

Recommendations for Integrating Instruction High-Leverage Practices in Special Education Teacher Learning

Larry Maheady, Angela L. Patti, Lisa A. Rafferty, Shannon Budin & Pixita del Prado Hill

Executive Summary

Ideally, educators use teaching practices that have a positive impact on important student outcomes. This is particularly important for those who teach individuals with disabilities since their students are more likely to perform below peers academically (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2018). Historically, in preparation programs, teacher educators have focused on developing candidates' curricular knowledge first, followed by opportunities to practice. However, learning *about* effective instruction primarily through coursework is an approach that has typically yielded little transfer to applied settings. Teacher educators should consider revising and/or designing preparation programs to provide more opportunities for candidates to *practice* effective teaching strategies in simulated and clinical settings with feedback from teacher educators, mentor teachers, and peers. In this brief, we provide information on the 12 instructionally focused High-Leverage Practices (HLPs) and offer recommendations for integrating them into "core curriculum" not only in special education teacher preparation programs but also in professional learning opportunities.

Aim & Background

When teachers use effective instructional practices, educational outcomes for students with disabilities (SWD) are more likely to improve (e.g., Campbell, Bowman-Perrott, Burke, & Sallese, 2018). Although many effective instructional practices exist, they are not used routinely by novice and/or experienced teachers in many K–12 classrooms (McLeskey, Maheady, Billingsley, Brownell, & Lewis, 2019). This ubiquitous "research-to-practice gap" has prompted major curricular and pedagogical changes in teacher education. These changes have included: (a) increased emphasis on clinical practice, (b) identification of a small number of teaching practices that all teachers should use with fluency (i.e., HLPs), and (c) development of methods to prepare and support teachers who use the most effective practices (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009).

Closing the "research-to-practice gap" hinges, in part, on teachers using effective teaching practices, especially HLPs, which are chief among effective teaching practices. HLPs are "a set of practices that are fundamental to support student learning, and that can be taught, learned, and implemented by those entering the profession" (Windschitl, Thompson, Braaten, & Stroupe, 2012, p. 880). HLPs are: (a) limited in number, (b) used often during the school day, (c) applicable across broad age-, grade-, and ability-levels, and (d) supported by empirical research. Working in collaboration with key stakeholders, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) approved 22 High-Leverage Practices for special education teachers and candidates (CEC, 2017). The HLPs are organized into four interrelated components of special education practice (Collaboration, Assessment, Social/Emotional/Behavioral, Instruction). In this brief, we describe the 12 Instruction HLPs, and provide suggestions for how teacher educators might use them to develop, revise, and structure pre- or in-service learning (see also Figure 1).

"Effective special education teachers base their instruction and support of students with disabilities on the best available evidence, combined with their professional judgments and knowledge of individual student needs."

—McLeskey et al.,
2017, p. 69

Findings, Implications & Recommendations

“Intervention research...points to the importance of well-thought-out instructional focus areas.”

—CEC & CEDAR Center, 2019, p. 5

Teaching students with disabilities is a strategic, flexible, and recursive process (McLeskey et al., 2017). Instruction HLPs 11 through 13 describe the knowledge and skill sets that special education teachers (SETs) need to *design* and *adapt* instruction. Effective teachers create lessons that are developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and applicable across multiple instructional settings. They link student understandings to appropriate learning standards, progressions, and benchmarks and align them with long- and short-term individualized education program (IEP) goals. Effective SETs provide well-planned lessons with accuracy and consistency, monitor student performance, and adjust content, materials, and/or strategies as needed.

HLPs 14 through 22 highlight the knowledge, instructional, and decision-making skills needed to *deliver* and *evaluate* sound lessons. Effective SETs actively engage all students in meaningful learning activities, provide scaffolded supports, and use practices that promote pro-social interactions. They use teacher-led, peer-assisted, student-managed, and technology-assisted practices well, know when and where to apply them, monitor student progress regularly, and analyze instruction to improve student outcomes and refine their teaching practice.

The 12 Instruction HLPs were developed to improve teachers’ instructional competence and thereby enhance educational outcomes for SWD. Ultimately, any such improvements rely on SETs who are well prepared to use these practices in P–12 settings. For novice teachers, effectiveness will be driven by factors rooted in their preparation programs, the most important of which are opportunities to (a) use HLPs in simulated and authentic settings and (b) receive performance-based feedback. Ideally, school partners will provide necessary input to align HLPs with school and student needs and teacher educators will develop or refine a *continuum* of developmentally sequenced teaching opportunities to hone candidates’ teaching skills. Maheady and colleagues (in press) offer a few recommendations:

1. Identify and prioritize a small set of Instruction HLPs (e.g., 5 to 8); solicit input from school partners to identify *important* and *relevant* HLPs; and, provide structured opportunities for pre- and in-service teachers to use them and receive performance-based feedback.
2. Develop explicit criteria for selecting clinical placements (e.g., teachers are good instructional models, SWDs make adequate academic progress and are socially accepted by peers).
3. Consider *teacher pairings* to facilitate co-planning, co-teaching, and co-evaluation of Instruction HLP implementation and impact.
4. Provide a pipeline of professional learning, through school-university partnership, that includes opportunities for pre- and in-service teachers to practice and receive feedback on their use of Instruction HLPs to promote consistency, capacity-building, and enhanced P–12 student outcomes.

Conclusion

The 12 Instruction HLPs provide a useful blueprint for defining effective SET instructional practice. There are, however, important implications (i.e., conceptual, instructional, and organizational) associated with their use in pre- and in-service teacher learning programs. Minimally, teacher educators must decide which HLPs to emphasize in their programs, how to prepare pre- and in-service teachers to use them, and how to evaluate the impact of their efforts. As such, Figures 2 and 3 provides resources designed to assist teacher educators in integrating Instruction and other HLPs into preparation programs for pre- and in-service teacher learning.

References

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Figure 1. Instruction High-Leverage Practices for K–12 Special Education Teachers and Candidates

Instruction High-Leverage Practices #11 through #22
11. Identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals.
12. Systematically design instruction toward a specific learning goal.
13. Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals.
14. Teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence.
15. Provide scaffolded supports.
16. Use explicit instruction.
17. Use flexible grouping.
18. Use strategies to promote active student engagement.
19. Use assistive and instructional technologies.
20. Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning across time and settings.
21. Provide intensive instruction.
22. Teachers provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior (learning focus).

Figure 2. Resources to Learn More about the Instructional HLPs and Integrating Them into Special Education Teacher Preparation Programs

Resource and URL	Description
High-Leverage Practices in Special Education https://highleveragepractices.org/	Developed in partnership between the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the CEEDAR Center, this webpage includes a variety of resources to help promote the understanding and use of HLPs (e.g., webinars, videos of HLPs in practice, resource links, and professional development guides).
Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center. (2019). <i>Introducing high-leverage practices in special education: A professional development guide for school leaders</i> . Arlington, VA: Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center. https://highleveragepractices.org/a-professional-development-guide-for-school-leaders/	This guide, designed for school leaders, provides explanations of HLPs in special education, along with tools for professional development on HLPs.
HLP Video Series https://highleveragepractices.org/videos/	These videos provide visual models of HLPs in action, in real classrooms, with real students.
IRIS Center: HLP Resources https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/resources/high-leverage-practices/	CEC and the CEEDAR Center partnered with the IRIS Center to develop an interactive tool to help users identify IRIS resources that provide information on HLPs.
High-Leverage Practices in Elementary Education, Teaching Works, University of Michigan http://www.teachingworks.org/work-of-teaching/high-leverage-practices	This site describes 19 high-leverage practices developed for K-5 <i>general education</i> teachers. Brief descriptions of each HLP and other resource materials are provided.
<i>Teachingworks: High-Leverage Practices</i> http://www.teachingworks.org/work-of-teaching/high-leverage-practices	This website, created by the University of Michigan, includes a list and description of the 19 general education HLPs from University of Michigan's Teaching Works.
McLeskey, J., Barringer, M-D., Billingsley, B., Brownell, M., Jackson, D., Kennedy, M., ...Ziegler, D. (2017). <i>High-leverage practices in special education</i> . Arlington, VA: CEC and CEEDAR Center. http://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/high-leverage-practices/	This book is the final report of the special education HLP writing team which includes the 22 HLPs in special education with descriptions, rationales, and research support.