

COMPONENT 2:
FOCUSED OBSERVATION



THE THREE COMPONENTS OF PRACTICE-BASED COACHING

There are different types of professional development (PD) experiences: some are focused on *increasing awareness* or knowledge and some are focused on *supporting implementation* of practices in the early learning and home settings. Coaching is one PD strategy that can be used to support coachees' implementation of practices. Practice-Based Coaching (PBC) focuses on improving coachees' use of evidence-based practices to support children's progress toward school readiness goals. The components of Practice-Based Coaching can be applied when supporting anyone who works directly with children, such as teachers, teaching assistants, other early learning staff, home visitors, family child care providers, and families. For the purposes of this document, "coachee" is used to refer to anyone who directly works with children.

PBC is a cyclical process for supporting coachees' use of effective teaching and home visiting practices that lead to positive outcomes for children. The coaching cycle components are:

1. Planning goals and action steps
2. Engaging in focused observation
3. Reflecting on and sharing feedback about teaching and home visiting practices

Each component is necessary for implementing PBC, and each component builds from the previous component. For example, reflection and feedback between a coach and coachee cannot occur without conducting a focused observation, and an observation cannot be focused without setting goals and developing an action plan for supporting coachees' implementation of practices.

Typically, PBC involves a coach and coachee or a coach and group of coachees (i.e., expert coaching). But coachees might coach each other (reciprocal peer coaching), or a coachee might act as his or her own coach (self-coaching). Depending on program needs, PBC partnerships may occur on-site or at a distance. The key components of PBC are used for each of these coaching formats. To implement a PBC program that produces positive outcomes for coachees and children, all three components must be applied in the context of collaborative coaching partnerships. Let's review Component 2: Focused Observation.

COMPONENT 2: FOCUSED OBSERVATION

WHAT IS FOCUSED OBSERVATION?

Focused observation is a way of looking at coachees, learning environments, and practices in the context of the coaching partnership. It is the intentional and systematic way coaches and coachees gather and record information for use in reflection and feedback. A PBC observation is focused when it is guided by the action plan and focused on the coachee's goals. Coaches and coachees agree on the times when an observation will occur. Coaches then use these observations to prepare for the next stage of the coaching cycle: reflection and feedback.

WHY IS FOCUSED OBSERVATION IMPORTANT?

The focused observation component helps make the action plan come alive. It provides a supportive context for coachees to try out the new skills they want to develop. In many ways, it also promotes a culture of accountability. Coaches and coachees make a plan, and both parties know their roles in following up on the plan. Focused observations allow the coach to "check in" and see the plan unfold in the early learning setting. The action plan serves as a guide or road map for the observation. The focused observation becomes a springboard for reflection and feedback during the next stage of the coaching cycle.

HOW DO WE DO IT?

As described in Shared Goals and Action Planning, the action plan guides the focused observation process. This means the coach and coachee work together to identify times when implementation of the teaching practices specified as goals on the action plan are likely to occur. These times are important opportunities for focused observation. Let’s consider the example of a coachee whose action plan includes asking open-ended questions during book reading. Naturally, a coach would plan to conduct focused observations during times when book readings are likely to occur. The coach may plan to observe during a variety of large group, small group, or individual book reading activities. This helps the coach collect a range of information to inform the reflection and feedback conversation. Table 1 provides examples of action plan targets and related focused observation activities.

TABLE 1: CONDUCTING A FOCUSED OBSERVATION

ACTION PLAN GOAL	POSSIBLE OBSERVATION TIMES AND ACTIVITIES	DATA COLLECTION IDEAS
I will remind children about rules before we begin a new activity to help clarify expectations (what children should do).	Opening large group, centers, and small group	Count the number of coachee reminders of the rules prior to and during the activity. Count the number of times the coachee references the rules to reinforce children’s positive behaviors. Describe how individual children respond to reminders. Tally the number of challenging behaviors during activities.
I will use open-ended questions during book reading to support children’s responses and connections to text.	Book reading activities, including large group, small group, and/or individual.	Count open-ended and test questions asked by the coachee. A scan of average child engagement during book readings with and without open-ended questions. Count correct and incorrect responses to questions.
I will increase the number of conversations with children that include three or more turns per speaker.	Center time, outside time	Count turns taken by the coachee and child during conversations. Count the number of children the coachee has conversations with that include three or more turns. Count the number of children the coachee converses with in which there are three or more turns per speaker.

Throughout the focused observation, the coach observes and carefully records information. These records help document coachees’ progress toward the action plan goal. Coaches may record things they hear the coachee say, things they see the coachee do, or related actions they see children perform that provide information about the coachee’s progress toward the goal. They may also collect data related to specific action plan steps. For example, if the coachee’s action plan includes asking more open-ended questions during book reading, the coach may tally the number of open-ended questions in comparison to the total number of questions asked throughout the observation. The coach may also record verbatim examples of questions and children’s responses. Figure 1 provides an example form that a coach may use to record information during the focused observation.

FIGURE 1: FOCUSED OBSERVATION FORM

Coachee:		Coach:	
Date:	Time spent in observation:	Time spent in meeting:	
Observation focus:			
What I observed:		What I want to share:	
Follow-up needed:			

Successful coaches record this information carefully and can use a variety of coaching logs or other structured note-taking forms. These notes or logs become important tools for organizing and documenting reflection questions and feedback. Other important tools for focused observation are:

- Video.** Video recording (whether done by the coach or the coachee) provides an objective view of early learning setting events. The ability to view a video multiple times provides the coach and coachee an opportunity to focus on precise skills or behaviors that may have been missed in live observations. These video observations can be incorporated into reflection and feedback conversations. This allows the coach to anchor the feedback in examples of the coachee’s use of teaching or home visiting practices related to his/her action plan goal(s).
- Coaching supports.** If focused observations are conducted on-site, the coach may also provide a variety of supports during the observation. These might include modeling of the teaching or home visiting practice, side-by-side verbal or gestural support, problem-solving discussions, and other help in the early learning setting. Table 2 provides examples of common support strategies coaches might use as part of focused observation. It is important to remember, though, that these supports happen in the context of a collaborative coaching partnership. The coach must talk with the coachee about acceptable supports prior to the focused observation. Some coachees may be comfortable with the coach modeling the practice with children or providing verbal cues of when to use the practice, but some coachees may feel uncomfortable with these supports. The level of support the coachee and coach are comfortable with may change as the coaching partnership develops.

TABLE 2: ON-SITE OBSERVATION COACHING SUPPORTS

TYPE OF SUPPORT	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
Side-by-side verbal or gestural support	<p>The coach delivers verbal prompts or cues to remind the coachee to use specific strategies or uses non-verbal visual or gestural support to prompt or remind the coachee to use a strategy.</p> <p>This action can be used to acknowledge the appropriate use of a strategy or to prompt or remind a coachee to use each particular strategy.</p>	<p>The coachee is beginning to use a five-minute countdown glove for transitions. Coach says to coachee, “Let Caleb pull off one of the minute cards from the glove.”</p> <p>The coach nods her head to confirm with the coachee the successful use of the visual schedule with the group.</p> <p>The coach taps a watch to indicate that 20 minutes have passed since the start of literacy groups.</p>
Problem solving discussion	<p>The coach and coachee have a conversation to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Identify the problem. 2) Brainstorm and generate options. 3) Decide on a possible solution. 4) Implement and evaluate the solution. <p>In an observation, one or multiple steps of the problem-solving process might occur.</p>	<p>Identify the problem—The coachee and coach might have a brief discussion as children transition to small groups and decide that Sam doesn’t seem to know where to go.</p> <p>Generate options—The coach asks the coachee, “Do you think the white board would work for his schedule or should he have something more personal?”</p> <p>Decide on solutions—The coach can ask questions for clarification, “Do you think Sam would respond to a first-then board?”</p> <p>Implement and evaluate—The coachee introduces a new mini- schedule into the daily routine for Sam. While the coachee is implementing use of the schedule, the coach observes and takes data on Sam’s behavior.</p>
Modeling	<p>The coach demonstrates how to implement specific strategies or instructional practices.</p>	<p>The coach demonstrates how to use an individualized direction or visual schedule by working with a child during an activity, routine, or transition.</p> <p>The coachee and coach notice a group of children having a difficult time at the computer. The coach makes eye contact with the coachee to get confirmation that she can go ahead and model and then prompts the children to use materials to problem solve (e.g., “Why don’t we see if the solution kit might help?”).</p>

TYPE OF SUPPORT	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
Other help in the setting	The coach assists with activities not directly related to the implementation of the action plan. This is a strategy that should be used infrequently and only for the purpose of relationship-building or providing needed assistance in an emergency.	The coach helps serve snacks while the coachee is using a visual schedule with a target child. The coach facilitates the play of a group of children while the coachee responds to a child in distress.

WHAT DOES FOCUSED OBSERVATION LOOK LIKE IN DIFFERENT COACHING FORMATS?

Different strategies might be used to engage in focused observation across different coaching formats. Table 3 shows how focused observation can take place in the context of peer coaching and self-coaching. For example, in reciprocal peer coaching, two coachees may agree to discuss action plans and observe in each other’s classrooms. They may also review videotapes of each other’s teaching or home visiting practices, collect data on one another’s practices, and/or provide coaching supports in the early learning setting. In the case of self-coaching, a coachee might receive support from a facilitator to learn about self-coaching, but the coachee decides when and how to collect information about his or her teaching or home visiting practices. In self-coaching, focused observations can take place by recording and watching a video or live by collecting real-time data, taking notes, or asking an assistant to record information.

TABLE 3. FOCUSED OBSERVATION WITH DIFFERENT COACHING PARTNERS

COACHING PARTNER	OBSERVATION	DATA COLLECTION	SUPPORTS PROVIDED
Expert	On-site observation or videotaped observation of activities agreed upon by the coachee and coach that provide opportunities to view goal or specific action plan steps	Data agreed upon by coachee/coach, such as count of the behaviors based on the teaching or home visiting practices targeted in the goal and action plan steps	Agreed-upon cues that coachee/coach provides to support use of strategies Reading materials, video examples, useful websites, or other resources and video examples provided by the coach
Reciprocal peer	On-site observation or videotaped observation of activities agreed upon by the coachee/coach that provide opportunities to view goal or specific action plan steps	Data agreed upon by coachee/coach, such as count of the behaviors based on the teaching or home visiting practices targeted in the goal and action plan steps	Agreed-upon cues that coachee/coach provide to support use of strategies Reading materials, video examples, useful websites, or other resources and video examples provided by the expert/mentor coach who supports the peer-reciprocal coaching process
Self	Videotaped activities in which the coachee can view goal or specific action plan steps	Data the coachee collects when watching his/her video to support use of teaching or home visiting practices targeted in the goal and action plan steps	Reading materials, video examples, useful websites, or other resources the coachee can use during the self-coaching process

When conducting distance coaching, special considerations apply. Technology has made it possible for coaches and coachees to collaborate across vast geographic areas and it is possible to offer highly effective coaching at a distance. In most distance delivery models, the focused observation is conducted through video. As in an on-site observation, the coachee and coach agree on the time and activities for focused observation. Often, the coachee sets up a camera and films the predetermined activity him or herself. Other times, a staff person is available or assigned to assist with

filming. The coachee then shares the videotaped focused observation with the coach. This can be accomplished in several ways: uploading the video to a secure server, mailing a hard copy of the video, or using screen sharing technology. The coach then views the videotape with an intentional focus on observing the action plan goals and steps. The coach records notes, including data, on action plan step implementation to guide the reflection and feedback process.

Unlike an onsite observation, the coach cannot provide the same types of supports (for example, verbal and gestural cues). But the coach can provide supports prior to the observation. For example, the coach could send a video model of the practice to the coachee, provide the coachee with guiding questions to answer while viewing the video, or provide a resource for viewing the practice online or reading more about the practice.

Every coaching partnership looks different. Coaches and coachees must find the combination of strategies and supports that work for them. Regardless of the form observations take, it is important to remember that the goal of focused observation is to collect information that can be used to support coachees to implement quality teaching and home visiting practices and promote school readiness for all children.

FOCUSED OBSERVATION SUPPORTING MATERIALS

1. Jerald, C. (2012). *Ensuring accurate feedback from observations: Perspectives on practice*. Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. www.gatesfoundation.org/college-ready.../ensuring-accuracy-wp.pdf
2. Lloyd, C. M., & Modlin, E. L. (2012). *Coaching as a key component in teachers' professional development improving classroom in Head Start settings*. OPRÉ Report 2012-4, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
3. O'Neill, J. (2000). Smart goals, smart schools. *Educational Leadership*, 57,46–50.
4. Rush, D., & Shelden, M. (2011). *The early childhood coaching handbook*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.
5. Steps to Success. (2005). *Professional development plan*. Resource for Steps to Success: An Instructional Design for Early Literacy Mentor-Coaches in Head Start and Early Head Start.
6. Snyder, P., & Wolfe, B. (2008). The big three process components in early childhood professional development: Needs assessment, follow-up, and evaluation. In P. Winton, J. McCollum, & C. Catlett (Eds.), *Practical approaches to early childhood professional development: Evidence, strategies, and resources* (pp. 13–51). Washington, DC: Zero to Three.
7. Zemke, R., & Kramlinger, T. (1982). *Figuring things out: A trainer's guide to needs and task analysis*. Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley.

PRACTICE-BASED COACHING SUPPORTING MATERIALS

PRACTICE-BASED COACHING

This document describes Practice-Based Coaching and formats for implementing Practice-Based Coaching. It also explains the components of Practice-Based Coaching. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/pbc-bandout.pdf>

Buysse, V., & Wesley, P. (2005). *Consultation in early childhood settings*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT COACHING?

This short article describes what research says about coaching for practitioners who work with young children, and what research says about key components for the Practice-Based Coaching model. In addition, the article discusses why Head Start programs might consider Practice-Based Coaching as an essential part of professional development. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/pbc-what-do-we-know.pdf>