



MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTIONS LEAD THE WAY

Developing a Rubric on Inclusive Instruction



Branch Alliance
for Educator Diversity

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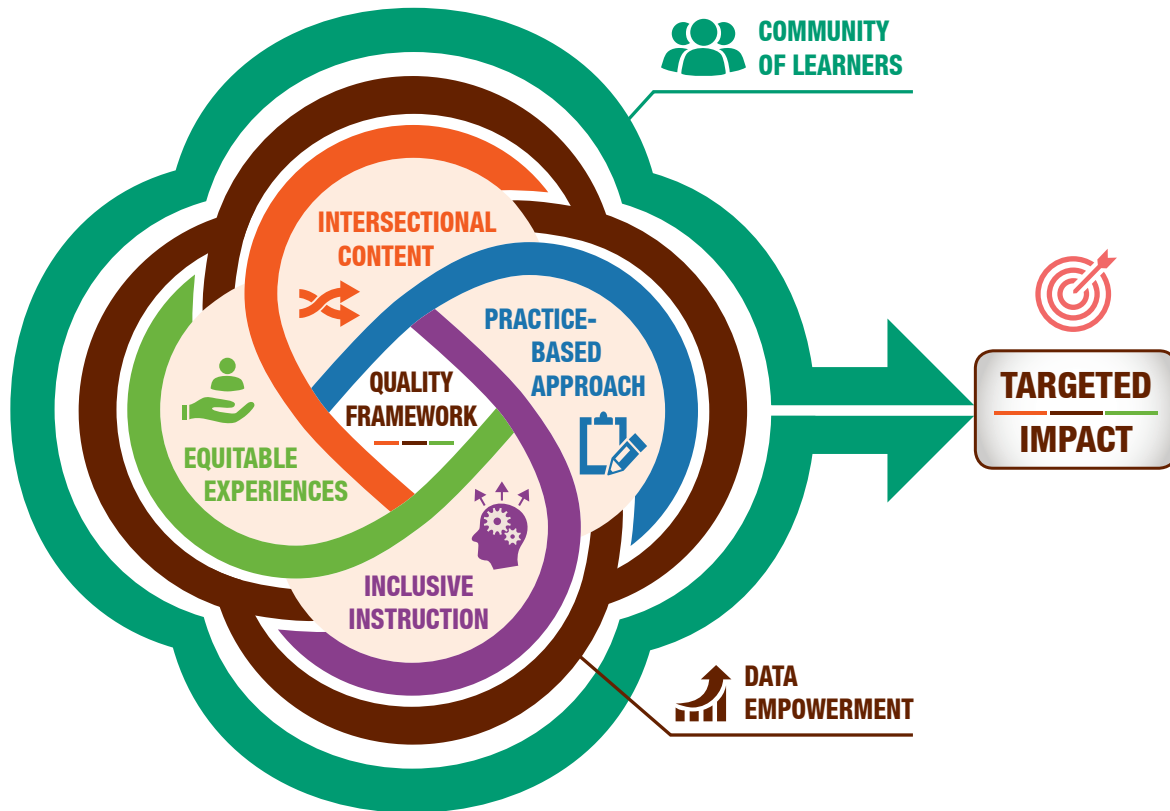


MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTIONS LEAD THE WAY

▲ Developing a Rubric on Inclusive Instruction

Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity (BranchED) is the only non-profit organization in the country dedicated to strengthening, growing, and amplifying the impact of educator preparation at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), with the longer-range goals of both diversifying the teaching profession and intentionally addressing critical issues of educational equity for all students. Our vision is for all students to access diverse, highly effective educators. Housed within the overarching BranchED organization, the BranchED National Educator Preparation Transformation Center operates with the goal of redefining what constitutes quality educator preparation within MSIs. The work of the center is based on the premise that teacher preparation programs that implement sustainable, quality programming at scale will result in more diverse teachers better able to positively impact outcomes for Black and Latino/a/x students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

This goal is accomplished through application of our Framework for the Quality Preparation of Educators. The Framework outlines a roadmap for teacher preparation programs to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse student body. It seeks to build equity-oriented Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) that prepare



educators to reflect, respect, and reify the value of the diversity of America's PK-12 school children. The BranchED Framework for Quality Preparation of Educators identifies six critical focus areas that teacher preparation providers can leverage to redesign their programs.

Inclusive instruction is identified as one of these key design principles of effective EPPs. Within this principle, BranchED believes that quality teacher preparation minimizes barriers to learning and supports the success of all learners while ensuring that academic standards are not diminished.

▲ Rationale for a Rubric on Inclusive Instruction

As part of the transformation process at BranchED, EPPs need to examine their curriculum, defined as the totality of student experiences in the educational process, to ensure it focuses on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Engaging in a curriculum audit, a process to examine curriculum including coursework and applied experiences, can serve as a starting point for continuous improvement efforts. With this in mind, BranchED believed that a formative tool to guide this curriculum audit work, focusing explicitly on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, and assessing the extent to which these are evident in the curriculum, would be an important addition to the field. By focusing on a formative rather than a compliance-driven process, this tool would provide space for honest and contextualized discussions among program faculty and stakeholders around a curriculum rooted in inclusive instruction.



▲ History of Rubric Development

Upon seeing the need for a tool of this nature, BranchED gathered a core research team of knowledgeable scholars to begin work on the development of a rubric on inclusive instruction. This team was composed of six faculty members representing EPPs at three MSIs. Research team members included: Dr. Stacy Kula, Azusa Pacific University; Dr. Alicia Watkin, Azusa Pacific University; Dr. Jody Moody, Texas A&M - San Antonio; Dr. Karen Kohler, Texas A&M - San Antonio; Dr. Christian Faltis, Texas A&M - International University; Dr. Seth Sampson, Texas A&M - International University.

The first step for the core research team was to engage in a process to select the criteria of inclusive instruction that would be used to build the rubric. After a discussion of BranchED's definition of inclusive instruction and the importance of including elements of diversity and equity, the core team was tasked with individually proposing potential criteria to be included in the rubric. Team members independently reviewed literature on inclusive instruction and proposed criteria for the rubric rooted in the research and their experience working with culturally and linguistically diverse candidates. With initial research complete, the core team convened for discussion and refinement of eight potential criteria that eventually became the anchor for the rubric. This process of independent work combined with rich, collaborative sessions proved to be a successful format in the development of the rubric. The proposed criteria were centered around a research-based understanding of the importance of inclusive, culturally responsive

and sustaining practices. Deep, meaningful learning and engagement are connected to curriculum that reflect students' backgrounds and experiences.¹ As the rubric criteria were developed, the team focused on components that were asset-based,² centered students and their funds of knowledge,³ promoted positive cultural identity,⁴ individualized instruction with high expectations for all learners,⁵ and encouraged critical reflection.⁶

Collaboration among the core team was a highlight of the development process. The cycle of individual research and reflection combined with collaborative discussion aided the core team in the development process of the rubric criteria, exemplar descriptions, levels of implementation, and an implementation guide. The team met monthly to engage in these critical conversations, make decisions, and decide on next steps. This process of continual reflection combined with action pushed the work forward in a meaningful way and resulted in a quality product. However, this team did not engage in this work in isolation. Along the way, other scholars were engaged in the process to ensure the end product was reliable, valid, clear, and of high quality.

The Role of Critical Friends and Pilot Implementation Team

Apart from the core team, other essential roles in the development of the rubric were that of the critical friends and the pilot implementation team. These teams were comprised of colleagues of the core team, professors of education in the same institutions. They were embedded in every step of the process to ensure the validity and usefulness of the rubric. They provided feedback around face and content validity as well as feedback regarding relevance and clarity within the tool specific to the themes of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. As this data was collected from the critical friend group, the core team utilized the Lawshe Content Validity Ratio (CVR) and found that five of the proposed criteria surpassed the critical value. The CVR for three criteria were below the critical value (.99) and flagged for review. Ratings on clarity, along with qualitative responses regarding the proposed criteria, were also obtained from reviewers. This insight led to proposed revisions to six criteria, including the merging of two criteria for greater clarity, the division of one criterion raters felt was double barreled, and the development of one new criterion. The team ended this exercise with nine revised criteria that would ultimately be built into a fully constructed rubric. Reviewer responses also reinforced the importance of an implementation guide to provide additional context for criteria. Throughout this process, the rubric and its criteria, along with the implementation guide, were iteratively reviewed by the research team and additional MSI faculty.

Furthermore, a pilot implementation team was engaged in applying the rubric to their own curriculum and providing feedback. Contributions from this team resulted in revisions including more asset-based language and a more significant distinction between how to utilize the rubric to assess a single course versus a whole program. This team's critical feedback helped improve the rubric and create confidence in its quality. In all, the development of the rubric and accompanying materials was a collaborative process rooted in critical discussions and feedback cycles.

The Final Product: A Rubric on Inclusive Instruction

This work culminated in a rubric on inclusive instruction. Below are the nine criteria that anchor the rubric.

A curriculum that demonstrates inclusive instruction:

- 1 Explores issues of identity including intersections of identity.
- 2 Encourages praxis through informed action, advocacy, and/or activism.
- 3 Centers the voices of families, community, and PK-12 education stakeholders through asset- and place-based partnerships.
- 4 Includes representation of multiple dimensions of diversity (e.g., cultural, ethnic, multilingualistic, gender, ability, sexuality, religious, etc.) in materials across the program.
- 5 Includes representation of multiple dimensions of diverse backgrounds (e.g., socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, multilingualistic, gender, ability, sexuality, religious, etc.) across those who develop and deliver the instruction.
- 6 Utilizes aspects of Universal Design for Learning, providing flexibility, voice, and choice to ensure engagement, access, and needed supports for every teacher candidate.
- 7 Develops critical perspectives in teacher candidates that result in critiques of systems.
- 8 Develops and integrates asset-based pedagogies of care.
- 9 Embeds histories (contributions, experiences of assimilation and oppression, etc.) of marginalized groups in education throughout the program.

The rubric with these nine criteria is intended to be used as a formative tool to provide insights as to how EPPs are tending to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. The formative nature of this rubric provides opportunities for reflection, revision, and improvement. It is not intended to grade or score curriculum for compliance purposes. To that end, users will notice that there are no numeric values applied to the different levels of implementation, nor are there stagnant methods for application of the rubric. Instead, the rubric offers descriptive levels of implementation that build on each other, exploration of inclusive instruction at the course and program level, and space to reflect on current implementation and planning of next steps.



▲ Lessons Learned

The development process of this rubric involved collaborative reflection on both research and practice. Drawing from the collective experience of the core research team, several major themes emerged that are reflected across the criteria. These “lessons learned” were supported by the literature, as well as the team’s experiences during the development of this instrument.

Dimensions of Diversity Must Be Explicit

Early discussions and readings among the team focused on the existence of a wide range of identities, any of which can co-exist or intersect with others. True inclusion creates space in classrooms for teacher educators and teacher candidates to bring their multiple and unique identities, to feel a sense of safety in expressing all that they are, to see themselves reflected in the materials and discussions of the course, and to learn to support all their future students across their careers. These identities cut across issues of race and ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, neurodiversity, gender, and sexuality and could include other dimensions as well. It was necessary that the rubric explicitly call out these dimensions, to ensure that EPPs did not inadvertently exclude a segment of their teacher candidates (or fail to prepare those candidates to support a segment of their future students). The explicitness of these areas of identity provides opportunities for EPPs to think about the holistic nature of inclusion at both the course and program level.

Inclusion Starts at Inception

The inclusion of diverse perspectives should be present in the conceptualization, planning, and implementation of instructional design. Often, in focusing on the end result of teacher preparation—classroom practices—EPPs may forget that inclusion starts much earlier, when programs and courses are conceptualized. The involvement of diverse voices and perspectives at these early stages is vital, as it works to ensure that the very structures and content of courses and programs do not only reflect dominant perspectives but incorporate and value those of marginalized populations. This sets the stage for inclusion across all phases of curriculum development and implementation: from the inception of courses to the course design, to the selection of materials and assessments, to actual instruction. As noted in the rubric, EPPs should seek to hire diverse teacher educators (along the multiple dimensions of diversity, as noted above), and to creatively incorporate the voices of individuals from marginalized groups (e.g., hiring community consultants, working with parent groups, etc.) in the absence of such diversity.

With this in mind, the research team acknowledges the critical importance of diverse perspectives in the team members developing the rubric. The members of the initial development team were predominantly White and identified the necessity of including members with greater diversity, recognizing that the initial team's perspectives in creating a rubric to address equity and diversity were limited. The team intentionally sought to and included additional team members from diverse backgrounds as critical friends and implementation team members. Feedback from these team members identified areas for revision, including asset-based language focusing on the resilience and contributions of diverse communities.

Individual Courses Are Only One Piece of the Puzzle

When implementing this rubric, it is beneficial to include voices that have a deep understanding of the course or program being evaluated. Without this knowledge, it can be difficult to apply the rubric effectively. As part of the reliability process, critical friends were given a sample curriculum to assess independently. However, it was challenging for them to apply the rubric without historical knowledge of course development or experience teaching the course. An additional hurdle when analyzing an individual course with a rubric is the impulse to view final ratings as a “score” on inclusive instruction. However, it is unlikely that a single course in a program will be at the level of mature implementation for all the criteria within the rubric. For example, some aspects of equity and diversity may be presented early in a student's program of study in order to introduce concepts and issues within education. In this instance, a criterion rated as “emerging implementation” may not signal a need for revision, but simply indicate that this particular criterion is being introduced in this course. However, if a criterion is rated as “emerging implementation” for courses throughout a program, this may be cause to evaluate the course and program more deeply. In this way, ratings of implementation, for both individual courses and the whole program, should be viewed as a formative practice to guide critical reflection and curricular revisions.



▲ Recommendations for Future Projects

Involve Other Teacher Educators

The current rubric was designed with teacher educators serving in full-time professor roles at EPPs. In future projects related to this rubric, it will be helpful to expand the perspectives of teacher educators to include others who assist in preparing teacher candidates. Other teacher educators may include PK-12 and higher education administrators, mentor teachers, school counselors and social workers, and other community outreach professionals. These other educators work intimately with schools, families, and communities, making what could be learned from these educators valuable for the whole school community.

Expand the Theme of Language Diversity

An area of diversity that could be expanded in an inclusive instruction rubric is language diversity. Particularly for institutions that prepare candidates to serve communities with a high density of language diversity, an expansion in this area would allow for further assessment of how curriculum is preparing teacher candidates to serve language diverse students. Topics such as academic and social language acquisition, dynamic bilingualism, and translanguaging could be important items to review within an inclusive curriculum. At minimum, it will be vital for those

using the rubric to determine the components of linguistic diversity important to address in the context of their program. A similar more expansive project could be to create an additional rubric, modeled from the rubric for inclusive instruction that would serve as a tool to assess curriculum around the theme of linguistic diversity. These additional activities will build the understanding of teacher educators' views on language diversity and could lead to changes in how teacher educators promote multilingualism in the communities they serve.

Create Accompanying Professional Development

When implementing the rubric on inclusive instruction, professional development will be key. A future project will be to create professional development tools and support that will assist users with their application of the rubric. This professional development will include discussion to better frame the rubric criteria, familiarization with the levels of implementation, and norming around the definitions of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging for their particular program and the community they serve. Additionally, this professional development will provide necessary tools to calibrate use of the instrument across various scorers. The intention of the rubric is to enhance a formative understanding of inclusive instruction within a curriculum, and the rubric in isolation may not provide this desired result.



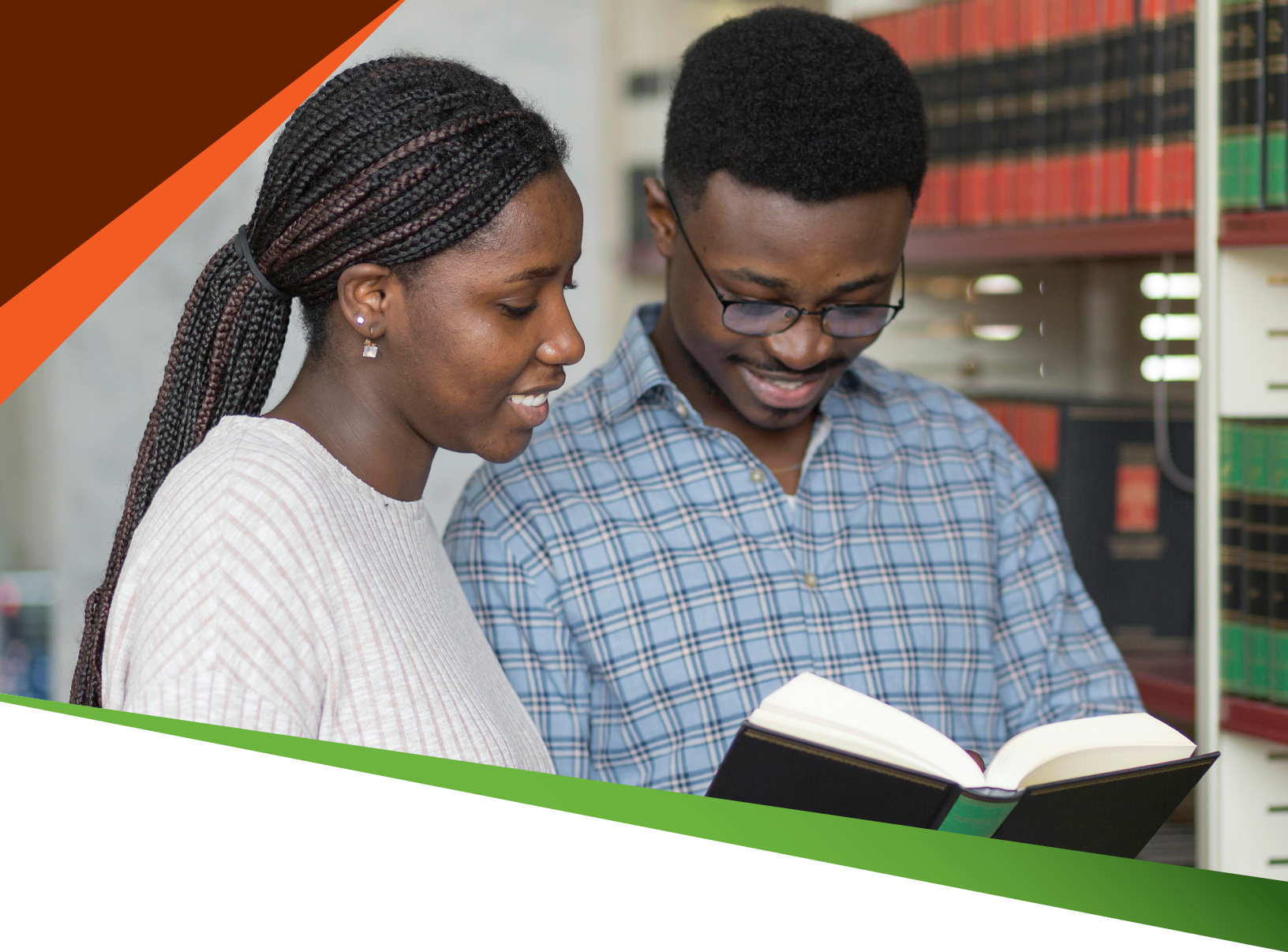
Contribute to the Field of Research

The use of this rubric on inclusive instruction provides opportunities to conduct additional research to better understand the various ways teacher educators are implementing the instrument. Additionally, research could be conducted around the impact of evaluation findings using the rubric. Specifically, teams could explore any instructional changes implemented by teacher educators following their use of the rubric. The dissemination of this research at conferences and state policy venues would contribute to the field and promote the examination of curriculum with an eye toward diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

Expand Beyond Higher Education

The need for inclusive instruction is not unique to the field of higher education. Given the need for inclusive instruction at all levels, there is an opportunity to create a parallel rubric focused on curriculum at the PK-12 level. An instrument of this nature would support classroom teachers and school administrators in their endeavors to consider and understand inclusive instruction and the themes of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging across the PK-12 curriculum. An expansion of this nature will require input from PK-12 teachers, administrators, counselors, community professionals, social workers, and other key stakeholders.





▲ Collaborative Research Empowers MSIs to Lead the Way

Collaborative research projects among MSIs can certainly spotlight the knowledge, experience, and expertise of faculty serving in these institutions. MSI teacher educators bring unique acumen and experience to the themes of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Their work with diverse communities lends critical insights to these themes as demonstrated in the development and refinement of this rubric. This project highlighted the talents of MSI teacher educators while producing a high-quality rubric on inclusive instruction, which has the potential to enhance curriculum within EPPs at other MSIs and throughout the country. The development of this rubric is yet another contribution to the field by the talented and dedicated teacher educators at MSIs.

Endnotes

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