candidate remarked this "was more beneficial and productive to my actual teaching than anything else I have done to date." It was noted that a course focused on lecture and discussion would not have been as beneficial as a course with hands-on application and practice. While students often remarked practice-based experiences in their classes did occasionally "push them out of their comfort zone," they reflected the experiences were worth it in terms of the learning and growth that occurred.

Candidates also valued the ways in which the inclusion of practice into their courses promoted collaborative growth and learning among colleagues. This finding was similar to the faculty outcome of acknowledging the benefit of learning and iterating together to improve capacity and competency. As one student remarked after a peer run through, "I found it helpful to see others' models, how they approached it, what they focused on, and how they took constructive criticism and implemented it. I learned as much from watching and critiquing as I did from modeling and receiving feedback myself." This ability to grow collaboratively aided candidates in actively absorbing information even when they were not the person conducting the rehearsal or run through. Such reflections illustrate how PBPs create learning opportunities for all participants, enabling faculty to maximize instructional time while supporting students' capacity to learn from both individual enactment and peer observation.

7. Discussion

Faculty across all five programs agreed that including practice-based opportunities was valuable. The collaborative PD described here was the impetus for this integration, echoing research on the importance of structured, sustained faculty development (Borko et al., 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Marrongelle et al., 2013). Just as PBPs supported candidates in focusing on intentionality in their teaching, faculty also had to bring intentionality to their instructional design, highlighting the reciprocal nature of practice-based learning (McDonald et al., 2013).

Candidates gained increased opportunities to practice core professional skills in a supported university setting before applying them with real individuals. This aligns with Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald's (2009) conceptualization of approximations of practice and extends evidence that approximations can be scaled across multiple programs. These findings also resonate with Lampert et al.'s (2013) learning cycle, underscoring the importance of iterative practice, feedback, and revision in candidate development.

Our study contributes to broader discussions about the adaptability of PBPs. Whereas much research focuses narrowly on teacher education (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Reisman et al., 2019), we found PBPs could be meaningfully integrated into educational administration, school psychology, and speech-language pathology. This supports calls to broaden practice-based education while embedding principles of equity and responsiveness (Kennedy, 2019; Zeichner, 2021).

At the same time, our findings highlight tensions raised by critics. Philip et al. (2018) warn that a narrow focus on "core" may marginalize justice-oriented aims in teacher education. We acknowledge this concern and see our departmental approach as balancing the need for concrete practice with preparing candidates to navigate equity and diversity. Future iterations should more explicitly integrate equity as a core practice (Zeichner, 2021; Garcia & O'Donnell, 2020).

The collaborative structures we used mirror inquiry-based PD models (Pella, 2015) and suggest that faculty benefit from the same cyclical, reflective learning structures recommended for K–12 teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Faculty emphasized that decomposing complex program standards into actionable practices was a critical step, consistent with literature on core practices (McDonald et al., 2013). Additionally, video analysis and rehearsals became powerful tools for faculty and students alike, aligning with prior findings on video in teacher education (Ball, 2013; Ghousseini & Sleep, 2011).

Faculty members' purposeful inclusion of rehearsal and other approximations promoted more participatory teaching and learning, advancing programmatic and departmental goals. A shared focus on practice across programs pushed participants outside their comfort zones and built rapport that will support future work. Training and collaboration around PBPs will be sustained to further engage in the iterative learning cycles called for in higher education PD (Borko et al., 2011). Re-establishing leads within each program to mentor others and drive outcomes may further increase departmental uptake of practice.

Despite criticisms of practice-based teaching and core practices (Philip et al., 2018), our department determined this approach was a productive way to decompose, sequence, and teach the comprehensive sets of standards on which programs are based. This requires balancing critiques of educational approaches with the need to support candidates in mastering central, transferable practices within limited preparation time.

Finally, we acknowledge that the practices chosen do not represent the totality of skills candidates will need. Practice continues alongside theory to encourage robust learning. The core practices emphasized will evolve over time and through candidates' lived experiences. Our goal is for baseline proficiency in these practices to become a foundation for candidates' future improvisation in the field, enabling them to respond flexibly and responsibly (Lampert et al., 2013).

7.1 Limitations

Faculty in both the elementary and secondary education programs expressed a direct interest in "promoting equitable learning opportunities for all students and disrupting patterns of inequity in the classroom." Increased opportunities to practice particular core practices during coursework may provide candidates with unique opportunities to examine the power of their professional choices during practice. Further exploring this important connection between content, pedagogy, practice, and equity may lend additional support for the inclusion of PBPs (Zeichner, 2021). However, as we did not frame our work with a particular focus on equity, the ways in which our candidates were able to consider equity during practice remains variable and requires further study within more developed stages of our work.

7.2 Implications

Based on findings from this study, we have several recommendations for other programs and departments that want to consider including PBPs. Our pragmatic suggestions are as follows:

1) *Provide faculty institutional support and dedicated time*. As PBPs may represent a significant pedagogical shift, faculty require the time to unpack and practice these methods in depth. Meaningful change is unlikely without such support (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017).
(2) *Create cross-program professional learning groups*. Throughout our focus groups and narratives, one consistent theme related to the collaborative nature of PD and the ability to learn from one another. Too often college faculty are learning and advancing their pedagogies separately in one-shot PDs. Our findings suggest that ongoing collaboration allows faculty to refine, revise, and reflect together, resulting in more sustainable and efficient improvement (Borko et al., 2011; Wei et al., 2009).

(3) *Hold regular meetings to share successes and challenges*. Our research found it was important for faculty to hear from one another about successes, but also challenges. Integrating PBPs is a laborious process at the onset, and faculty were happy to have a space to declare their "a ha" moments, but also learn from each others' missteps (Whitcomb, Borko, & Liston, 2009).

(4) *Establish a shared repository for resources and data*. As faculty work together and apart at integrating PBPs into courses, it becomes important this work not be isolated. By having a shared space for faculty designed units, student data, and resource sharing, faculty redesign and reflect on their own courses by examining the work of others. This leads to more efficiency and transparency throughout the process; further helping faculty to adapt and work from the successes of others. Moreover, this notion of shared learning and experiences creates a sense of camaraderie and support among faculty across programs (Gelfuso & Dennis, 2019).

(5) *Research student outcomes systematically.* As we noted, onboarding all faculty can be challenging; however, if student data showcases the successes candidates feel regarding practice-based learning, the onboarding may become more efficient and effective (Reisman et al., 2019; Boyd et al., 2009). Data is collected, analyzed, and presented to all faculty as a means to showcase how candidates feel about PBPs within their own programs and departments.

(6) *Intentionally equity intentionally*. One finding was how the inclusion of PBPs brought up issues of equity for students. Students noted that learning in a practice-based environment forced them to consider word choice and how the teaching moves they made either included or excluded students. Building on this, future research might explore how equity can be treated as a core practice across disciplines (Philip et al., 2018; Zeichner, 2021; Garcia & O'Donnell, 2020). Together, these implications highlight the importance of sustained faculty support, collaboration, and an intentional focus on equity in advancing PBPs at the programmatic and departmental levels.

8. Conclusion

This study demonstrates how a department-wide initiative to embed practice-based pedagogies can enhance both faculty development and candidate preparation. By engaging faculty across five distinct educator preparation programs in sustained professional development, we created opportunities for collaboration, reflection, and the systematic integration of PBPs into coursework. Candidates benefitted from structured opportunities to rehearse and refine core practices in safe, supportive environments, while faculty advanced their own pedagogical knowledge through cycles of inquiry and shared practice.

The findings reinforce theoretical frameworks such as the learning cycle (Lampert et al., 2013) and approximations of practice (Grossman et al., 2009), while also extending the literature

by showing how PBPs can be adapted beyond traditional teacher education to fields like school psychology, speech-language pathology, and educational administration. Importantly, our work addresses critiques that PBPs risk sidelining equity (Philip et al., 2018) by framing equity itself as a core practice to be explicitly rehearsed, reflected upon, and integrated into professional preparation (Zeichner, 2021).

Practically, our study highlights the importance of long-term, collaborative PD structures for faculty, the utility of decomposing complex standards into actionable practices, and the power of video, rehearsal, and simulation as tools for candidate learning. These strategies provide a replicable model for other institutions seeking to move beyond fragmented approaches to faculty development and candidate practice.

Ultimately, this work contributes to the growing evidence base that practice-based pedagogy, when implemented at scale and with intentionality, can bridge the longstanding gap between theory and practice in educator preparation. By embedding opportunities for practice across programs, departments can prepare professionals who are not only competent in core practices but also capable of adapting responsively and equitably in complex, real-world contexts. This dual emphasis on rigor and justice underscores the potential of PBPs to shape the next generation of educators and educational leaders.

Table 1.

Programmatic High-Level Accomplishments

Program	Yearly Accomplishments
Elementary Education	● Deconstructed program standards into a list of practicable core practices. ● Mapped core practices across program courses to ensure distributed implementation. ● Integrated peer-run throughs and rehearsals in math, science, and language arts methods courses, focusing on discussion facilitation and eliciting student thinking. ● Incorporated simulated student interactions (SSI) in math methods courses to support candidates in unpacking students' mathematical thinking. ● Utilized video strategically in both online modules and in-class learning cycle activities.
Secondary Education	● Engaged in collective reflection on traditional methods course structures. ● Identified relevant grade 7–12 content areas to embed in practice-based opportunities. ● Provided scaffolded, coached practice in math, science, and English methods courses. ● Implemented a combination of videos, SSI, peer-run throughs, and rehearsals across multiple courses.
Speech Language Pathology	● Deconstructed program standards to inform the development of course sequences and specific course expectations ● Piloted the use of rehearsal in one course to explore practice-based implementation
School Psychology	● Broke down all program standards into observable, actionable components supported by rubrics. Conducted a systematic syllabus review to identify additional courses suitable for practice-based activities. Developed and implemented rehearsals, peer-run throughs, and simulated activities in four of the program's twenty-two courses.
Educational Leadership and Administration	● Integrated rehearsal techniques for coaching and critical conversations into a program course. ● Used video for both modeling and practicing key leadership concepts in another course.

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