



EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION COACHING:

A CLOSER LOOK AT COACHING MODELS IN CHILD CARE AND HEAD START

INTRODUCTION

Providing professional development opportunities to early childhood professionals is necessary to strengthen skills and knowledge in the field. Making these experiences accessible for teachers and caregivers increases their knowledge and skills therefore, improving the quality of the experiences they provide young children. This increase in the quality of children's learning experiences helps young children learn. Researchers often debate the method and means of professional development delivery. As the field has broadened its scope of approaches to professional development delivery, research has found that coaching is very effective (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Coaching has been so effective that Head Start has included it in the 2016 Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) (Administration for Children and Families, 45 CFR Chapter XIII, RIN 0970-AC63, 2016).

This brief provides a broad description of the coaching landscape across the country and offers strategies and resources to promote systemic coaching approaches for state, territory, or regional considerations. CCDF administrators, quality improvement and licensing professionals, and other state, territory, regional, and program-level staff can use this brief as they consider quality improvement options. At the program-level or the individual teacher-level, coaching can be an effective strategy to increase quality, and consequently child outcomes, in the early care and learning field.

This resource is divided into six sections:

1. Coaching Defined
2. Purpose of Coaching
3. Delivery Methods
4. State/Territory Coaching System Structures
5. Coaching Models
6. State Examples
7. References and Resources

COACHING DEFINED

Though coaching itself can be as varied as the entities and agencies providing it, the definitions of coaching tend to be even more fluid. It is sometimes used interchangeably with related terms, such as technical assistance, mentoring, and consulting. It is important then to define coaching and discuss what is included in a coaching model or system. In the landmark professional development glossary created by NAEYC and NACCRRA (now known as Child Care Aware of America), coaching is defined as

a relationship-based process led by an expert with specialized and adult learning, knowledge and skills, who often serves in a different professional role than the recipient(s). Coaching is designed to build capacity for specific professional dispositions, skills, and behaviors and is focused on goal-setting and achievement for an individual or group (NAEYC & NACCRRA, 2011).

Head Start, in the 2016 HSPPS, further stipulates that programs must “... implement a research-based, coordinated coaching strategy for education staff” (Administration for Children and Families, 45 CFR Chapter XIII, RIN 0970-AC63, 2016). This regulation increased interest in coaching within the Head Start community. Coaching frameworks or models are created to ensure that coaches use similar approaches and consistent strategies when working with teachers and caregivers. In many states across the country, child care system leaders also use coaching models to improve quality in early care and education community-based settings or as part of quality rating systems.

In late 2016, the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning (NCECDTL) used state agency websites to conduct an informal scan of online resources, documents, and references related to early childhood coaching (Child Care Licensing, Pre-Kindergarten Administrative Agencies, etc.). Staff analyzed basic information about coaching offered within states and the various purposes that they served. This scan revealed that coaching is provided in a myriad of ways at the state level and for many different purposes. Coaching is structured differently from state to state, delivered in diverse ways, and provided by a range of agency types. The variety of factors within each model makes one-to-one comparisons between different state systems or state child care systems to Head Start systems challenging. Factors within coaching models can be sorted into four categories—purpose, delivery methods, coaching system structures, and approaches. The variation comes from how these factors are administered and how the factors are aligned to the philosophy of the coaching model. Reviewing these factors, however, may provide agencies and states with a way to assess the potential fit and feasibility of each model.

PURPOSE OF COACHING

Coaching is used for different purposes in early care and education settings. Program-level purposes require a different approach than those aimed at improving individual skills for teachers and providers. Coaching for overall quality may focus on environments or programmatic indicators. Individual factors may include health and safety, materials, and organization of the classrooms or settings. Programmatic factors may include business practices and policies, staff benefits, and family involvement in the program. Coaching to support individual teachers often improves teaching practices and reinforces and incorporates new knowledge gained through training, coursework, or other professional development activities.

Coaching goals also differ between program types. For example, program leaders may identify coaching as a strategy to support goals in Head Start programs, goals as defined by the state pre-kindergarten program, Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) goals, or goals to improve on an assessment instrument. Within state child care systems, some programs may receive both program-level coaching as well as individual coaching. In state quality improvement initiatives, coaching typically takes place as part of a broader professional development strategy that may include coursework, group training, mentoring, and other professional development strategies.

DELIVERY METHODS

Traditional coaching methods are provided on-site with program leadership, teaching staff, or providers. Alternative methods to the more traditional coaching practice have been explored which include a variety of delivery methods using virtual approaches. These programs use online platforms to provide support for multiple participants or to accommodate teachers who work in rural or other isolated areas. They can also use video to document teaching practices with providers to reflect and discuss in distance coaching. Videotaping and video review can also augment any coaching delivery method.

Coaching may also vary depending on the type of organization providing the services and the model they use. For example, a student teacher may have a coaching experience as a part of a course, while an experienced teacher may receive coaching through their local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency, and a family child care provider might be coached through an Early Head Start/Child Care Partnership. In addition, coaching is delivered to different types of roles within a coaching delivery system from an expert or technical assistance provider to peer-to-peer coaching. At the state and federal levels, these delivery methods are determined by the coaching system structure and the funding entity's requirements.

STATE/TERRITORY COACHING SYSTEM STRUCTURES

Head Start operates on a federal to local structure that provides guidance and opportunities to be flexible. The Head Start Program Performance Standards for coaching require programs to provide coaching support for teachers, while allowing for programs to choose a research-based coaching model. State agency-funded systems are often designed to support programmatic advancement within a QRIS or state licensing system. State systems also support and deliver coaching to individual teachers through CCR&Rs or other professional development providers. These coaching systems are often designed to improve identified teaching practices. Often a CCR&R coach may use a specific assessment tool to identify teaching practices that will support positive social and emotional development in young children. Pre-kindergarten programs create coaching systems to help teachers develop and improve teaching practices. This system may be structured to align with public school coaching systems.

Regardless of the agency, coaching structures typically include qualification requirements for coaches. In Head Start programs, the qualifications outlined in the HSPPS require coaches hold a BA in early childhood education or a related field (Administration for Children and Families, 45 CFR Chapter XIII, RIN 0970-AC63, 2016). Additionally, several states have developed coach competencies and credentialing systems to ensure that coaches are qualified within the state-level coaching systems. Coaching system policies may also dictate the dose, duration, and intensity of the coaching experience—which is then supported by the appropriate caseload assignments. One of the most critical factors within the coaching system is determining the appropriate approach to use to achieve the goals that the system is designed to support.

COACHING MODELS

A coaching approach, or model, is a framework or process that guides the coaching experience. The model's theoretical underpinnings guide every component in the framework. The model provides direction to help coaches practice with fidelity. Coaching models reflect the purpose, goals, and principles of the project (Isner, et. al, 2011). Most coaching models are built on trusting relationships, goals and expectations, and offer an opportunity to use reflective practice to learn and grow. Research suggests that the five key elements of a research-based coaching model include goals, action plans, observation, reflection, and feedback (Zaslow, M., Tout, K., & Halle, T. 2012).

Listed below are several coaching models based in research or evidence. This alphabetical list is by no means definitive—rather it reflects popular approaches used in early childhood or related fields.

COACHING INTERACTION STYLE

The Coaching Interaction Style, originally developed for home visitors, is a capacity-building, helpful practice to help parents and professionals use existing abilities and developing skills to attain desired child and family outcomes. Regular interactions between learners and coaches builds learner's capacity and helps them achieve intended outcomes. Coaching Interaction Style is built upon a research synthesis of coaching practices and studies that identified five coaching characteristics:

1. Joint planning between the learner and coach
2. Observations by and of the learner
3. Participatory action on the part of the learner
4. Promoting the learner's reflections on his or her actions
5. Feedback by the coach based on the learner's reflections

These characteristics occur within the context of coaching interactions that help learners improve existing abilities, develop new skills, and gain a deeper understanding of their teaching practices. The Coaching Interaction Style comes with tools to support coaches in interactions with learners including, *The Framework for Reflective Questioning*, *The Coaching Log*, and the *Coaching Practices Rating Scale* (Rush & Sheldon, 2011).

http://inclusioninstitute.fpg.unc.edu/sites/inclusioninstitute.fpg.unc.edu/files/handouts/Using_a_Coaching_Interactive_Style_with_Families.pdf

<https://ttac.gmu.edu/telegram/archives/aprilmay-2012/article-5>

EARLY EDUCATORS EXCEL COACHING MODEL

The Early Educators Excel vision document describes the coaching model below.

Excellent Schools Detroit launched the Early Educators Excel (E3) initiative in 2014 to improve access to high quality professional development and educational programming in Detroit's early childhood and care communities. With a focus on language, literacy, and socio-emotional development, E3 provides targeted, adaptive support to teachers, instructional support staff, and administrators influencing the academic and social development of young learners, birth to age eight. E3 also offers supplemental workshop and learning experiences for parents and families of young children to leverage the power of instruction and engagement in the home environment.

By design, E3 partners with programs and agencies across sectors—from Head Start and Great Start Readiness Program to elementary schools—to create a network of quality instructional support and promote progress toward a sustainable, high-functioning early childhood system.

The E3 coaching model prioritizes

- goal-focused, individualized support to address the developmental needs of educators and their children or staff;
- learning experiences that support whole communities of stakeholders (e.g. teachers, instructional support staff, administrators, and parents/guardians);
- data-driven observations of instructional quality and ongoing practice; and
- practice-based support to encourage direct application of knowledge and skills.

<http://mmfisher.org/grant-partner/excellent-schools-detroit/>

<http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/ccprc/2017/A21.pdf>

INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

Instructional coaching is most commonly used in the K-12 education system. It helps teachers reflect and examine their practices. The key focus is on student content knowledge. The model uses student outcomes to measure the improvement of teaching practices. Coaches guide teachers through a three-phase process. Phase 1 is the *Pre-Observation Planning Conference Phase*. In this phase, teachers set goals for children's learning and plan activities for children to meet those goals. Phase 2 is the *Observation and Analysis Phase*. In this phase, coaches videotape teachers carrying out a planned activity. Teachers and coaches then separately watch the video to assess what children have learned from the activity and analyze the strategies that teachers used to help children reach that learning goal. Finally, in Phase 3, the *Reflective Conference Phase*, coaches and teachers watch and discuss the video together. Coaches invite teachers to think about their teaching practices in a reflective way. Coaches may do this by asking teachers reflective questions, and then working with them to set new goals, identify activities and strategies to meet these goals, and plan the focus of the next observation (Trach, 2014).

<http://annenberginstitute.org/sites/default/files/product/270/files/InstructionalCoaching.pdf>

https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/Trach_ND14.pdf

MY TEACHING PARTNER™

My Teaching Partner (MTP) is a collection of professional development supports, including web-mediated individualized coaching. With this model, consultants and teachers are partners. Teachers tape themselves every two weeks and send the footage to the consultant who provides feedback and support (Pianta, et. al, 2008).

The coaching program involves following five steps in a two-week cycle:

1. Teachers record a video
2. Coaches review the videos and write prompts
3. Teachers review videos and respond to prompts
4. Teachers and coaches discuss prompts and practice
5. Teachers and coaches create a summary and action plan to inform the next cycle

All three MTP resources rely on a standardized observational assessment of teacher-student interactions—the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is the observational assessment tool used in MTP coaching and serves as the definition of effective practice.

<http://curry.virginia.edu/research/centers/castl/mtp>

http://curry.virginia.edu/uploads/resourceLibrary/Research_Brief_MTP-PreK_NICHHD2.pdf

PARTNERSHIPS FOR INCLUSION ON-SITE CONSULTATION MODEL

Partnerships for Inclusion (PFI) is a model of assessment-based, individualized, on-site consultation. The PFI model is a consultation rather than coaching model. It involves joint problem-solving by early educators and on-site consultants (as in the NAEYC/NACCRRA definitions). The model uses the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R), the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R), and the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCRS) as tools to assess quality in the home or classroom setting. Then individuals work with consultants to assess their needs, create an action plan, and receive individualized support. PFI has a specified initial and ongoing training and procedures to assess fidelity. The model is based on the tenet that change is possible when teachers are actively involved in the change process and have opportunities to apply new knowledge and skills (Buysse & Wesley, 2005).

<http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/ccprc/2007/12/12BPreliminaryFindingsfromtheQUINCEStudy.pdf>

<http://fpg.unc.edu/node/4747>

PRACTICE-BASED COACHING (PBC)

PBC is a research-based coaching model developed under the auspices of the Administration for Children and Families Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance System. PBC is a professional development approach used by early childhood education staff to help teachers use effective practices that lead to positive outcomes for children. PBC is made up of three components—planning goals and action steps, engaging in focused observation, and reflecting on and sharing feedback about teaching practices. All three components take place within a collaborative coaching partnership. The overall goal is to improve knowledge and practice by providing a robust body of materials and T/TA services that increase fidelity and effectiveness of PBC implementation (Hemmeter, M. L., Fox, L., & Snyder, P. (n.d.). Snyder, et. al, 2012). The Coaching Companion, a web-based video sharing and coach feedback app, may be incorporated into the PBC model.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/professional-development/article/practice-based-coaching-pbc>

STATE EXAMPLES

COLORADO

Aligned to the Colorado Coaching Competencies, the Colorado Coaching Network provides foundational support to early childhood coaches working with any state coaching initiative. As part of the workforce component of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund and through a collaboration between the [Colorado Coaching Consortium](#) and the [Colorado Department of Education](#) (CDE), Colorado expanded the coaching network through the launch of the Coaching Credential in January 2015. CDE regional coaching consultants developed the relationship-based professional development (RBPD) training required to earn the coaching credential. Additionally, the coaching consultants have implemented local reflective supervision and consultation groups for early childhood coaches to maintain their credential. Moving forward, CDE will continue to provide the RBPD training and a facilitating reflective supervision and consultation training to increase access to these supports.

WASHINGTON

[Early Achievers](#) (EA) is Washington state's QRIS for child care and early learning. There are three organizations responsible for direct implementation of Early Achievers. The Department of Early Learning is the lead administrative agency responsible for ensuring that all elements of Early Achievers are implemented with fidelity. The University of Washington is the partner responsible for facility rating and developing the coach framework. Child Care Aware of Washington is responsible for coaching, technical assistance, and Level 2 trainings. The Early Achievers House Framework is comprised of the following:

- Building a Solid Foundation
- The Open Door—Family Engagement and Partnership
- The First Pillar—Curriculum and learning opportunities aligned with Washington State Early Learning Guidelines
- The Second Pillar—Screening and Ongoing Child Assessment in Collaboration with Families
- The Roof—Highly Individualized Teaching and Learning

To support the Early Achievers (EA) House Framework, Washington state has developed a [coaching framework](#) that uses PBC—embedded essential characteristics of collaborative coaching relationships into the PBC cycle. Collaborative coaching relationships support high-quality programs and helps teachers grow through a cycle of goal setting, focused observation, reflection, and feedback. Further, the Early Achievers PBC framework is girded by the guiding principles of culturally responsive coaching, resilience, and parallel process—each of which is integrated throughout the PBC cycle. Coach supports and professional development include the following:

- Deep dive training and establishing reliability in Toddler CLASS, Pre-K CLASS, FCCERS, ITERS, and ECERS.
- On-demand coach consultation from Cultivate Learning and the [Haring Center](#) at the University of Washington for establishing fidelity to the EA coach framework (i.e., the EA model of PBC) and increasing understanding of a variety of topics.
- Internships at the [Haring Center in the Experimental Education Unit](#) at the University of Washington.
- Monthly webinars in which coaches learn about targeted practices and connect with each other across the state to share new information and resources.
- The Coaching Companion, a web-based video sharing and coach feedback application.

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RELATED WEBSITES

Coaching in Early Care and Education Programs and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS): Identifying Promising Features

<http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/2011-35CoachingQualityImprovement.pdf>

Practice-Based Coaching Resources

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/professional-development/article/practice-based-coaching-pbc>

Coaching in Early Childhood

<http://www.coachinginearlychildhood.org/ccoaching.php>

Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Interventions-TACSEI

http://challengingbehavior.fmbi.usf.edu/do/pyramid_model.htm

Center on Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning-CSEFEL

<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/index.html>

CSEFEL Coach Job Description

http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/states/ne_job%20description_coach.pdf

Center for the Advanced Study of Excellence (CASE)

<http://fippcase.learnpointlms.com/>

STATE DEVELOPED MATERIALS

- IL: <http://www.eclearningil.org/about-us/pfa-coaching-project>
- TX: <http://earlylearningtexas.org/mentoring-toolkit.aspx>
- CO: http://cocoaches.net/uploads/Coaching_competencies_Oct_2010.pdf and <http://www.ecpac.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Coaching-Certificate.pdf>
- NC: <http://ncicdp.org/technicalassistance/coaching/>
- UT: https://ccpdi.usu.edu/ou-files/uploads/Coaching_Compencies_2014.pdf
- MA: <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/peer-assistance-and-coaching/>

ASSESSING COACHING MODELS

GENERAL FACTORS

- Is the model based on research or evidence?
- Is the model affordable and can it be fiscally sustained?
- Does the philosophy of the model a good fit with the intended participants (both coaches and coachees)?
- Is the model focused on program-level improvements or skill-level achievements of teachers and caregivers?
- Does the model acknowledge program leadership as gatekeepers?
- Does the model have inclusion opportunities for their participation?
- Is there a system established to collect and report data? Will the data be useful for funders and stakeholders?

COACHING MODEL FACTORS

- ❑ Does it discuss the theoretical foundation of the model?
- ❑ Is the purpose clearly identified and does it point to the desired outcomes?
- ❑ Do the purpose and objectives meet the desired intent?
- ❑ Are the preferred delivery methods identified?
- ❑ Are the delivery methods flexible yet yielding comparable results?
- ❑ Do the delivery methods align to the needs of the program(s), state, territory, or region?
- ❑ Are the coaching system structures identified and replicable?
- ❑ Is there a supporting infrastructure in place to replicate the system? If not, is it within the scope to replicate?
- ❑ Is there funding to support the coaching system structure?
- ❑ Is there sustainability for the coaching system structure?
- ❑ Do the coaching approaches meet with the needs of the population?
- ❑ Is any required technology available or attainable (video cameras, software, laptops, microphones, internet accessibility, iPhones, iPads, etc.)?
- ❑ Is there enough staff or staff candidates to provide coaching?
- ❑ Is training available and fiscally accessible to hire or train staff to provide the approaches?
- ❑ Is a sustainability plan feasible to keep coaching staff current and reliable to the model and train new staff in the event of turnover or expansion?
- ❑ Who will provide oversight for the project and the coaches?
- ❑ How will coaching fidelity be implemented and sustained? Does the coaching model support model fidelity?

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- ❑ Does the coaching model specify what dosage, duration, and intensity or frequency is needed for positive results?
- ❑ Did the coaching model creators conduct research with a comparable population and in comparable conditions?
- ❑ Are any differences between the research conditions and the target population significant enough to make a difference?

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