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## Practice-Based Coaching and Early Childhood Professional Standards in a Diverse Field

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Practice-Based Coaching and Early Childhood Professional Standards in a Diverse Field

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### Abstract

The field of early childhood education has long relied on professional development strategies to support teachers with varying degrees of education who enter the field from a variety of disciplines. Research indicated educators needed intensive and individualized professional development efforts that were integrated into daily practice (Rodgers, Kennedy, VanUitert, & Myers, 2019). Practice-based coaching has been used as a professional development strategy in early childhood classrooms to develop educators' knowledge and skills in best practices for young children. Thirty-two empirical studies conducted since 2011 on the process, effectiveness, and assessment of practice-based coaching were reviewed to identify coaching components, processes, and the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy to consider how coaching could be used to develop professionalism within the diverse early childhood education workforce. The results indicated practice-based coaching was an effective strategy in the classroom to build teacher skills and knowledge and aid in children's development. Practice-based coaching aligned with NAEYC's professional standards. Studies in inclusive school classrooms, family childcares, small and large programs were reviewed to determine practice-based coaching's effect in diverse settings. Results indicated literature was lacking in the full range of diverse settings and provider demographics, exposing a gap in research and an opportunity for future study. Exceptions to the long-term outcomes of coaching in some of the research suggested future studies were needed to consider additional support strategies after the coaching process ended (Unver, 2016).

*Keywords:* Practice-based coaching, mentoring, professional development, family childcare, infant-toddler care, professional standards

### Practice-Based Coaching and Early Childhood Professional Standards in a Diverse Field

The early childhood education field has suffered a professional identity crisis which resulted in normalizing the uneven preparation of teachers, inadequate compensation, and high attrition rate in the workforce (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC) addressed the fragmentation of the early childhood education profession in a 2015 report which offered recommendations to unite and mobilize the workforce through best-practices and knowledge of child development ([www.nas.edu/birthto8](http://www.nas.edu/birthto8)). Early childhood education has relied on professional development to support teachers who enter the field from a variety of disciplines and with varying degrees of education. Research indicated educators need intensive and individualized professional development efforts integrated into daily practice (Lutton, A., 2018; Rodgers, Kennedy, VanUitert, & Myers, 2019). Practice-based coaching has been considered an individualized professional development strategy appropriate for any childcare setting as a link between knowledge and practice. The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL) defined practice-based coaching (PBC) as a process to guide educators' use of best practices for supporting positive child learning outcomes in the teaching environment (2014). NCQTL defined a coach as an expert, with knowledge and experience in the targeted practices, or as a peer, agreeing to mentor a provider using a practice-based coaching framework. Research of PBC defined the second partner in the practice-based coaching process as anyone who supports child development, including educators, providers, pre-service teachers, therapists, or parents (Regan & Weiss, 2019). For the sake of unity, the term *provider* was used collectively in the literature review to describe the role of the one receiving the coaching. Research on PBC was analyzed to identify the rigor and quality of the literature to help consider how practice-based coaching can be used to support professionalizing

the diverse field of the early childhood education.

### **The Professional Development of a Diverse Workforce**

According to the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood National Center, the U.S. early education workforce was composed of over 2.3 million individuals in 2019; 97% of whom were women and many of whom were people of color. Some early educators were reported to have little formal education beyond high school and struggled with basic reading, writing and math skills. Providers earned poverty level wages without basic benefits like health insurance, and some educators reported working in environments without adequate classroom support (ECNC, 2019). At the same time, Head Start, the Council for Professional Recognition, state-funded pre-K programs, and NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation increased the demand for educators with degrees and credentials (Lutton, 2018). The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning indicated that any framework constructed around the understanding of the knowledge and competencies required of early childhood educators, must also make room to include the entire workforce (ECNC, 2019). Suggestions for requiring higher education degrees in a population for whom many would be the first to attend college was unrealistic and helped explain the lack of systemic change over the last two decades (Feeney & Freeman, 2018, Lutton, 2018). Ethical considerations of displacing successful educators from classrooms over a lack of credentials arose with the possibility of displacing ethnically representative teachers with better educated professionals who did not represent the children as well (Mosely, 2018). A presumption that the presence of a degree signified professional status was misinformed (Goffin, 2016), but research consistently indicated the education level of teachers working with young children impacted the quality of early childhood education received (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Carson, Baumgartner, Ota, Pulling Kuhn, & Durr, 2017; Reidt-Parker & Chainski, 2015). A dilemma

was created by recognizing providers were the key to quality early childhood education practices and professional preparedness was the key to quality practices. How could early childhood education stakeholders support providers with such a high variance in professional preparedness, to elevate the profession with higher standards of preparation?

### **Leaders in Practice-Based Coaching**

Many early childhood education organizations and initiatives considered the question of how to make early childhood education more professional by trying to establish a shared definition for the profession. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) joined a collaboration of stakeholders to develop an initiative called Power to the Profession (P2P) to advance early childhood education (ECE) as a field of practice. P2P recommendations indicated mentoring, including coaching, could be used to support professional standards (Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/initiatives/profession>). Coaching dramatically increased at the turn of the century as the number of organizations reporting the implementation of coaching programs doubled in the year between 1997 and 1998 (Friedman-Krauss, Barnett, Garver, Hodges, Weisenfeld & DiCrecchio, 2019). Practice-based coaching (PBC) was shown to build personal and professional growth, helping both participants to feel valued in the process (Palaiologou & Male, 2019). The intent of practice-based coaching was to increase the quality of the teaching strategies and learning outcomes for young children by connecting teacher knowledge to everyday practice (Ambrosetti, 2014).

Coaching used for the implementation of the Pyramid Model and in Early Head Start programs was influenced by early childhood education scholars, Dr. Lise Fox, Patricia Synder, and Mary Louise Hemmeter. The researchers designed a method of collaborative partnership to support early childhood educators' knowledge and skills in teaching environments. The experts

agreed on the core elements of effective mentoring programs. First, a mentoring relationship, like PBC, was to provide individualized support to help improve knowledge and skills working with young children. Second, the support was to address practical issues that occur in daily work with children. Lastly, partnership was to center around a shared commitment to learning and use the best available knowledge to ensure positive results for all children (Snyder, Hemmeter, & Fox, 2015). The core elements of effective mentoring rooted practice-based coaching to the same adult learning theories and included common components aligned to professional standards relevant across a range of roles and settings (NCQTL, 2014; NAEYC, 2012; Zembytska, 2016).

### **Adult Learning Theories**

The concept of mentoring went all the way back to the Middle Ages, but the specific theory on practice-based coaching was borrowed from the field of education and psychology. Adult education and child learning are closely related and share important theorists in the field of early childhood education including Vygotsky, Piaget, and Erickson. Vygotsky's theories addressed the relational aspect of practice-based coaching. He believed learning was a social interaction. Vygotsky's social constructivist theory was used to consider both participants' attitudes, values, and beliefs as products of their individual experiences in collaborative partnerships (Nolan, 2017). Piaget, who believed self-discovery was crucial to learning, provided the foundation on the best way to motivate a person (Nolan & Molla, 2016). Research confirmed intrinsic learning was the most sustainable path to professional development (Palaiologou & Male, 2019; Reeve, 2002). Erickson's adult psychosocial stages suggested the collaboration in coaching benefited both participants, as challenges were identified and developed over time to create a learning relationship (Ambrosetti, 2014; Regan & Weiss, 2019; Thomas, 2013). Edward Deci and Richard Ryan developed the Self-Determination Theory -SDT (1975) which stated that



humans had three innate psychological needs (Reeve, 2002). People had the need to feel competent, connected, and confident in one's abilities.

Coaching developed to provide on-the-job learning as a supplement for basic pre-employment education and preparation (Wong & Waniganayake, 2013). The effects of practice-based coaching as a relationship based professional development strategy to support teaching needs within the classroom, created the structure for the current literature review. Professional standards were included to integrate the objectives of PBC with a solid foundation. The comprehensive review of available research was examined to consider the question of how practice-based coaching could support early childhood education professional standards in a diverse field.

### **Professional Standards in Early Childhood Education**

The 2015 report released by the National Academy of Medicine called, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, acknowledged the critical work of early childhood educators, the science of early childhood development, and the potential strategies to improve professional preparation. NAEYC responded with, *Power to the Profession* as a national initiative based on the premise that early childhood educators must provide the leadership to elevate the early childhood education profession (NAEYC, 2019). A professional set of competencies grounded in the knowledge of child development was drafted to unite all early childhood educators to create quality learning experiences for children (NAEYC, 2012). The standards provided a foundation from which diverse programs incorporated the wisdom of local communities, families, and providers to develop quality knowledge and skills (NAEYC, 2012). Research indicated when providers applied quality knowledge and skills, children benefited (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Carson et al., 2017; Reidt-Parker & Chainski, 2015).

### **Conclusion**

Professionalism in the field of early childhood education evolved from a triad of research, policy, and practice (NAEYC, 2012). Research and policy informed everyday work early childhood educators performed in the classroom, but teaching practices were intended to inform research and policy, too. The P2P initiative stated early childhood educators must engage in a dynamic cycle of continuous growth to become a valued profession in the eyes of politicians (NAEYC, 2019). Policy makers leverage professional standards against proposed legislation, so without a connection between the standards and the practice early childhood education remains at risk to be dismissed in legislation. A literature review provided a foundation for the question of how to professionalize the field of early childhood education using the strategy of practice-based coaching with a set of professional standards.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

Early childhood education (ECE) providers have long recognized the importance of continuous self-improvement to better help prepare children for success in school. Self-improvement strategies needed to be adaptable to support the wide range of educational backgrounds, experiences and needs of ECE providers. Research indicated professional development that embedded learning in practice, created time and space for teachers to collaborate with peers, offered knowledge of quality teaching practices, and provided support tailored to individual needs was effective in improving teaching practices (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner 2017). ECE tried a variety of quality improvement strategies to support a skilled, ethnically and linguistically diverse early childhood workforce to meet professional standards, but one called practice-based coaching (PBC), has shown promise to improve the quality of teaching strategies within the context of the learning environment (Barton, Velez, Pokorski, & Domingo, 2019; Grygas Coogle, Nagro, Regan, Merrill O'Brien, & Ottley, 2019; Rakap, 2017). A literature review on practice-based coaching summarized components and linked key features in coaching to professional standards to identify positive outcomes for providers and children. The review distinguished PBC as a professional development strategy, identified the framework, and connected the components within that framework to professional standards used to improve the quality of the teaching strategies needed for the wide variety of teaching contexts. Information from the review was used to recommend future research towards larger scaled applications of practice-based coaching in early childhood settings.

Effort to locate empirical research was completed through academic data bases including SAGE, ERIC, and SPRINGER using the keywords; practice-based coaching, mentoring, and professional development, family childcare, infant-toddler care, and professional standards. One

hundred forty nine articles of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research were found using the keywords in conjunction with the term, *early childhood*, to narrow down research based on the age group of interest. Qualitative studies were used to contrast meaning through descriptions of experiences, ideas, beliefs and values. Quantitative research was generated from data collected around the variables of PBC. The mixed research combined both qualitative and quantitative data to triangulate or back up the findings through different methods of collection. Information from all three types of research was gathered and assessed in terms of rigor, scope, and focus to narrow the research down to twelve qualitative, seventeen quantitative, and three mixed method studies. The review used the term, practice-based coaching (PBC) to describe coaching strategies that provided individualized support from a trusted early childhood peer or colleague based on the definition from the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL, 2014). PBC was proposed for use with anyone who supports child development, including educators, providers, pre-service teachers, therapists, or parents. Two landmark studies defined instructional coaching, or PBC, as an on-site professional development strategy provided by a mentor or peer to assist with the implementation of research-based instructional practices (Edwards, Gandini, & Nimmo, 1994; Glazerman, Dolfin, Bleeker, Johnson, Isenberg, Lugo-Gil, Grider, & Britton, 2010). The studies based on collaborative learning highlighted the importance of relationship-based partnerships and were chosen because the grounded theory helped encompass the contextual elements of the research in practice-based coaching (Edwards et al., 1994; Glazerman et al., 2010). Research on relationship-based professional development focused on improving children's developmental outcomes by increasing the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the providers caring for them (Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012; Wilson, Dykstra, Watson, Boyd, & Crais, 2012). The resulting literature review summarized the common components of support

and synthesized the research to consider how using professional standards within the coaching process could help professionalize the diverse early childhood education (ECE) workforce.

### **Practice-Based Coaching as a Professional Development Strategy**

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defined professional development as a continuum of support designed to prepare individuals with the knowledge and skills to work with young children and their families (NAEYC, 2011). Historically, professional development in the field of early childhood education focused on transmitting knowledge through training, but according to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), professional development should be cohesive and sustained over time rather than episodic, one time workshops. The National Institute for Early Education Research stated continuous improvement in teaching practices was critical to prepare all children for success in school (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2019). The degree to which professional development was individualized and emphasized the application of knowledge to practice emerged as a critical factor in professional development (Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012). Research on coaching, as an individualized method of professional development, was shown to support quality improvement in early childhood education through collaborative partnerships (Carroll-Lind, Smorti, Ord, & Robinson, 2016; Fetting & Artman-Meeker, 2016; Korhonen, Heikkinen, Kiviniemi, & Tynjala, 2016; Sawyer & Campbell, 2017; Singh, Han, & Woodrow, 2012; Williford, Bulotsky-Shearer, Bichay, Reilly, & Downer, 2018). Programs of all sizes required ongoing support for providers to apply the best practices from child development research (Carson et al., 2017). Snyder, Hemmeter, and Fox (2015) indicated a clear distinction between coaching and supervising. Research emphasized the equitable power structure of coaching and distinguished coaching from supervising by describing the process as being from a trusted early childhood peer or colleague

without administration implications (Hemmeter, Hardy, Schnitz, Adams, & Kinder; 2015; Leighton, Ford-Connors, Robertson, Wyatt, Wagner, Proctor, & Paratore, 2018; Wilson et al., 2012). Providers reported interactions with coaches felt safe and focused on support and improvement (Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015). Effective professional development provided teachers the time to learn, explore, implement and change practices in meaningful and relevant ways (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner 2017). PBC was shown to give providers opportunities to stretch skills and try new strategies or ways of interacting with children without judgment or repercussions (Bruns, La Rocco, Sharp, & Sopko, 2017). A literature review identified common components in coaching and considered factors in research to explore the effect of practice-based coaching on teaching practices to support professional standards in diverse educational contexts.

### **Practice-Based Coaching Components**

Practice-based coaching was defined by Regan and Weis (2019) as a cyclical process of professional development designed to give providers repeated opportunities to be observed while practicing on the job, creating goals and action plans, and engaging in reflection and feedback. Snyder, Hemmeter, and Fox identified the core of the PBC framework as focused on effective teaching practices through a process of three interconnected components (2015). Literature identified the key components of practice-based coaching as observation; goals and action planning; and reflection and feedback (Fox, Hemmeter, Snyder, Perez Binder, & Clarke, 2011; Ottley, Grygas Coogle, Rahn, & Spear, 2017; Richter; Rakap, 2017). The features of PBC were synthesized from the research to identify the coaching approach in more detail (Baker, 2017; Grygas Coogle, Ottley, Rahn, & Storie, 2018; Han, Blank, & Berson, 2017; McLeod, Kim, & Resua, 2019; Ottley et al., 2017; Recchia & Puig, 2018; Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017; Unver,

2016; Yoon & Larkin, 2018). Research studies were synthesized to highlight the components and reveal the type of support offered to ECE providers within the dynamic process of PBC (Fettig & Artman-Meeker, 2016; Fox et al., 2011; Groenveld, Vermeer, Vanljzendoorn, & Linting, 2011; Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018; Han & Damjanovic, 2014; McCollum, Hemmeter, & Hsieh, 2011; Ming See, 2013; Nolan & Molla, 2018; Ota & Austin, 2013; Unver, 2016).

**Goals and action plans.** The first component of PBC included goal setting and action planning. Goals were first defined as both measurable and achievable to provide structure and accountability to the coaching process (Regan & Weiss, 2019). Instructional planning on teaching strategies followed child assessment and progress to monitor the action steps during the PBC process (Fettig & Artman-Meeker, 2016; Fox et al., 2011; McCollum et al., 2011; Rakap, 2017). The importance of identifying a targeted teaching practice explicitly known and agreed upon was indicated in most studies (Baker, 2017; Barton et al., 2019; Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018; Fox et al., 2011; Hemmeter et al., 2015; McLeod et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2012). The exception was two experimental designed research studies that included goals chosen by the coach without the provider's input (Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Ottley et al. 2017). Goals were short and specific which allowed for easier assessment and tracking opportunities as the process of planning evolved over time (Fox et al., 2011; Hemmeter et al., 2015; McLeod et al., 2019; Nolan, 2017; Recchia & Puig, 2018; Wilson et al., 2012).

**Observation.** The second component common in the research was focused observations. Every study examined used observation in the setting of the provider to gain insight on needs and effectiveness of the strategies employed. Observations were integrated to the specific goals and action plan from the first component making the second component focused and intentional (Baker, 2017; Rakap, 2017). Studies indicated many different ways to engage in observations,

including live observation by the coach (Baker, 2017; Rakap, 2017), reviewing videotape of the teacher in the classroom (Groenveld et al., 2011; Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017) or self-monitoring on the part of the teacher (Fox et al., 2011; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Leighton et al., 2018; McLeod et al., 2019; Ottley et al., 2017; Sawyer & Paulsen, 2012).

The Rakap (2017) and Fox et al. (2011) studies used standardized observation rating scales, or parts of the scale to conduct observations. Coaches developed checklists or used observation protocols to establish fidelity in assessments through observations. Other programs use standardized observation rating scales like the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), Infant/ Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS), Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO), and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Observations included the coach providing support to improve and refine teaching practices with strategies including modeling, verbal prompts, or suggestions (Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018; Yoon & Larkin, 2018). All thirty-two studies included observations in the providers' settings to gain insight and gather information for future action planning.

**Reflection and feedback.** The third component in the coaching cycle common in the research involved using reflection and corrective feedback to help achieve the identified goals (Baker, 2017; Han et al., 2017; McLeod et al., 2019). Coaches in the studies engaged in self-reflection to provide feedback about what was effective and what was a barrier to improving or refining the implementation of the teaching practices observed (Han et al., 2017; Nolan, 2017; Recchia & Puig, 2018). Studies indicated different ways to reflect on and share feedback about teaching practices. Studies reflected through journaling, watching videos of practice, or in conversation between the coach and provider (Baker, 2017; Fox et al., 2011; Groenveld et al., 2011; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Hemmeter et al., 2015; McLeod et al., 2019). Feedback



took the form of written notes or emails, graphical representation of progress, or discussion (Baker, 2017; Han et al., 2017; McLeod et al., 2019; Ottley et al., 2017; Rakap, 2017). Support strategies were also used during the third component of reflection and feedback to improve or refine effective teaching practices (Fox et al., 2011; Hemmeter et al., 2015; McLeod et al., 2019; Nolan, 2017; Ottley et al., 2017; Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012). Reflection and feedback were shown to be a shared process between both partners in PBC (Han et al., 2017; Hemmeter et al., 2015). Feedback occurred in follow-up sessions after a focused observation or during real time while the action plan was being implemented (Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018).

Both coaches and providers used reflection to review and update existing goals and action plans (Hemmeter et al., 2015). Reflection was an important part of the Nolan (2017) and Recchia and Puig (2018) studies to complete the cycle of coaching and naturally lead back to goal setting and action planning, associated with the first component. Other studies continued with the same goals and revised the original action plan (Fox et al., 2011; Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018). All strategies were emphasized to have been selected based on communication between the coach and the teacher. Examples of support strategies found in the studies included role-playing, problem solving, or providing educational materials (Baker, 2017; Leighton et al., 2018; McLeod et al., 2019). Research indicated practice-based coaching was most successful when the program addressed the specific needs of the providers, focused on children's learning, and built on the resources already available in the early childhood setting (Baker, 2017). The components of PBC gave structure to the process but did not limit the creativity of the coaches and providers as to how to implement the coaching cycle. Each study used PBC to best meet the contextual needs of the provider.

## **Factors in Research**

A participant's quote from a qualitative study programs provide invaluable supports for members of the early education workforce now and enable them to see the early care and education profession as one where they have a future. "A teacher's best resource is other teachers. Talking together, we are always reminded of our core values. It's all scaffolding, it's all linked" (Lutton, p.54). To address the question of how PBC can be used to support the diversity of teaching contexts in early childhood education, factors in the research including the purpose and designs of the studies, the data collection and assessment methods, and the participants in the collaborative partnerships were summarized. The literature review constructed a pattern of the coaching models based on theoretical frameworks or approaches. Eight different theoretical frameworks were mentioned across the thirty-two studies, with the most common being qualitative case studies (Baker, 2017; Han & Damjanovic, 2014; Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015) and quantitative multiple-baseline designs (Barton et al. 2019; Ottley et al., 2017; Rakap, 2017). Two studies failed to mention any specific framework (McLeod et al., 2019; Yoon & Larkin, 2018). The purpose of the coaching among the studies examined in the literature review cited improving the quality of teaching (Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018; Rakap, 2017; Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017), improving teacher outlooks or attitudes (Han et al., 2017; Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015), and supporting specific curriculum implementation (Fox et al., 2011; McCollum et al., 2011). The literature was found to consist of a mix of specific intents but all under the broader construct of positive learning experiences for children through support of the teachers. Specific factors including the research designs, the roles of participants within PBC, the data collection and analysis, and the assessment of both the effectiveness of coaching as well as the coach, were important to consider in how PBC could be used in the diverse field of early childhood

education.

**Research designs.** Research designs were important in determining the rigor of a study and the extent to which causal conclusions were drawn. Experimental designs in which educators were randomly assigned to a strategy or control group were used in only two of the 32 studies (Barton et al., 2019; McLeod et al., 2019). Experimental designs allowed causal conclusions about coaching. Three studies used a pre-post design where the outcome of the intervention strategy was estimated by comparing before and after the implementation (Fettig & Artman-Meeker, 2016; McCollum et al., 2011; Richter, Kunter, Ludtke, Klusmann, Anders, & Baumert, 2013). Research indicated that the coaching approach contributed to the positive outcomes of the early childhood education programs evidenced by children's learning outcomes (Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Rakap, 2017). PBC programs were designed around a framework to implement and enhance the quality of care for children by supporting higher quality teaching methods.

**Roles.** Snyder, Hemmeter, and Fox (2015) stated practice-based coaching was a partnership constructed not only around the understanding of the purpose of the professional development, but also on the roles of the participants. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for participants in PBC indicated in the research were important for successful collaborative relationships (Han et al., 2017; Nolan, 2017; Singh et al., 2012). The coach-provider collaboration set goals, identified action steps, and worked together on support strategies like role-play and problem-solving (Baker, 2017; Leighton et al., 2018; McLeod et al., 2018). The collaborations were shown to build trust, rapport, and resilience during the coaching process over time (Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015; Nolan & Molla, 2018; Recchia & Puig, 2018). Coaches provided support and guidance based on the provider's needs within the particular contexts of the

settings and providers built up trust in being understood and supported (Nolan, 2017; Nolan & Molla, 2018). PBC acted as a source of encouragement, prioritized listening and observation, and offered non-judgmental feedback as a source of support (Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Ottley et al., 2017). Coaches maintained confidentiality and set the expectations of the partnership including the time and location of the meetings, and how data was to be collected and reported (Fox et al., 2011; Hemmeter et al., 2015).

**Participants.** Who experienced PBC and in which settings the coaching occurred was relevant to considering the question of the diversity of the professional development method? Coaches and providers in the studies were mostly white females with some level of higher education. The exception was four studies which included some participants of color (Barton et al., 2019; Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018; Ottley et al., 2017) and Rakap's (2017) and Nolan's (2017) studies that focused on new educators who were still in the process of earning degrees. There was an emphasis on coaches who had content knowledge of the curriculum or focused practices (Nolan, 2017; Rakap, 2017). Some studies specifically preferred coaches with both educational credentials and professional experience in early childhood education (Fox et al., 2011; McLeod et al., 2019). The coaches in all settings had more experience or higher education levels than the providers being coached (Barton et al., 2019; Rakap, 2017). Some providers were mandated to participate in PBC as a requirement for new curricula (Baker, 2017; Rakap, 2017) but most volunteered or were recruited to participate (Barton et al., 2019; Fox et al., 2011; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017).

Information was collected on the frequency and length of the visits and the duration of the entire coaching partnership. The most commonly described coaching dosage was multiple times per week (Fox et al., 2011; Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018; Hemmeter et al., 2015;

Ottley et al., 2017; Rakap, 2017). Two studies had bi-monthly visits (Fettig & Artman-Meeker, 2016; Wilson et al., 2012). The most commonly described time frames for coaching were three to six months (Barton et al., 2019; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Leighton et al., 2018; Rakap, 2017; Wilson et al., 2012). Only two studies reported coaching partnerships for up to one year (McCollum et al. 2011; Nolan, 2017). Not all studies included information about the duration of each coaching visit, but the majority that did reported sessions lasted less than one hour at a time. Successful coaching programs used some form of accountability. Coaches used logs, written notes, or other forms of documentation to help strengthen the effectiveness of teacher practices.

Two approaches were commonly used in early childhood settings to recruit coaches. Some studies used coaches who also had a teaching role on site. Peer mentors, or coaches were experienced teachers who served as coaches in addition to ongoing teaching responsibilities. For others, coaching was the only role. Some of the research included additional staff or consultants hired to provide PBC support. The unique characteristics of the setting determined which role worked best. Coaches were required to address content-focused professional development when working with providers with specific curriculum to ensure alignment between teaching practices and desired outcomes for children (Nolan, 2017; Rakap, 2017). Research described the coaches' responsibilities as developing action plans, collecting data through observations, interpreting the data and giving feedback, and offering problem-solving strategies (Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Leighton et al., 2018; Nolan, 2017; Recchia & Puig, 2018).

**Methods.** PBC programs used face-to-face methods the majority of the time, but several employed long distance methods using virtual technology (Groenveld et al., 2011; Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018; Ottley, et al., 2017). Some studies used a combination of both

approaches (Hemmeter, et al., 2015; Rakap, 2017). Nine of the studies used video of providers' instruction and interactions within the early education setting to receive comments and feedback from the coach (Fox et al., 2011; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Leighton et al., 2018; McLeod et al., 2019; Ottley et al., 2017; Rakap, 2017; Sawyer & Campbell, 2017; Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017). Other methods included using earpieces in a method referred to as, Bug-in-Ear, where the coach was not in the room with the provider but through technology was able to give feedback and suggest support strategies in real-time (Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018; Ottley et al., 2017; Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017).

**Data collection.** Coaches documented encounters with providers in a variety of ways. Written notes, checklists, and video analysis were common data collection tools to help set goals, track progress, and determine whether the needs of providers were met (Gyrgas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018; McLeod et al., 2019; Yoon & Larkin, 2018). Studies utilized surveys or questionnaires to establish goals to which action plans were developed (Baker, 2017; Barton et al., 2019; Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018). Some surveys included Likert-scale items, but few included open-ended questions. Observation measures were done live, videotaped, or collected by provider checklists (Baker, 2017; Hemmeter et al., 2015; Rakap, 2017). The data was visually analyzed to focus on level changes across phases in studies to see how the data overlapped (Grygas Coodle, Nagro et al., 2019; Ottley et al., 2017; Rakap, 2017). Results were compared using statistical techniques like triangulating the data from a critical ecology framework (Baker, 2017) to coding descriptive data (Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018; Hemmeter et al., 2015; Ming See, 2013; Nolan & Molla, 2018; Singh et al., 2012). The descriptive analysis of qualitative data was coded and used to reveal patterns (Ming See, 2013; Wilson et al., 2012). Five studies included data collection to provide fidelity to the coaching method, such as

document reviews, checklists, and secondary observer comparisons (Fox et al., 2011; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Hemmeter et al., 2015; Ottley et al., 2017; Rakap, 2017).

**Assessment.** Studies indicated participants' collaboration in discussing progress and assessing the data helped individualize teaching practices and better children's learning outcomes (Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Rakap, 2017). The activities and strategies used to assess the progress consisted of keeping logs, journals, and reflections during the coaching cycle. PBC studies designed key assessments that measured performance through qualitative (Baker, 2017; Carroll-Lind et al., 2016; Han & Damjanovic, 2014; Han et al., 2017; Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015; Korhonen et al., 2016; Leighton et al., 2018; Nolan, 2017; Nolan & Molla, 2018; Recchia & Puig, 2018; Singh et al., 2012; Yoon & Larkin, 2018) and quantitative measures (Barton et al., 2019; Fetting & Artman-Meeker, 2016; Fox et al., 2011; Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al 2018; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Hemmeter et al., 2015; McCollum et al., 2011; Ming See, 2013; Ottley et al., 2017; Rakap, 2017; Richter et al., 2013; Sawyer & Campbell, 2017; Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017; Unver, 2016; Williford et al., 2018). A combination of both methods was used in several studies (McLeod et al., 2019; Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012; Wilson et al., 2012). Conversations, journaling, and written reflections collected qualitative data within the PBC programing.

**Outcomes.** The outcomes included in the research studies indicated the impact of PBC. Children's learning was stronger the longer the coaching period went on. Two years of coaching had the most significant results. Younger children and English as a second language learners gained more when teachers participated in coaching partnerships. PBC influenced the organization of the classroom environment, the amount and quality of literacy activities, and meeting children's social and emotional needs. Studies stated coaching increased teacher

knowledge (Nolan & Molla, 2018; Wilson et al., 2012). Attitudes were collected on job satisfaction and the outcome was that providers reported higher job satisfaction after participating in a coaching program (Carroll-Lind et al., 2016; Recchia & Puig, 2018). Studies described positive outcomes for the children in the environment that the coaching took place (Barton et al., 2019; Hemmeter et al., 2015). Relationships between the coach and provider were reported as positive (Hemmeter et al., 2015; Nolan & Molla, 2018; Rakap, 2017; Wilson et al., 2012). The Yoon and Larkin (2018) study was the only one to find no effect on relationships after the coaching experience. The review concluded that practice-based coaching was a beneficial professional development strategy. The question remained if a synthesis of the research factors would indicate support for the diverse needs of the early childhood education workforce as well as it did for mainstream providers.

### **A Diverse Early Childhood Education Workforce**

Early childhood providers varied widely in education and experience in the studies. The few studies found on coaching in diverse early childhood education settings were shown to be effective in supporting teaching practices to promote children's learning outcomes (Groenveld et al., 2011; Nolan & Molla, 2018; Ota & Austin, 2013; Sawyer & Campbell, 2017; Singh et al., 2012; Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017). According to NAEYC and The Education Trust (2019) the birth-through-five work force included approximately 2 million early childhood educators serving more than 12 million children, with half working in a paid family based childcare setting ([www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/user-74/increasing\\_qualifications](http://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/user-74/increasing_qualifications)). PBC's ability to be effective in a diverse range of contexts was considered by examining the range of early childhood educational settings, where coaching occurred. A summary of the settings used in PBC revealed that most of the thirty-two studies occurred in school-based, inclusive classrooms



(Barton et al., 2019; Fox et al., 2011; McLeod et al., 2019; Ottley et al., 2017; Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017; Wilson et al., 2012). Only two settings were described as economically depressed areas (Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018; Yoon & Larkin, 2018). Two occurred in family childcare programs (Groenveld et al., 2011; Ota & Austin, 2013) and only one was specifically in an infant toddler program (Sawyer & Campbell, 2017). The settings in which the research took place were important to add insight to both the participants and the context to which PBC occurred to consider the effectiveness of generalizing the professional development strategy.

The Education Trust and NAEYC studied early childhood educators of color through individual responses to understand the implications of increased educational requirements on the early childhood education workforce. The qualitative study used NAEYC contacts to build a diverse sample of early childhood educators from New Jersey, North Carolina, and Wisconsin. Participants of color discussed questions of policy and support around the topic of requiring an early childhood education credential or degree. Feedback was intended to help policymakers and leaders support early childhood educators of color increase professionalism. Five focus groups of 4 to 16 participants each, were conducted to allow sufficient time for each participant to be heard. Data were coded using a constant comparative analysis to identify the need to support emotional needs and confidence in providers through the professional development process (NAEYC, Ed Trust, 2019).

**Emotional support.** The Educational Trust and NAEYC study (2019), and Hardy and Basler's coaching webinar (2019) both included the importance of emotional support and confidence building in supporting providers. Emotional competence was specifically addressed in three of the studies in the literature review on coaching (Han et al., 2017; Nolan, 2017; Yoon & Larkin, 2018). Practice-based coaching was shown to accommodate teachers' complex

emotions and become more emotionally supportive within the relationship-based partnership (Han et al., 2017; Nolan, 2017; Yoon & Larkin, 2018). Only one study indicated no added increase in sense of well-being from the coaching experience (Unver, 2016).

**Confidence.** Studies reported improvements in teacher attitude and confidence after the coaching process (Han et al., 2017; Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015). Fox et al. (2011) was a small study following three teachers' emotional competence during a coaching experience. One of the participants suffered a death of a family member during the experience and failed to meet the end criteria for coaching despite extending the timeframe twice as long as the other two participants in the study. Practice-based coaching was found to influence providers' dispositions and habits of mind evidenced in the reported change in practices (Nolan & Molla, 2018).

Coaches' dispositions mattered, too. Studies revealed coaches possessed a combination of personal qualities including excellent interpersonal skills, patience, flexibility, open mindedness, and optimism. Coaches shared the essential value of building and maintaining positive and productive collaborative relationships.

### **Professional Standards in Practice-Based Coaching**

The core standards of professional preparation were evidenced in the research collected on practice-based coaching. The principles to support professional practice were shown to help early childhood educators become grounded in a strong foundation of common practices in the research on PBC (Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012; Wilson et al., 2012). Coaching components and actions matched up to the competencies agreed upon by professional organizations in support of professional development (Baker, 2017; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Hemmeter et al., 2015; Leighton et al., 2018; Nolan & Molla, 2018; Rakap, 2017; Wilson et al., 2012). Practice-based coaching was shown to identify the strengths and needs of providers in the area of child

development knowledge (Barton et al., 2019; Hemmeter et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2012).

Shared professional values including a commitment to diversity and inclusion, with a respect for cultural contexts in decision making was evidenced in studies (Nolan & Molla, 2018; Singh et al., 2012; Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017). The standards are meant to support educators across diverse work settings. The wide variety of settings represented in the PBC research also shared a set of six common outcomes of the professional standards to outline expectations for professional knowledge, skills and dispositions with an emphasis on assessment. The core standards describe what a provider should know and do in the field. Research on PBC met the standards through evidence that programs offered learning opportunities aligned to the standards (Baker, 2017; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Leighton et al., 2018; Nolan & Molla, 2018; Rakap, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

Practice-based coaching has been used as a professional development strategy in early childhood classrooms to develop educators' knowledge and skills. A literature review on the topic considered how the coaching strategy was completed to integrate a set of professional standards into the process. Thirty-two empirical studies on the effectiveness, and assessment of the professional development strategy of practice-based coaching were analyzed and synthesized to consider PBC's effectiveness to build provider skills and knowledge within the context of teaching. The review identified common outcomes among the research studies. Improved skills and knowledge including new curriculum implementations (Nolan & Molla, 2018; Wilson et al., 2012) and a positive effect on teaching attitudes were indicated (Carroll-Lind et al., 2016; Recchia & Puig, 2018). Positive outcomes for the children in the environment that the coaching

took place were indicated (Barton et al., 2019; Hemmeter et al., 2015) along with an increased sense of cultural competency for providers (Nolan & Molla, 2018; Singh et al., 2012; Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017). The outcome in the literature was that relationships between the coach and provider were reported as positive (Hemmeter et al., 2015; Nolan & Molla, 2018; Rakap, 2017; Wilson et al., 2012) which can be used to inspire future research on PBC. The literature review also added to the existing knowledge of how practice-based coaching can be used to support the professional development of the diverse early childhood education workforce by examining the factors in the research by category. The use of practice-based coaching indicated increased teacher skills and knowledge and aligned with NAEYC's professional standards to better meet the needs of children's development (Baker, 2017; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Hemmeter et al., 2015; Leighton et al., 2018; Nolan & Molla, 2018; Rakap, 2017; Wilson et al., 2012). Despite a balance of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research articles, studies were found to be limited in representing the wide range of early childhood educational settings and participants' educational levels. The identified gaps help direct future studies to better children's learning outcomes through focused professional development of the ECE providers.

### Chapter Three: Research Summary and Conclusions

The field of early childhood education has long relied on professional development strategies to support teachers with varying degrees of education who enter the field from a variety of disciplines. Practice-based coaching (PBC) has been used as a professional development strategy in early childhood classrooms for ongoing development of educators' knowledge and skills in best practices for young children. The purpose of the literature review on PBC was to identify a successful framework used for coaching and to analyze the components with a set of early childhood education professional standards. Research addressed the question of how practice-based coaching as a professional development strategy could support early childhood professional standards for educators over a diverse range of settings and educational backgrounds. The results indicated practice-based coaching was an effective strategy in the classroom to build teacher skills and knowledge and aid in children's development (Barton et al., 2019; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Rakap, 2017). Practice-based coaching was shown to align with NAEYC's professional standards (NAEYC, 2012). Results indicated literature was lacking in the full range of diverse settings and provider demographics, exposing a gap in research and an opportunity for future study. Research was limited for coaching across the full range of diversity in ECE. A summary of the studies examined PBC as a professional development strategy and the common PBC components. The factors summarized in the coaching research were further analyzed to consider how the PBC components could support professionalism in the diverse field of ECE.

#### **Practice-Based Coaching as a Professional Development Strategy**

Coaching was determined to be an effective professional development strategy associated with quality improvements in early childhood education for both providers and young children

(Barton et al., 2019; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Rakap, 2017). The goals and action plans of ECE providers in the studies were articulated well, but the effectiveness of practice-based coaching to support all of the unforeseen needs across the wide range of teaching contexts was not clear with such a homogenous sample of participants. The literature review recognized that empirical evidence on the effectiveness of PBC to support diverse needs was limited and additional research from a wider range of teaching contexts including infant and toddler care, family childcare, and private sector programs was warranted.

### **Practice-Based Coaching Components**

The outcomes included in the research were important indicators of the impact of PBC on supporting professionalism in ECE. A frequently cited outcome was improved teaching quality (Hemmeter et al., 2015; McLeod et al., 2019; Rakap, 2017). One study reported no significant improvement in teaching quality, but the fidelity of adhering to all three key components of coaching was questionable (Korhonen et al., 2016). Even when research indicated PBC was effective, the settings in the studies were identified as strategically chosen and providers were willing to participate (Leighton et al., 2018; Ottley et al., 2017). The outcome of a mandated PBC program without buy-in from coaches and providers would possibly have had different results. If PBC was to be used as a professional development approach to increase professionalism in the ECE workforce, the strategy would have to be part of a larger collection of professional development options that providers could choose to maintain the positive benefits.

The paper reviewed studies on coaching to analyze the features consistently associated with PBC. Patterns in coaching designs and outcomes identified three main coaching components; goal setting and action planning, observation, and feedback (Fox et al., 2011; Ottley

et al., 2017; Rakap, 2017). Analyzing the coaching components in each study helped identify the foundation of practice-based coaching to better generalize the strategy into a variety of contexts. Examining the fidelity of the coaching process was important for future replication in a variety of contexts. Fidelity measures included multiple sessions of PBC to help create a visual analysis of the data and established consistency across samples (Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Hemmeter et al., 2015). Some studies implemented fidelity measures through secondary observers, coaching checklists, and rating scales (Fox et al., 2011; Ottley et al., 2017; Rakap, 2017). Few studies measured the long term effects of coaching (Barton et al., 2019). Overall, coaching programs indicted positive long term effects on teacher practices (Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Hemmeter et al., 2015).

### **Factors in Research**

The literature review included a sizable mix of qualitative and quantitative research to find a balance between real experiences and workable data. Experimental designs were chosen as much as possible for the causal conclusions about coaching (Ottley et al., 2017; McLeod et al., 2019). Studies were also chosen with interview data collected in phases and provider responses were coded using constant comparative analysis to analyze the content for themes (Han & Damjanovic, 2014). Some studies employed the use of qualitative data analysis software to help address reliability issues across multiple interpretations (Baker, 2017; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019). Inter-rater reliability was created in studies that coded and compared the same responses (Barton et al., 2019; Hemmeter et al., 2015). Providers' reactions were recorded in three stages; initial response to coaching, during the coaching process, and reflecting on the coaching experience afterwards (Wilson et al., 2012). The experimental studies gave strength to the review, but the providers' experiences made the process real. Some studies failed to provide

any information on the extent PBC was aligned to the training or preparing the coach before the process took place. The gap in this research study created future possibilities to investigate how coaches are prepared when supporting specific curriculum or learning outcomes.

The review of the methodologies also revealed limitations in the way teacher attitudes were measured. Provider attitudes or teaching dispositions were found to be important in positive learning outcomes for children and adult learners (Yoon & Larkin, 2018; Han et al., 2017). Some studies utilized surveys or questionnaires, while others included only conversation and observation measures. Some of the surveys included Likert-scale items that may have missed the important nuances of experiences needed to address the research question. Data collection and analysis were sometimes difficult because of the integrated dynamic process of PBC (Hemmeter et al., 2015). Videos used in some of the studies to collect data were controlled by the providers, whereas the videos used to establish baselines were controlled by the researchers, indicating possible bias (McCollum et al., 2011). Randomization in the order that the providers received coaching, along with the replication of the coaching strategies across providers, increased the confidence in PBC positive outcomes (Grygas Coogle, Ottley et al., 2018; Ottley et al., 2018). The studies examined teacher attitudes through open-ended interviews or questionnaires, but those studies were often limited to a few teachers and could not be generalized beyond any one context or group of people (Fox et al., 2011; Wilson et al., 2012). The literature review indicated that providers reported positive experiences with practice-based coaching, but more research was needed in how provider's attitudes effected the perception of the positive experiences reported.

### **A Diverse Early Childhood Education Workforce**

A limited number of empirical research studies on coaching in family childcare were conducted more recently than 2013, leaving this sizable and important demographic under-



represented in the study of PBC (Groenveld, et al., 2011; Ota & Austin, 2013). As an individual, relationship-based support system, PBC cannot work as a one size fits all program. Research was unclear as to the level of specialized training practice-based coaches had in teacher development. The sample of coaches' backgrounds and preparedness was limited, so conclusions could not be drawn based on the role of the coach. A wide range of coach demographics would support the diversity as a strength, but further research into the coaching role was necessary.

Black and Latino early childhood educators were reported as less likely to hold a bachelor's degree and more likely to have high school as their highest level of attainment than White or Asian educators (NAEYC & The National Trust, 2019). Research demonstrated that PBC supported individual providers in unique contexts, making the possibility of PBC supporting teachers of color even more valuable academically, socially, and emotionally for the students who share the same demographics. The studies in the literature review were predominately representative of white females with some level of higher education (Fox et al., 2011; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Ottley et al., 2017). PBC failed within the scope of this research study to represent the large demographic of providers of color, so outcomes for supporting the diversity of the field remained unclear.

### **Professional Standards in Practice-Based Coaching**

NAEYC's professional preparation standards offered a framework for applying new knowledge to critical issues used with practice-based coaching (NAEYC, 2012). Professional standards state that educators are to respectfully, effectively, and equitably serve children, families, and each other. Service and respect were also common expectations in the studies on PBC (Nolan & Molla, 2018; Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017). Studies included honest communication between coaches and providers that led to understanding and self-discovery (Han

et al. 2017; Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015). Professional standards were established to encourage educators to seek out high-quality professional development opportunities and take responsibility in assessing practices to ensure continued growth. Practice-based coaching supported the development of intrinsic learners through the collaborative process (Leighton et al., 2018; Nolan & Molla, 2018). Early childhood educators engaged in high-quality professional practices when safety needs were met in the teaching environment. Practice-based coaching was designed to help teachers regularly reflect on the effectiveness of practices in the teaching environment and revise methods as needed which accounted for the professional standard of assessment (Rakap, 2017; Williford et al., 2018). Research indicated practice-based coaching identified needs, facilitated a connection with resources, and problem-solved with providers to meet needs (Baker, 2017; Leighton et al., 2018). Coaches advocated for the needs of the providers and providers learned to advocate for the classroom (Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019). NAEYC stated that to meet the standard of high-quality practice, educators need to take on an advocacy role both in the classroom and out into the community. Practice-based coaching met the professional standard of educators experiencing the support of community through the providers' experiences with coaches, co-teachers, and family members, but more research on extending advocacy learned through PBC was warranted. The professional standard for providers to become involved in policy work was not addressed in any of the studies on PBC. Research did indicate positive outcomes for providers and children, which could influence policy makers in the future (Hemmeter et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2012). The final professional standard that practice-based coaching was shown to support was the continuous improvement process. The very nature of practice-based coaching was shown to be a cyclical process of improvement where intrinsic motivation was fostered (Leighton et al., 2018; Nolan & Molla, 2018). The standards set the

national vision of excellence for early childhood educators and the research on PBC indicated that the dynamic process of observation, goal setting, assessment, and reflection can become a possibility for every provider.

### **Conclusion**

The unifying themes in practice-based coaching indicated significant support for educator goals according to ECE professional standards (NAEYC, 2019). The literature review addressed the question of how practice-based coaching as a professional development strategy could support early childhood professional standards for educators over a diverse range of settings and educational backgrounds. The results indicated practice-based coaching was an effective strategy in the classroom to build teacher skills and knowledge and aid in children's development, but more research was needed to generalize the outcome into the diverse field of ECE. The limitations and lack of diversity in the studies exposed gaps in the research and opportunities for future study for PBC in unique teaching contexts. Although research lacked on PBC's influence on advocacy and policy work, conceptually more early childhood education stakeholders would evolve as advocates to help align policies with the high-quality practices developed through PBC.

## Chapter Four: Discussion and Application

Research consistently links high quality early childhood education programs and positive child outcomes to the quality of the teaching practices in ECE settings (Edwards et al., 1994). Practice-based coaching has been used as a professional development strategy to improve the quality of teaching by connecting knowledge and practice within the context of the educational setting (Barton et al., 2019; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Rakap, 2017). A literature review of thirty-two empirical studies conducted since 2011 on collaborative-based coaching helps consider how the strategy could be used to develop professionalism within diverse contexts in ECE. Research indicates PBC supports teachers in specific contexts, although the diversity of the contexts within the literature review is limited. Focusing on developing the professionalism of providers in marginalized communities will benefit the entire ECE field and better support all young children to reach their full potential (NAEYC, 2019). A summary of the insights gained from the research on practice-based coaching can lead to improved practices, professionalism and policies in ECE. New research questions inspired by the implications of practice-based coaching will help educators, advocates, and policy makers develop the field of early childhood education into a brighter future.

### **Insights**

Lawmakers face a conundrum on how to best support professional development in early childhood education. Policy makers realize that investing in professional development for early childhood educators is a more plausible option than funding the entire field and that the high attrition rate in ECE threatens any investments made to individual providers. The contributing stakeholders can use research on practice-based coaching to further examine the process of professional development in ECE, recognize the professional benefits, and influence policies in

early childhood education.

### **Practice**

The literature review concluded practice-based coaching is an effective strategy to build teacher skills and knowledge in the classroom and aid in children's development (Barton et al., 2019; Grygas Coogle, Nagro et al., 2019; Rakap, 2017). PBC is an on-the-job training opportunity to connect professional development to individualized teaching contexts. The literature on coaching as a form of quality improvement in early childhood education settings is still developing but is worth supporting and researching more until the ECE workforce is adequately compensated and is better prepared for the financial cost of earning degrees (Goffin, 2016). Investigations on how to assess PBC using quality rating scales in a wider variety of settings would help build the argument for standardizing the use of the strategy field-wide without diluting the benefits of the flexibility in implementation. Studying PBC's ability to support the use of quality rating and improvement systems could also reveal further applications for the professional development strategy in more generalized contexts such as family childcare and private-sector settings. Further studies with larger number of teachers, a wider range of data sources and more information on the personal contexts of teachers' experiences would help to consider the potential of practice-based coaching support of a larger variety of providers from social-cultural backgrounds. Studies focused on coaches' fidelity of implementing practice-based coaching or how one becomes a coach would add to the body of knowledge on the foundation of effective practice-based coaching in the field of early childhood education. Exceptions to the long-term outcomes of coaching in some of the research also suggested future studies were needed to consider additional support strategies after the coaching process ended to maintain professional standards. Longitudinal studies on PBC could provide important insight on the

effect of bias on teaching practices and children's learning. PBC roles could become as common in ECE settings to assist with teaching issues as administration roles are to assist with staffing issues.

### **Professionalism**

Practice-based coaching aligned with NAEYC's professional standards. Defining early childhood education as a profession would help make a better case to the public about the need for increased investment in high-quality education (NAEYC, 2018). Early childhood educators agree that the opportunity to develop professionally is valuable, but knowledge gained, or required through higher education, must find a way to honor the years of experience in the field. Research on practice-based coaching indicated that providers supported further education as a way to establish professional identity but the process as to how that could be established was unclear.

Any emphasis on degree attainment, even with coaching and support, underestimates what is required to achieve professional status. Coaching used as a band aid strategy to take minimal steps towards professional development may not be enough. The professional standards offer unification and a shared professional identity built on cohesive preparation and the desire for the well-being of children and their families (NAEYC, 2012). Racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity should remain a cornerstone in defining what it means to have a high-quality workforce, lest the qualifications broadly raised for all early childhood educators hurt the children with the greatest need. The field of ECE needs to advocate for every provider by creating policy changes designed to professionalize the workforce in response to the increased understanding of early brain development and the importance of early childhood educators having and demonstrating a complex set of skills and competencies.

**Policies**

The early childhood education system is not currently structured or adequately funded to support millions of early childhood educators' higher educational requirements, nor compensate them fairly in the aftermath. A rush to increase requirements will only deepen existing divisions along racial, geographic, socio-economic, and linguistic lines among providers. NAEYC's Power to the Profession initiative stated that while degrees are expected from most professions, early childhood education first needs to reorganize into a unified system before educational standards could ever be imposed successfully. Practice-based coaching is one of the professional development strategies capable of supporting the ECE system without displacing the existing teachers who often represent the communities they teach in.

Educators and policymakers must work together to establish early childhood education as a public good. Initiatives like T.E.A.C.H. or the Power to the Profession offer strategies policymakers and educators can both agree to work with in varying degrees, to enhance the image, effectiveness, and compensation of early childhood educators (NAEYC, 2019). Investing in early childhood educators is an investment in children and will help address core economic and social challenges in our communities (Carson et al., 2017). Quality early childhood programs shape learning that has long lasting effects on the economy. Unlike other professions, early childhood education is not supported by a common system of preparation yet. ECE providers need a deep knowledge of child development and the chance to receive feedback and coaching as they learn (Reidt-Parker & Chainski, 2015). The benefits gained from practice-based coaching will evolve the profession, one teacher at a time.

**Implications**

Several questions developed over the course of this literature review. First, how can

coaches from diverse settings and educational backgrounds be recruited and trained in PBC? Then, what is an effective method to train the coach? How much explanation do potential coaches need in the background theory or research behind PBC to be able to implement the components of PBC with integrity, and how should that be measured? Finally, what impact could PBC have on the high attrition rates in the field of early childhood education? Answering these questions would guard against any change that was being implemented in ways that disregarded diverse early childhood educators and the reality of their work.

Findings indicate some tension between the weight of educational versus experiential knowledge, but there was no debate over how the professional development of ECE providers enhances the public's perception of the profession. Public respect is critical, because changing the perception of ECE could go a long way toward enhancing current and future opportunities in the workforce. Providers will have a much better understanding of the complexities of the field with increased knowledge and a broader perspective of the profession gained through collaborative coaching partnerships. These complexities include policies and systems that contribute to educator turnover and push prospective early childhood educators of color away from the field.

### **Conclusion**

Children's learning is facilitated when teaching practices build on children's strengths in developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate ways (ECNC, 2019, NAEYC, 2019). Providers using practice-based coaching can refine developmentally and culturally appropriate teaching methods to better help facilitate all children's learning through practice and reflection (Mosely, 2018). PBC is a relationship-based collaboration developed within the social-cultural, political, and historical context of each provider and child in mind (Carroll-Lind et al., 2016).



The endless variety of learning contexts require a strong, yet flexible professional development strategy for support. Advocates who have developed high-quality practices through PBC can align those practices to current and future policies to help build professionalism in the field of ECE. Knowledge turns into power, and providers who gain knowledge and skills can advocate for better benefits, higher wages, and more financial support of professional development strategies in the field of early childhood education. The same skills developed in PBC to increase problem-solving in the classroom can be applied to problem-solving in the community. The success of ECE as a profession “rests directly on the responsiveness to and centering of the needs of the early childhood workforce” (NAEYC & Education Trust, 2019, p.10). The current literature review on PBC reflects the lack of diverse contexts, which created a biased perspective on the professional development strategy’s ability to meet the needs of all ECE providers. Studies of PBC in different contexts may reveal the complexity of such biases and tap into the strengths that diversity adds to the field. Much of the discussion around policy recommendations for early childhood educators is focused on advancing the current workforce, but the future of the workforce is equally as important. The more the field of early childhood education is seen as a respected profession the more we can build on our image, compensation levels, recruitment and retention efforts into the future.

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