

Core Practice Continuums Overview

Purpose

Educational practice and research in developmental science converge on a set of core practices that drive toward an equitable, whole-child approach for all students. These core practices are articulated in Turnaround’s Whole-Child Design Blueprint. Turnaround’s Core Practice Continuums are a set of tools designed to prompt reflection and empower growth across roles in a school by providing rich descriptions of quality and categorically different images of practice across levels.

Audience

The Core Practice Continuums are intended for use by individual educators who engage with students in various ways in a school community, including: **teachers, student support staff, instructional support staff, school leaders and administrators**. See additional considerations for individual and schoolwide use below.

Structure and Function

Each continuum is intentionally framed to show a developmental progression of practice and pathways to improvement. While rubrics are a commonly used assessment tool in education spaces, the table below highlights key distinctions between the functions of rubrics and continuums.

A rubric ...	A continuum ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can be used for planning, implementing, reflecting and assessing ○ Serves as a summative measure of quality at a specific point in time ○ Is a linear tool specific to each cycle, used to assess achievement at a certain point in time, based on several specific criteria ○ Is an evaluation/summative tool primarily used to measure an expected outcome ○ Has descriptors that reflect a range of abilities from poor to proficient ○ Describes levels of achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can be used for planning, implementing, reflecting and assessing ○ Is for self-assessment and reflection ○ Serves as an indicator of how educators can move forward in the practices, examining their existing actions and experiences ○ Has descriptors of quality; often uses categorical differences, rather than changes in frequency across levels ○ Has descriptors that are accompanied by ideas and pathways to help educators move forward and improve ○ Reflects a developmental view

When reading across each continuum, development of a practice is shown through **Emerging, Developing and Advanced** levels of quality:

- At the **Emergent** level, indicators articulate the implications of practice that is not consistent, not uniform, or not grounded in a shared commitment and understanding across the school. This level often showcases common challenges and pitfalls related to the practice, including those that occur even when adults are trying to make good-faith efforts. Descriptors at this level can help educators interrogate bias, align to developmental research, and consider the impact that the absence of structures or support can have on the practice.
- At the **Developing** level, indicators may describe how a practice may be inconsistent or partial in the sense that there is evidence of both Emergent and Advanced structures or practices. Often at this level, structures, adult skills or student experiences are approaching high quality, but equity and inclusion are missing or execution of a practice at the Advanced level is not true for diverse groups of students. This level reflects developing, but not universal, adult buy-in about a particular practice and the framing offers ideas to develop the practice, pointing to how to get from “here to there.”
- At the **Advanced** level, indicators paint a picture of what happens when high-quality practice is in place and all students experience that practice. At the Advanced level, there is schoolwide consensus around the practice and the structures that support development of the practice. For many practices, Advanced indicates that the school functions as a learning organization that engages in continuous reflection and growth.

Additional Considerations for Use

As educators engage with a core practice continuum in different contexts, consider the following:

- ✓ **Remember that the continuum categories are porous.** This means that elements of your practice may be in different levels of development for different areas. For example, an educator's practice may look "Advanced" for Activating Background Knowledge but still "Emerging" for Reflecting on Language Learning.
- ✓ **Remember that the continuum is recursive;** it needs to be revisited and reconsidered as you adjust your practice and progress.

Applying the lens of an individual educator:

For several continuums, the Advanced level describes what the practice looks like when it happens schoolwide. An individual teacher may not feel they have a window into how this practice looks for all educators in the building. In this case, consider:

- ✓ Is there shared agreement across the school on what is meant by a specific practice and what it looks like?
- ✓ What opportunities are available for shared ownership and collective growth in the identified area (e.g., peer learning, observation, resource sharing)?
- ✓ What type of coaching or professional development is needed to advance your practice?

Applying the lens of a school leader:

Although the continuums are geared toward individual educator practice and reflection, some continuums explicitly signal the importance of an integrated schoolwide perspective and commitment. Leaders utilizing the continuums should consider the implications of all the layers that go into supporting quality practice across a school. They can do this by applying a lens of leadership in addition to reflecting on their own individual practice. Some ways to do this include:

- ✓ Consider how you, as a leader, embody and explicitly model the skills, mindsets and practices present in the continuums.
- ✓ At the Advanced level, look for indicators of the practice happening beyond any one individual's practice, such as: "*happens almost always,*" "*demonstrated by all adults,*" "*is the experience of all students.*" If there are large inconsistencies for a practice, consider whether you are proactively creating the context and conditions for *all* staff to be able to demonstrate that skill or engage in that practice.
- ✓ Consider what **Inclusive Leadership** looks like: Is there shared agreement across the school on what is meant by a specific practice and what it looks like?
- ✓ Consider the role of **Staff Relationships & Collaboration**: Is there a culture of collaborative learning for the staff connected to this practice? Do all staff feel empowered to identify common problems of practice and propose solutions that move the whole school toward improvement?
- ✓ Think about **Capacity Building**: Do you see the development of the skills, practices and mindsets captured in the continuum as an ongoing process and as one of your main leadership responsibilities? Have you worked collaboratively to build a strong, shared commitment to a point of view/expectations/understanding of these practices with staff? What opportunities do you see to provide coaching or professional development around a specific practice area?

Core Practice Continuum: Student Relationship Structures

The intentional structuring of time and space, embedded from the classroom to the district level, to ensure that relationships among students and with adults can flourish.



Structure Design and Implementation Aligned to Purpose

The design and scheduling of relationship structures weakly supports the intended purpose of the structure – to build meaningful relationships and a web of supports. When in place, relationship structures may take the form of “add-on” activities to an otherwise academically focused instructional day. Rather than being utilized as an integrated and purposeful element of the learning environment, relationship structures may function as a venue for accountability (e.g., *attendance, homework checking, study hall*) and/or a loosely planned “break” from academic learning.

Some structures that support relationships may be in place, but often only at the classroom level (e.g., *class meeting/advisory, collaborative learning experiences*). There are missed opportunities to embed structures at the school and district level (e.g., *interdisciplinary teaming, smaller class sizes*), which would complement and deepen the types and qualities of relational experiences for all students.

Relationship structures are not implemented reliably or consistently, often being replaced with academic curriculum and/or administrative tasks. As a result, there are limited opportunities to develop the skills, routines and trust necessary for successful relational and collaborative experiences within the structures

The design and scheduling of relationship structures somewhat supports its purpose of supporting student relationships, though it falls short of facilitating enduring and transformative relationships and interpersonal experiences. It is common to see the facilitation of generally positive social interactions, some collaborative experiences, and the centering of short-term relationships.

Relationship structures are in place at multiple levels of the school system, but may be implemented in siloed or temporary contexts (e.g., *cohorts that change every semester or year*). The implementation can be quickly abandoned when it is challenging or not immediately successful (e.g., *staff or students resist, time is tight, resources are stretched*). Decisions about the planning and sourcing of relationship structures may be made with a preference for logistical ease and academic priorities, rather than consideration of what most strongly supports and sustains relationships.

Relationship structures are implemented reliably and consistently in some school settings, but not in others. Relationship structures are most reliably implemented in settings that have existing structural supports (e.g., *elementary school classrooms with one main teacher, expanded learning programs*), but may be challenged

The design and scheduling of relationship structures is strongly aligned to achieving its purpose: to create opportunities for small learning environments within the larger school context, where students can be well known in multiple ways, build trusting relationships with peers and adults, and have the time and space available to implement “group-worthy” learning experiences.

Multifaceted structures that sustain long-term relationships and create a web of supports are embedded at all levels of the school are adequately resourced (e.g., *advisory at the classroom level; peer mentoring and looping at the school level; minimizing school transitions through longer school grade spans at the district level*). The creation of high-quality time and space for relationships is central to all discussions and decisions, especially at school and district levels.

Relationship structures are implemented reliably and consistently, making school experiences more navigable, coherent and predictable for students (e.g., *counteracting the disruptive nature of school transitions and resulting discontinuity in relationships*).

(e.g., *students are so excited to engage with their peers that a teacher deems the structure “too difficult to manage”*).

Collaborative Social Experiences

Within the relationship structures, students experience little choice and autonomy and have limited opportunities to engage generatively and meaningfully with each other. Students engage with the topic/content using prescribed ways of contributing and interacting that are defined by, and sometimes dominated by, adults (e.g., *the teacher may use the time to lecture about misbehavior; students may individually contribute when called on, but have limited bi-directional peer discussion*).

Students rarely experience opportunities to practice holistic skills (e.g., *social awareness*) in safe and meaningful interpersonal contexts with peers and teachers. When these opportunities do arise, students may experience negative or harmful interactions, such as exclusion, put-downs, or unchecked discussions that deny or dismiss aspects of student identity or culture. Teachers may experience frustration when student skills that have been discussed or “covered” appear to have limited transfer to interpersonal activities.

Intentional Adult Roles and Practices

Within the structures, educators maintain tight control of the implementation, content and facilitation. The content and learning approaches may either be determined by a standard or mandated curriculum, or completely left up to individual educators with limited

where school design is at odds with student developmental needs (e.g., *rigid class schedules where teachers see many students in short, academically defined blocks*).

Within the relationship structures, students have inconsistent experiences with choice, autonomy, quality of interactions and engagement. The quality of student experiences may be mediated by teacher capacities and comfort (e.g., *skills in planning relational experiences; ability to engage with students in less formal, power-structured or academic roles*), resulting in certain experiences for some, but not for others.

Sometimes, lack of structure or scaffolding for holistic skill development (e.g., *self-awareness and regulation, executive functions*) undermines the activities, causing staff and students to be hesitant about trying again. Students who are generally seen as “compliant” by the teacher are often put in leadership roles and given more autonomy to practice holistic skills, while other students are rarely afforded these opportunities. Thus, some students feel disengaged or rarely experience contexts that challenge growth of relational skills or a sense of relevance and belonging to school.

Many educators facilitate relationship structures well, but there are some educators who do not use the structures at all or use them inconsistently, because they are skeptical about the value of these structures or have not been adequately supported in developing

Within the relationship structures, all students experience opportunities to engage in partnership and discourse with peers on relevant and compelling topics and tasks. Student voice and choice is a driver of the experiences, which provide frequent opportunities to get to know their peers and teachers outside of the normal routines of teaching and learning; to give and receive social support; to draw meaning from their community, cultural and individual lived experiences; and to engage playfully, as well as in more structured ways.

Students experience many opportunities to authentically develop holistic skills such as social awareness, self-regulation and growth mindset as they collaborate and connect with their peers and teachers (e.g., *navigating a conflict while planning a community service project*). As students are trusted to step into leadership roles and navigate their social experiences, they are also adequately supported by adults to maintain a context of physical, emotional and identity safety and belonging for all students.

Within the structures, educators function as facilitators and coaches, scaffolding skill development toward autonomy, empathetically listening and prompting inquiry with questions, and co-designing engaging and

guidance about the purpose or intention of the activities across the school or district.

Educators are not prepared to address issues related to diversity, equity or inclusion, and choose to avoid those topics or ignore them when they come up spontaneously. This approach undermines all students' opportunities to explore and learn about these issues, and in particular, it alienates some students, such as students of color or from other marginalized groups.

Little time and space is reserved for educator capacity building, and it is often limited to setting up systems at the beginning of the year. When students struggle within relationship structures, educators default to disciplinary reactions, like sending students out of the room, rather than taking the opportunity for everyone – including the educator – to learn from the experience.

the facilitation and coaching skills to manage relationship structures.

Some educators are able to address issues of diversity, equity and inclusion, but these issues are not openly discussed within the school community. Educators, therefore, have limited shared understanding about how best to support students around these issues.

Leaders provide some time and space for educator capacity building for relational experiences and structures, but it may be in the form of program-based professional development or generalized social-emotional skill development. Leaders have not created a culture for continuous improvement that would allow educators to process and learn from mistakes or challenges, or to process information about differences in student experience to figure out how to improve their structures.

meaningful learning experiences, alongside students and community members.

Educators are self-reflective and skilled in addressing issues of diversity, equity and inclusion in ways that value student experience and perspectives and strengthen students' sense of belonging (e.g., *facilitating conversations that come up spontaneously within relationship structures like Advisory; planning for intentional conversations about current issues, like racial justice, in these structures*).

Leaders provide time, space and structures, in a non-evaluative environment, to plan, implement and improve relationship structures. Leaders enhance educators' abilities to implement high-quality relationship structures by facilitating structures such as interdisciplinary teaming, shared cohorts of students, and common planning time. This allows educators to share their knowledge about students, provide individualized supports, and maintain continuity in student experiences (e.g., *norms, practices, complementary content/activities*).

References

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