THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Quality Teaching and Learning

Head Start has a long tradition of providing professional development to support teachers as they implement effective practices that lead to positive outcomes for children. Coaching is one form of professional development that has shown promise for supporting teachers as they implement effective teaching practices.

The purpose of this document is to present the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning's (NCQTL) coaching model. This model has both a research base* and an experience base. We refer to this coaching model as *Practice-Based Coaching*. *Practice-Based Coaching* is a model of coaching that includes three components (described below) which are associated with change in teacher practices and associated changes in child outcomes. While the components are all necessary, the way in which they are implemented may vary. This document will define *Practice-Based Coaching* and discuss formats in which *Practice-Based Coaching* can be implemented, and it will highlight and explain the components of *Practice-Based Coaching*.

What is Practice-Based Coaching?

Practice-Based Coaching is a cyclical process for supporting teachers' use of effective teaching practices that lead to positive outcomes for children. The coaching-cycle components are (1) planning goals and action steps, (2) engaging in focused observation, and (3) reflecting on and sharing feedback about teaching practices. *Practice-Based Coaching* occurs within the context of a collaborative partnership. Each component in the cycle is designed to inform the actions taken by a coach or teacher during the subsequent component (or throughout the coaching process). The cyclical nature of *Practice-Based Coaching* emphasizes that expectations, understandings, and desired outcomes of coaching are regularly reviewed and updated. Figure 1 shows the *Practice-Based Coaching* cycle and illustrates the relationships among the components.

Figure 1. *Practice-Based Coaching* Cycle

For the purposes of this document, it is helpful to define several key terms. A *coach* can refer to an expert, a peer, or the teacher (self). Here, an *expert* is someone who has knowledge and experience in the teaching practices being coached. Although *teacher* is used to describe the recipient of coaching, *Practice-Based Coaching* can be used with other individuals who work with young children, such as home visitors, therapists, or teaching assistants. *Teaching practice(s)* refers to the process of teaching that supports child learning. Examples of teaching practices may include setting up the classroom environment to support learning, designing the schedule, establishing peer buddies to teach social skills, and designing and implementing developmentally appropriate activities. Teaching also includes the use of specific instructional practices that are used to teach within Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework outcome domains (e.g., shared book reading for literacy, active exploration for science, peer buddies for social-emotional development) and instructional practices (e.g., wait-time, prompting, reinforcement, fading cues) that teachers use across outcome domains. *Practice-Based Coaching* can be used to support, improve or refine teaching practices across all domains delineated in the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework.

In What Formats Can Practice-Based Coaching Be Provided?

Practice-Based Coaching can be implemented in different delivery formats. Coaches can be experts, peers, or even oneself. Delivery can be on-site or from a distance. Table 1 shows various options for implementing *Practice-Based Coaching*. It is also important to recognize coaching may be delivered in a hybrid format. For example, an expert might view a videotaped activity that was uploaded to a website but arrange for a face-to-face debriefing meeting. NCQTL will be developing additional documents about how each format of *Practice-Based Coaching* can be implemented.

Table 1. Options for Delivering *Practice-Based Coaching*

		Coach		
		Expert	**Peer**	**Self**
Format	On-Site	• Expert comes into the classroom to watch an activity. • Expert and teacher arrange a time to have a face-to-face meeting.	• Peer comes into the classroom to watch an activity. • Peers meet in teacher workroom.	• Teacher uses self-guided materials to structure an observation of her teaching practices. • Teacher uses a checklist to examine own videotaped teaching practices.
	Distance	• Expert watches video of classroom activity that teacher uploaded. • Expert uploads written feedback to shared website and has a conference call to provide specific prompts for reflection.	• Peer reviews a video of classroom activity the teacher has posted to a discussion board. • Peer and teacher arrange a time to discuss observation via Skype.	• Teacher uses online tutorial to plan an activity to videotape. • Teacher journals about experiences using a structured online self-coaching tool.

What Is Meant by Collaborative Coaching Partnerships?

Practice-Based Coaching occurs within the context of a collaborative partnership. A *collaborative partnership* refers to the working interactions between a coach and teacher that provide a safe space for teachers to ask questions, discuss problems, get support, gather feedback, reflect on practice, and try new ideas. Coaching is neither evaluative nor judgmental. *Practice-Based Coaching* is a supportive way to help adults grow professionally.

Developing a collaborative coaching partnership is an ongoing process that develops over time. Collaborative partnerships are begun and developed by establishing rapport and shared understandings. This might be done through sharing of professional experiences and backgrounds; establishing a set of shared expectations for time commitments and outcomes; or discussing and reaching a mutual understanding of the coaching process and purpose. The coaching cycle is designed to strengthen collaboration and should be used systematically. The coaching components require reciprocity, or two-way interactions. Each coaching partnership is individualized to the unique strengths, needs, shared understandings, and desired outcomes of the coach and teacher.

How Is Each Component of Practice-Based Coaching Implemented?

Each component of the *Practice-Based Coaching* model is described below. All components, taken together, help achieve desired outcomes for improvement or refinement of teaching practices. A summary of the processes involved in each component is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. *Practice-Based Coaching* components at-a-glance

Component 1: Planning Goals and Action Steps	Component 2: Engaging in Focused Observations	Component 3: Reflecting on and Sharing Feedback about Teaching Practices
• Assess needs • Set goals for coaching • Create an action plan to guide coaching • Review and update goals and action plan throughout coaching partnership	• Gather information through observation • Record information about the observation • Use support strategies for improving or refining teaching practices (e.g., models, prompts)	• Discuss and reflect on observation and progress • Share and consider feedback • Use support strategies for improving or refining teaching practices (e.g., problem-solving conversations, creating materials)

Component 1: Planning Goals and Action Steps

This component of the *Practice-Based Coaching* model includes processes for *initial* goal setting and action planning and processes for *ongoing* goal setting and action planning. For initial goal setting and action planning, a needs assessment should be conducted. A needs assessment involves gathering data about current teaching practices and determining priorities for enhancement or refinement (Snyder & Wolfe, 2008). The selection of an appropriate needs assessment instrument will depend on the focus of coaching. An important feature of the needs assessment instrument is the clear delineation of the teaching practices to be examined.

Based on needs assessment information, a set of goals is developed that guides the creation of an action plan. Goals should be clearly defined, measurable, and achievable within a defined timeframe. Goals provide accountability and allow opportunities to celebrate progress. For example, a coaching goal might be that the teacher wants to increase children's responses and interactions during storybook reading.

During action planning, the steps, resources, and supports needed to reach a goal are specified. The action plan also includes a time frame to review progress on goals. The steps included in an action plan are small, observable tasks or strategies that support accomplishment of the goal. For the above storybook reading goal, sample action steps might be to read articles about shared storybook reading; to read the storybook ahead of time and put sticky notes in the book as reminders for inserting interactive activities; to select books with repetitious phrases that children can repeat; and to have a teacher assistant videotape the story reading for later review. The goals and action plan provide a "roadmap" for the support and feedback that occurs as part of the other components in the coaching cycle. Table 2 highlights the key processes associated with this component.

Component 2: Engaging in Focused Observations

The second component in the *Practice-Based Coaching* model is engaging in focused observations. The term "observation" refers to the process of gathering and recording information about implementation of desired teaching practices during ongoing classroom activities, routines, and transitions. Focused observations are guided by the goals and action plan steps described above. Observations are focused, because the information the coach is gathering is specific to the shared goals and action plan steps rather than a more general observation of the class. For example, if the teacher and coach agreed on a goal of improving transitions with an action plan step of the teacher providing specific reminders of expectations prior to transitions and providing positive feedback for children who are meeting expectations, the coach would observe and record information on these targeted actions by the teacher. There are many different ways to engage in focused observations, including live observation by the coach, reviewing videotape of the teacher in the classroom, or self-monitoring on the part of the teacher. Focused observations may include the coach providing support to improve and refine teaching practices. This support might include strategies such as the coach modeling an instructional practice, providing a verbal prompt, or offering quick suggestions. Coaches, whether expert, peer, or self, use a range of strategies that support using effective teaching practices during ongoing classroom activities, routines, and transitions. The strategies are selected based on the action plan steps and discussion between the coach and the teacher.

Component 3: Reflecting on and Sharing Feedback about Teaching Practices

The third component of the *Practice-Based Coaching* model focuses on (a) mutual consideration of the support strategies used and information gathered about teaching practices to identify successes, challenges, and areas for additional improvement or refinement (i.e., reflecting on teaching practices); and (b) sharing feedback about implementation of support strategies and implementation of teaching practices. This component happens in the context of a debriefing "meeting." A debriefing meeting is a time to communicate about progress and challenges, and make plans for future meetings and observations.

Reflecting on teaching practice involves taking time to think about what was effective and what was a barrier to improving or refining implementation of teaching practices. Reflection encompasses consideration both of the feedback and the support experiences.

Sharing feedback about teaching practice involves providing information about performance that is both supportive and constructive, and is intended to help achieve identified goals and improve or refine teaching practice. Supportive feedback is used to recognize and encourage successful implementation of teaching practices. Supportive feedback connects information from the observation with the goals and action plan steps to illustrate progress toward desired outcomes. Constructive feedback is used to help recognize opportunities for improving or refining teaching practices. The goal of delivering constructive feedback during a debriefing session is to address the jointly identified teacher goals based on the focused observation by the coach and reflection on practice by the teacher. Constructive feedback supports teachers in applying strengths to areas of need. Constructive feedback should be conversational and specific and provide ideas for strengthening practice implementation.

There are different ways to reflect on and share feedback about teaching practices. For example, reflection might occur through journaling, while watching a video of practice, or in conversation. Feedback could take the form of written notes or emails, graphical representation of progress, or discussion. As in the previous component, support strategies are also used during reflection and feedback to improve or refine effective teaching practices. Examples of support strategies include role-playing, problem-solving conversations, or provision of materials and resources.

How Does the Coaching Cycle Continue?

As part of the debriefing meeting, information from the processes associated with reflection and feedback lead the way to engaging in ongoing goal setting and action planning, associated with Component 1.

For ongoing goal setting and action planning, the existing goals and action plan are reviewed and updated. Updating the goals and action plans might include continuing with the same goals and revising the action plan, revising the selected goals and updating the action plan, or identifying new goals and creating a new action plan. At some point during the ongoing process, the original needs assessment might be reviewed or updated to determine new priorities.

References

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