

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 for Children’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 **Emerging** 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 Emerging 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: Learning Experiences in the Zone of Proximal Development

Meaningful, engaging and relevant lessons, projects, practice and feedback that draw upon students' interests, prior experiences and skills to inspire and support growth.



Shared Goals

School staff, leadership, caregivers and students have differing visions for learning, which may focus primarily on what students should learn and when, without considering how and why. There may be disagreement about what learning outcomes matter most, or lack of transparency around what learning outcomes are valued. Goal setting may be minimal or might be oriented toward groups of students, rather than personalized to each student. Goal-setting processes do not integrate students' interests, hopes and dreams with schoolwide, high expectations. Because of this, adults may have to exercise a lot of control over students to motivate them to engage. Adults may have a limited concept of what students are capable of.

Meaningful Learning Design

Little effort is made to understand students' identities, prior knowledge and experiences, interests and goals, so learning experiences are not necessarily resonant. Learners are seen as passive, and much effort might go into controlling their engagement through rewards and/or punishments. Student interest and emotional engagement is seen as their responsibility, so students might be blamed when they do not care about or like what they are learning.

Leaders, staff, caregivers and students may agree upon some ways to center students in the learning process, but may struggle to consistently act against that vision. Learning outcomes are somewhat clear and shared but are not consistently referenced in the design of learning goals. Goal-setting processes might account for student voice at times (*e.g., specialized goals for a project block*), yet at other times they may be primarily directed by school and adult priorities. Adult expectations of students may still be somewhat low, especially for struggling students, resulting in adults doing a lot of the "heavy lifting."

Some of the time, learning experiences are emotionally resonant for students. Educators may use their understanding of what students care about to design some learning experiences, or learning experiences might often reflect the interests and goals of the teacher or school. At times, experiences might provoke authentic use of skills and students' desire to seek out knowledge (*e.g., choice of meaningful texts to read, choice of topics for research projects*), while at other times, students may be asked to learn passively (*e.g.,*

All leaders, staff, caregivers and students have a shared vision for learning that highlights students as active agents in the learning process. Learning outcomes are clear, shared and used to design students' experience and goals. Personalized goal setting is a consistent part of students' experience, and they regularly reflect on and share progress and refine their learning goals. Goal setting is bi-directional – students' goals for their lives are shaped by school, and school experiences are shaped by students' identities, interests, hopes and dreams. All adults articulate high expectations for, and belief in the potential of, all students.

Projects, lessons, activities and resources are designed to be emotionally resonant, drawing from the understanding that when students care about what they are learning, they push themselves and are invested and engaged. Learning experiences are designed to provoke skill development and knowledge building, drawing upon students' identities, prior knowledge and experiences, interests and goals. Students have frequent opportunities to practice real

External pressures, such as curricular requirements and standardized testing, might be a primary driver of students' learning experiences. As a result, instruction might focus on siloed knowledge and/or skills that are decontextualized. If students ask why they're learning or doing something, teachers may lack a clear answer or often default to responses like "you're going to need to know how to do this next year" or "because it's on the test." Teachers may primarily use strategies like rote memorization and summary, versus making meaning of real-world examples. Much of the language in the classroom may focus on procedures rather than the learning process.

Collaborative Experiences

The classroom setup and schedule make one-on-one, small-group, and whole-group interactions between peers and with teachers challenging. Most, if not all, student work is independent, with limited opportunities for students to practice social, communication and relationship skills. Little support is provided to help students talk about their learning. Because of this, student discussions might often appear "off topic." When students do work together, it may not go well. Hierarchies and lack of matched supports might limit some students' sense of belonging within their academic community.

extensive drilling of facts or strategies without context or application). Some of the time, students seem to engage in practice opportunities eagerly and productively, while at other times, they might resist or disengage.

External pressures, such as curricular requirements and standardized testing, may make it challenging for educators to create learning experiences that are meaningful. As a result, some learning opportunities might engage students in transferable, meaningful, and contextualized skill and knowledge building (e.g., *for certain projects, during certain instructional blocks*). At times, students can share meaningful purposes for their learning, while at other times, they might be less sure. Some relevant, real-world examples and cases may be integrated throughout the learning process.

The classroom setup and schedule provide some opportunities for students to work with peers and teachers one on one, in small groups, and as a whole group. These opportunities might only occur during certain instructional blocks (e.g., *students frequently work together during science, but rarely engage with peers during writing*). Supports for student collaboration and communication might be rigid and limiting (e.g., *students might collaborate to get clear on assignments, but may not actually work together throughout their learning process*). Learning experiences might not help all students feel as though they belong. Students might value some peers as resources for their learning but might also see others as having less to offer because of how collaboration is framed by educators.

skills, in authentic contexts, with increasing complexity and with supports that facilitate productive struggle.

External pressures, such as curricular requirements and standardized testing, are inputs into, but not the drivers of, students learning experiences. Instead, educators expansively frame content and skills so that all students understand how they can use what they're learning. When students are asked why they are learning things, they share meaningful and varied purposes (e.g., *"so that I can count quickly and instead of one-by-one"; "so that I know the historical facts and can make a strong argument for what I care about to my local government"; "because my stories are important"*). Relevant, real-world examples are integrated throughout the learning process.

Adults recognize that peer relationships, guidance and collaboration facilitate performance within the zone of proximal development. Learning experiences support a sense of belonging and relatedness, offering opportunities for students to develop and practice social, communication and relationship skills. It is common to see students working together in partners and groups through both facilitated structures and informal collaboration. Students frequently engage in varied forms of academic discourse with one another, including many opportunities for students to ask each other questions, make connections, elaborate on and explain ideas, and engage in debate or argument. Within these structures, there is scaffolding and fading of supports and increased complexity as students grow.

Assessment and Feedback That Supports Growth

Assessment practices may primarily focus on evaluating student deficits, with little information that supports decision making about how to better achieve learning, growth or mastery. Similarly, adults may receive summative feedback that groups them into performance categories, without providing a pathway to growth.

Teachers may not have a great sense of where each student is, instead planning learning experiences based off of their preferences and/or assumptions about what students need at different ages. Students' performance may be measured based on whim, and families, caregivers and students might be confused about how they're doing or surprised by their teachers' assessment of them.

There are minimal processes for formative feedback – instead, students might find out at the end of the term how they are doing. Students are not likely to regularly provide feedback to their teachers and school about what they need to grow.

Assessment might at times focus on grouping or evaluating students based on past performances rather than assessing how to achieve growth and mastery for all. These same structures might be mimicked in approaches to adult capacity building.

Teachers are attuned to students' academic progress. While there may be some variation of assessment techniques (e.g., *observations, student self-assessments, exit tickets*), they may not support a multifaceted and dynamic understanding of students. At times, adults may hold students to different sets of standards for the same work, perhaps being overly hard or easy on certain groups of students based on biases, despite efforts to unpack and address them.

Students may receive some formative feedback as they are learning new things, but most of their feedback might come from tests or comments on completed work at the end of the learning process. Additionally, feedback might focus primarily on academics without addressing holistic skills that support growth. Students may provide some feedback to staff about the support that they need to learn, but it might not be implemented regularly.

There is a culture of continuous improvement in the school that is oriented toward growth and mastery for all, including adults and students, rather than sorting or evaluating individuals based on past performance.

Teachers are attuned to students' learning and development. They use a variety of formal and informal formative assessments, such as student observations, self-assessments, interim assessments/quizzes, exit tickets, peer feedback, and caregiver knowledge. There are consistent structures to unpack beliefs that shape adults' understanding of students, such as stereotypes based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, academic performance and language. Teachers use tools such as rubrics, continuums and exemplars to both clearly articulate their expectations and manage the impact of biases on their grading and evaluation of students.

Consistent and frequent feedback supports students' understanding of their individual growth in a holistic set of skills (e.g., *cognitive, social, emotional*). Similarly, students regularly have opportunities to provide feedback to staff about what is, and is not, working for them as learners, and this feedback results in changes to their experience. Adults play the role of facilitator, collaborator and/or coach in the classroom, providing increasingly complex tasks and fading supports as students master skills.

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