

PRACTICE-BASED COACHING

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 learning environment (Snyder et al, 2012). 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 coachees' implementation of effective practices. PBC focuses on improving coachees' use of effective 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 coachees' implementation of practices.

The PBC model can be implemented in various formats to accommodate program resources and needs. PBC often involves a coach and coachee or a coach and group of coachees (expert coaching). But coachees might also coach each other (reciprocal peer coaching), or a coachee 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 coachees and children and families. This brief focuses on how to implement PBC within the reciprocal peer format. Reciprocal/peer does not meet the requirements for intensive coaching as outlined in the Head Start Program Performance Standards, but may be used as a part of the research-based coordinated coaching strategy in a program.

WHAT IS RECIPROCAL PEER COACHING?

Reciprocal peer coaching occurs when two coachees support each other to implement effective practices. The coachees 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:

- Coachees have an identified set of practices to focus on in the coaching process.
- Coachees have sufficient release time for all elements of coaching, including meeting, planning for observations, observing, reflecting together, and sharing feedback.
- Coachees receive information or training on the effective practices prior to coaching. For example, coachees may attend a workshop where they receive resource materials. 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. Coach partners choose practices from the effective practices the program has chosen to focus on in professional development and coaching. Coach partners individually complete needs assessments and meet together to discuss the needs assessments and other 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 coaching partners collect data during this observation on coachee and child and/or family behaviors that are specified in the action plan, such as a count of how many times the coachee uses higher level vocabulary words with children during free play time or how many positive statements the coachee makes to the parent. The coachees may also provide supports for using the effective practices from the action plan, such as verbal or physical cues when there is an opportunity to use a practice that the observed coachee has missed.

COMPONENT 3: REFLECTION AND FEEDBACK

Reflection and feedback consists of the coachees reflecting on the focused observation to determine progress toward the goal of implementing effective practices in the action plan. During reflection and feedback, the coachees share and consider feedback. Reflection and feedback is also an opportunity for the coach to use support strategies to improve or refine effective 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 education staff who have a well-defined focus on a specific area for the improvement of practices. For example, following training on providing positive descriptive feedback, coachees 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 education staff who are more experienced and refining practices rather than beginning education staff who may need support in multiple areas. Coach partners should be chosen based on who work well together and who are working on similar effective practices.