

Designing Effective Professional Development: Spotlight on Coaching

ISSUE: To provide high-quality professional development (PD) for early educators, leaders often turn to coaching. This is a big step in the right direction since even the highest quality group-based PD can't, on its own, move knowledge into practice. The design and implementation of the coaching model are essential for ensuring that coaching is a lever for positive change. To be effective, coaching should be part of a site-based PD plan, and must have: (1) ongoing observation and hands-on participation in the classroom; and (2) individualized, reflective discussion and feedback.

What Makes Coaching Effective?

CONNECTION TO SITE-BASED PD CONTENT & OBJECTIVES

Bridges group-based PD sessions and classroom practice by:

- scaffolding and troubleshooting the classroom-based strategies discussed
- using skilled facilitator who attended PD session or has mastery of the PD content (Brief 3)

“(With) training, you learn so much in one day, and then you forget it. Here we learn something every day and then try it out in the classroom.”*

“[It made such a difference] to see what they were teaching us, to be practiced by her (the coach) in the classroom. Like, okay, I may not have done it that way but if it worked when she did it, okay, let me try it that way.”*

ONGOING OBSERVATION & HANDS-ON CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION

Regular classroom visits with hands-on, participatory approach serve to:

- equip the coach with a deep understanding of educator's day-to-day experiences
- support educator's plans and routines
- model educator competencies central to high-quality early education (Brief 2)

“The activities were based on the classroom observations, not ‘cookie cutter’ activities...they were built around what was actually going on in the classroom.”*

“It wasn't like the coach was there to crack the whip on you, or to observe you and make sure that you were doing everything right. She never gave that feeling. You felt like she was there to help better everything.”*

INDIVIDUALIZED, REFLECTIVE DISCUSSION & FEEDBACK

One-on-One conversations that are based on:

- a recent classroom visit (e.g., within the last 48 hours)
- a shared document that supports collaborative reflection on very specific moment-to-moment events and activities
- a non-judgmental and responsive stance
- consistency and reliability in scheduling and follow through

“They come into the classroom to observe and give you pointers on how well things went, as well as [how] maybe we could try something a little different next time, tweak it a little bit. But they never put you down, never make you feel like you don't know what you're doing. They come right in, just engage with the kids in the activities.”*

“She walks into my classroom — and my classroom can be chaotic —but you can see on her face that she's not phased... that makes me feel comfortable.”*

COACHING IS NOT

Evaluative	Sporadic	Paperwork or	A sign of	Tied to
Supervisory	Substitute	monitoring	something	accreditation
Short-term	teaching	compliance	wrong	or licensing

* Quotes from early educators participating in PD initiative.