



## PRACTICE-BASED COACHING: RECIPROCAL PEER

There are many ways to deliver professional development (PD). They range from PD experiences that increase awareness or knowledge to PD that supports implementation in the classroom (McCollum and Catlett, 1997). To determine which type of PD to implement, it is important to take into consideration the characteristics of those who will receive the PD as well as the desired outcomes of the PD (National Professional Development Center on Inclusion, 2008).

Coaching is a PD strategy that can be used to support teachers' implementation of teaching practices. PBC focuses on improving teachers' use of evidence-based teaching practices to support children's progress toward school readiness goals. It is intensive and has proven to be effective.

PBC is cyclical in nature and involves three components: 1) shared goals and action planning, 2) focused observation, and 3) reflection and feedback. Each component is necessary to implement PBC, and each component builds from the previous component. For example, reflection and feedback cannot occur without conducting a focused observation, and an observation cannot be focused without setting goals and developing an action plan to support teachers' implementation of practices.

The PBC model can be implemented in various formats to accommodate program resources and needs. PBC often involves a coach and teacher or a coach and group of teachers (expert coaching). But teachers might also coach each other (reciprocal peer coaching), or a teacher might act as his or her own coach (self-coaching). Depending on program needs, PBC can occur on site or at a distance. Regardless of the delivery format, all three components of the PBC model must be applied within the context of collaborative coaching partnerships to produce positive outcomes for teachers and children. This brief focuses on how to implement PBC within the reciprocal peer format.

### WHAT IS RECIPROCAL PEER COACHING?

Reciprocal peer coaching occurs when two teachers coach each other to implement effective teaching practices. The teachers have approximately the same level of knowledge and experience with implementing the teaching practices.

### HOW IS RECIPROCAL PEER COACHING IMPLEMENTED?

For reciprocal peer coaching to be implemented successfully, the following conditions should be in place:

- Teachers have an identified set of practices to focus on in the coaching process.
- Teachers have sufficient release time for all elements of coaching, including meeting, planning for observations, observing, reflecting together, and sharing feedback.
- Teachers receive information or training on the teaching practices prior to coaching. For example, teachers may attend a workshop on using conversations with children (the NCQTL 15-minute in-service suite Engaging Children in Conversations <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/practice/iss-library.html>) where they receive resource materials (Tools for Teachers and the Supervisor's Tools). As part of the workshop, coach partners have time to complete needs assessments, develop individual action plans, and plan with their partner for observation and reflection and feedback meetings.
- Coach partners are trained in the reciprocal peer coaching process and provided with materials to guide this process, including checklists for goal setting, action planning, and supporting reflection and feedback.
- Reciprocal peer coach partners receive guidance from a mentor coach or expert coach who can support the partners as needed. This may include a monthly in-person visit by the expert coach or periodic emails with additional guidance, meetings, or materials as needed.



## HOW DOES RECIPROCAL PEER COACHING LOOK IN EACH OF THE COMPONENTS OF PRACTICE-BASED COACHING?

### COMPONENT 1: SHARED GOALS AND ACTION PLANNING

During shared goals and action planning, the coaching participants 1) assess each other's needs, 2) set goals for coaching, and 3) create an action plan to guide coaching. In reciprocal peer coaching, the coach partners might work together to specify a set of practices. One teacher might suggest a set of practices to the other teacher, or a program administrator or curriculum specialist in the program might offer the set of practices. Coach partners individually complete needs assessments and meet together to discuss the needs assessments and other classroom data used to determine goals. The coach partners support each other to write individual goals and action plans for achieving these goals. Resources, such as reading materials, video examples, or useful websites, may be provided by the expert/mentor coach who supports the reciprocal peer coaching process.

### COMPONENT 2: FOCUSED OBSERVATION

Focused observation is the process of gathering and recording information about the action plan implementation through observation. In reciprocal peer coaching, the coach partners conduct an on-site observation or video record each other at an agreed-upon time that provides an opportunity to view the action plan goal or steps. The teachers or coaches collect data during this observation on teacher and child behaviors that are specified in the action plan, such as a count of how many times the teacher uses higher level vocabulary words with children during free play time. The teachers or coaches may also provide supports for using the teaching strategies from the action plan, such as verbal or physical cues when there is an opportunity to use a teaching strategy that the observed teacher has missed.

### COMPONENT 3: REFLECTION AND FEEDBACK

Reflection and feedback consists of the teacher and coach reflecting on the focused observation to determine progress toward the goal of implementing teaching practices in the action plan. During reflection and feedback, the coach and teacher share and consider feedback. Reflection and feedback is also an opportunity for the coach to use support strategies to improve or refine teaching practices. During reflection and feedback in reciprocal peer coaching, coach partners use check-in forms and provide positive support, objective feedback, and reflection. In reciprocal peer coaching, the coach partners review observation notes or data collected from the focused observation. The coach partners then pose reflective questions about the implementation of action plan steps and progress toward goals. If reciprocal peer coaching is being delivered from a distance, the coach partners may view videos of each other and reflect on the practice implementation. In reciprocal peer coaching, the coach partners may be provided with a rubric for reflection and sample reflective questions by the expert coach who is supporting the peer coaching team.

## WHEN IS RECIPROCAL PEER COACHING APPROPRIATE?

Reciprocal peer coaching is useful for teachers who have a well-defined focus on a specific area for the improvement of practices. For example, following training on providing small group instruction, teachers might coach each other around their individualized action plan goals for practice implementation.

Reciprocal peer coaching may not be as effective or intensive as an expert coaching model because a peer who is also learning to implement a practice may not be able to provide the level of feedback and reflection that an expert provides. Therefore, reciprocal peer coaching may be more appropriate for teachers who are more experienced and refining practices rather than beginning teachers who may need support in multiple areas of instruction. Coach partners should be chosen based on who work well together and who are working on similar teaching skills.



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