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Early Childhood

A Coaching and Mentoring Framework:
Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce

A Coaching & Mentoring Framework: Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce Prepared for the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood by EASTCONN under contract number: 23OECQISP1ECN. EASTCONN, a regional education service center in Connecticut received funding to create a coaching framework and a mentoring framework through a CQIS contract to support a continuous quality improvement mindset for the early childhood profession.

This framework was thoroughly researched and created in a collaborative process. The primary contributors are:

Project Lead at CT Office of Early Childhood and Coach
Deborah Adams, Education Consultant CT Office of Early Childhood

Project Lead and Coach
Diane Gozemba, Director of Early Childhood Initiatives at EASTCONN

Marina Rodriguez, Independent Consultant and Coach

Susan Vivian, Independent Consultant and Coach

Numerous colleagues who are Office of Early Childhood approved technical assistance providers in Connecticut have reviewed sections throughout the development process and contributed their expertise and insights through focus groups and a TA Provider support session. Early Childhood Associates, based in Massachusetts, provided in depth current research on other states, agencies and available frameworks to support this document.

This framework is brought to you as a free and open access document to guide your coaching and mentoring process. The intent of this framework is tobe used as a source for reflection to guide your thinking about confidence, skills, and supporting a continuous quality improvement mindset.

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Structure of the Framework

In this document, we begin with an introduction to the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood's Coaching and Mentoring Framework, outlining its purpose and background. We then provide definitions between coaching and mentoring, including their benefits and historical context as they have been practiced in Connecticut. The core of this framework is structured around four main elements: Ways of Being, Practices to Support Educators, Development, Identity, and Culture, and Eco-systems Thinking. Each of the four elements is presented in detail with specific practices, principles, and considerations for coaches and mentors and implementation options for use.

Introduction

CT OEC has commissioned this framework to guide and promote effective practices that advance equity in workforce development. Building upon the NAEYC Technical Assistance Glossary and CT's own Core Knowledge and Competency Framework, we see a need to embark on more training and recruitment. This framework therefore is needed to inform a new phase of implementation to the current OEC technical assistance provider system.

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood's Coaching & Mentoring Framework was created by active professional learning practitioners to serve as a scaffold for current and future coaches, mentors and early childhood leaders on how to effectively engage educators in any setting in their professional learning journey. In developing the framework, aspirational practices and common elements of both coaching and mentoring were considered on how to build human capacity within the early childhood workforce. This framework aims to tie together the collective learning gained from our current technical assistance providers, research, and other state models to develop a coaching framework for CT's early childhood professional development system.

Goals for the use of Coaching & Mentoring Framework: Supporting the early childhood workforce to encourage educators, coaches and mentors to:

- Reflect on their practice, while in practice, and after practice
- Cultivate curiosity about what they notice in their daily life and in their practice
- Examine beliefs about their practices to understand the origins and to cultivate an open mind to try new things
- Integrate new understandings into practice

"If you want a harvest in one year, grow a crop. If you want a harvest in ten years, grow trees. If you want a harvest that will last a lifetime, grow people."
- Chinese Proverb

The benefits of supportive coaching and mentoring live on within the individuals who learned about their growth potential through ongoing reflective practice.

What are the benefits of coaching and mentoring?

Coaches and mentors are uniquely positioned to support educator reflection about practice through dialogue that occurs within the workplace context. Coaching is grounded in the daily practice of the early childhood classroom to improve program quality and proven to be one of the most effective strategies to equip our workforce for success (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018). Amongst the wide range of professional development approaches, coaching is one of the most effective strategies for achieving sustained improvements in educators'

professional practice within their learning environment and children's learning outcomes (Kraft et al., 2018; Peleman et al., 2018; Rogers et al., 2020).

In the DeWhirst study (2023), mentoring success was linked to the training of mentors. Being an experienced teacher was not found to be a replacement for preparation, and believing any experienced teacher can mentor novices limits the potential benefits of a field experience. Mentors who received any procedural training engaged in more effective practices i.e. modeling, coaching, articulation, exploration, and creating safe learning environments.
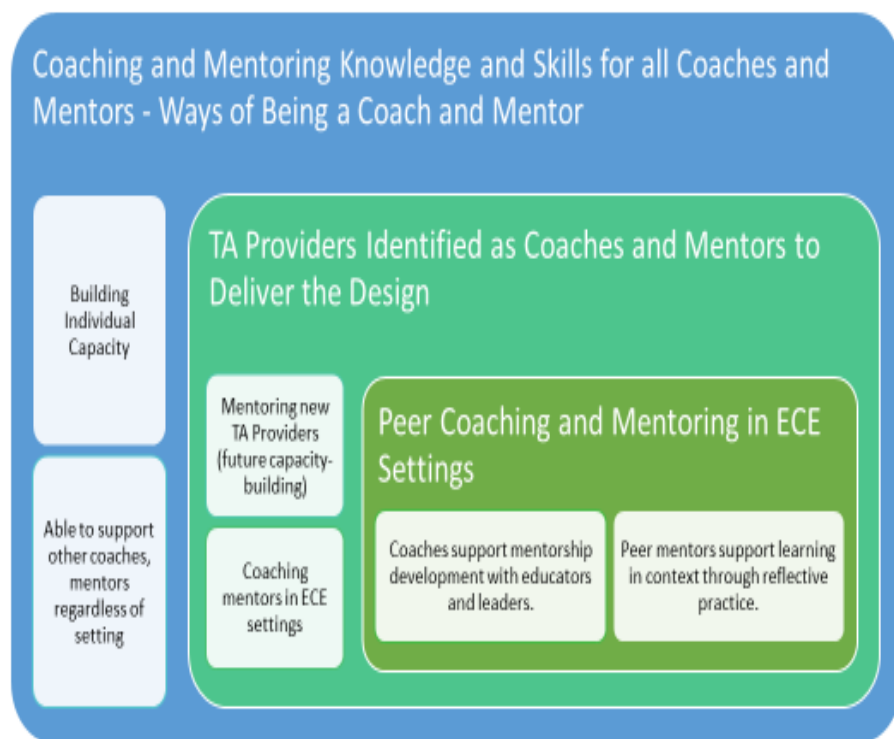
In researching the benefits of mentoring, both McCorkle and Swindell (2024) and DeWhirst (2023) noted the importance in making thinking visible for the learner. For example, situating mentoring in an authentic environment offers the learner a way to witness the mentors' practices and also to observe their outcomes. By presenting the targeted skills, the learner can transfer them to multiple contexts, and adopt the practices over time. Peer mentoring can serve as an effective process to support both the mentor and the mentee when program leaders build in time and resources for this professional support to engage adult learners for their growth within the context of their workplace.

The framework is not a specific coaching or mentoring model, nor does it require the adoption of any particular model. It is a set of foundational skills, knowledge, and dispositional characteristics for coaches and mentors to practice building their own personal coaching and mentoring capacity in preparation for any model of their choosing while building upon effective reflective practices. This framework is founded on the work of respected national organizations and independent entities, including Early Childhood Associates (ECA) who provided research on what currently exists in other states, agencies and research, with recommendations for framework development based upon equity and excellence.

As you review the document, keep in mind that this is heavily resourced from [A Framework for Coaching in Early Childhood Settings,](#) created by the Bank Street Education Center (2022). The core elements identified resonated with the authors of this document, who believe that relationship development and insightful interactions with educators serve as the primary mechanism to support learning, growth and change in a parallel process, as the coach or mentor supports the educator on their learning journey.

The collaborators of this document have found that the proposed framework is the only one that identifies the commonalities between coaching and mentoring, as well as identifying the difference between the two. This framework intentionally displays the two roles side by side to inform how each and both contributes to enhancing educator practice. Our learning over the past year has shown that coaching and mentoring as a relationship-based practice is more commonly utilized to advance educators' thinking and practice to make continuous improvement both at the individual and program level.

The Coaching and Mentoring Framework: Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce

Coaching and Mentoring Knowledge and Skills for all Coaches and Mentors - Ways of Being a Coach and Mentor

Building Individual Capacity

Able to support other coaches, mentors regardless of setting

TA Providers Identified as Coaches and Mentors to Deliver the Design

Mentoring new TA Providers (future capacity-building)

Coaching mentors in ECE settings

Peer Coaching and Mentoring in ECE Settings

Coaches support mentorship development with educators and leaders.

Peer mentors support learning in context through reflective practice.

Our approach to this work has been a collaborative effort with many voices from our early childhood field in Connecticut. This work is about growing human capacity for reflection on practice while in a work context supports a continuous growth mindset. Coaches and mentors are key ingredients to building that

reflective practice in a trusting relationship with the educators who care for and educate our youngest learners.

Coaching and Mentoring Values, Principles, and Definitions

The International Coaching Core Values surfaced as a foundation that resonated with exploration of this topic. During our work through collaborative discussions, we have come to believe coaching and mentoring core values can be the same as ICF Core Values.

[International Coaching Federation Core Values](#) (2022) represent both inherent qualities and aspirational goals for coaching and are being adopted as the professional ethical values as they pertain to Professionalism, Collaboration, Humanity, and Equity.

The principles are from Connecticut practitioners' experiences and reflect a starting point to describe some of the behaviors aligned with the ICF core values.

ICF Core Values	Coaching & Mentoring Principles
Professionalism: A commitment to a coaching mindset and professional quality that encompass responsibility, respect, competence, and excellence	● We use our understanding about how adults learn to engage in meaningful coaching and mentoring experiences that support our partners' goals and share responsibility in achieving them.
Collaboration: A commitment to develop social connection and community building	● We are willing to be a co-learner as an active partner in supporting growth with each other.
Humanity: A commitment to being humane, kind, compassionate, and respectful towards others	● We actively create trusting relationships that support honesty, transparency, and clarity (ICF, 2022).

Equity: A commitment to use a coaching mindset to explore and understand the needs of others so I can practice equitable processes at all times that create equality for all	● We recognize and respect all identity groups and their contributions by exploring to understand social diversity, systemic equality, and systemic oppression. (ICF, 2022).

As you review this document, keep in mind that there are also some distinctive differences between the two roles of coach and mentor as outlined below. To start, the NAEYC and Child Care Aware of America Training and Technical Assistance Glossary (2023) provided a foundation by which we expanded upon to represent additional differences we see in practice. Also, we utilized the Glossary definitions of Coaching and Mentoring to guide and clarify terminology; at the same time, we expanded upon each definition to represent what we see in Connecticut's practices and the broader literature. There are many structures that exist for coaching but not for mentoring.

Where Our Definitions Come From

The Early Care and Education Professional Development: Training and Technical Assistance Glossary, developed by NAEYC and Child Care Aware of America (2023) is the current resource defining the early childhood professional development early care and education technical assistance role. Drawing upon national resources that clearly define roles ensures that this framework is current and based upon relevant research regarding professional development definitions and competencies.

Coaching Definition: A relationship-based process led by an expert with specialized adult learning knowledge and skills, who often serves in a different professional role than the recipient(s). Coaching is designed to build capacity for specific professional dispositions, skills and behaviors and is focused on goal setting and achievement for an individual or group.

Mentoring Definition: A relationship-based process between colleagues in similar professional roles, with a more-experienced individual with adult learning knowledge and skills (the mentor) providing guidance and example to the less-

experienced individual (the mentee). Mentoring is intended to increase an individual's personal or professional capacity, resulting in greater professional effectiveness.

The essence of coaching and mentoring is to nurture reflection skills by modeling thoughtful consideration to the many sides of an issue; to ask questions to nudge thinking about why we do what we do; to provide moments that spark curiosity; and to share excitement that inspires motivation.

Clarifying Differences Between Coaching and Mentoring

Below is how NAEYC and Child Care Aware (2023) frame some of the differences; informing the development of Connecticut's framework.

Mentoring vs. Coaching

	Mentoring	**Coaching**
Timeframe	Tends to be more **long-term and relational.**	Likely to be **short-term, but depends on goals** to be achieved.
Focus	More **development-driven,** tapping into more experienced peer(s).	More **performance-driven** to achieve desired outcomes.
Structure	More **informal in nature** and on an as-needed basis.	More **structured in nature,** with set meeting schedule.
Agenda	**Agenda set by person being mentored** and needs at the time.	**Collaborative working agenda** to meet desired outcomes.
Outcome	**Shifts and changes over time.**	**Specific and measurable.** Working toward change in performance area.

ECE Training and TA Glossary, page 23.

Despite their similarities, our field research has revealed distinct differences between coaching and mentoring practices. Since there are several similarities there is a common misperception that you can be in both roles at the same time

without consideration for their differences. Oftentimes, practitioners use the terms coach and mentor interchangeably. However, it is our goal to share the commonalities and differences for clarity of what to expect in practice for both the practitioner and the educator or program leader engaging in a coaching or mentoring relationship.

Differences Between Coaches and Mentors Our collective experiences of coaching, mentoring, and research led to our common understanding that we share here to clarify roles and processes.	
Mentor	**Coach**
More development-driven, tapping into more experienced peer	More performance-driven to achieve desired outcomes
Allows mentee to ask questions to learn from their experiences	Asks coachee questions to uncover areas for improvement
Ongoing, open-ended time, no end point	Usually has an endpoint
Informal	Formal
Holistic Development	Specific goals
Long term goals	Short term goals
Follows unstructured process	Follows structured process
Has experience in early childhood practices as a practitioner and may have early childhood theory	Has understanding of theory and early childhood practices
Shares experiences, advises, and guides	Collaborative goal setting by by coaches and their co-learners to meet specific objectives

Shares growth with mentee that they may not yet recognize	Measures performance based on goals set for coachee
Focus on development of a professional being which leads to a reflective practitioner	Focus on development of teaching capacities

Vivian, S., Marina, R., Gozemba, D., and Adams, D., 2024

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Each of the four sections of the Coaching and Mentoring Framework is composed of elements for effective coaching and mentoring based on our current understanding of practices that yield educator growth in knowing themselves and their practice in new ways. For each element a big idea is provided to share the intent and purpose of that section. Guiding question(s) suggest how coaches and mentors might focus their thinking as they read and reflect. The practices outlined are comprehensive, thereby allowing for flexibility and growth as a coach or mentor increases their skills over time. You will notice we use the term educator and partner interchangeably as the content reflects a more personal approach. In highlighting a relationship, the term partner feels more appropriate and reciprocal as everyone in the relationship is a partner in learning.
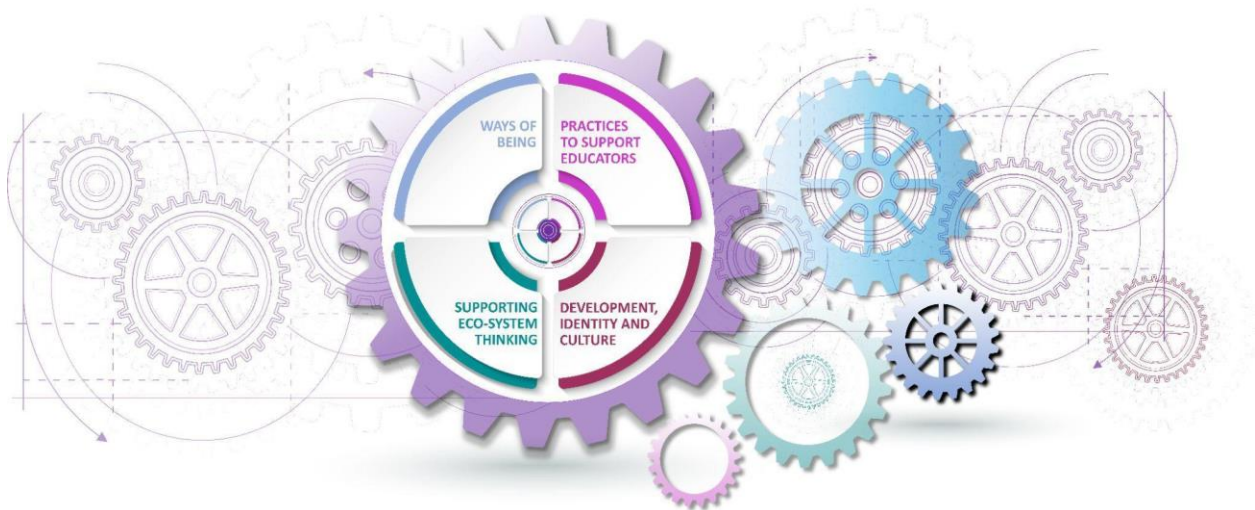
The four elements in this framework are:
- Ways of Being
- Practices to Support Educators
- Development, Identity, and Culture
- Eco-system Thinking

WAYS OF BEING

INTRODUCTION: The journey of an educator is cultivated by an empathetic coach and a compassionate mentor, with the belief and mindset that every person has the capacity to reach their potential through positive encouragement. An educators' future self develops as they begin to recognize the positive impact they can make when keeping the needs of children and families at the forefront of their thinking. A coach and a mentor demonstrate "ways of being" by how they act in a relationship with their partner.

BIG IDEA: Coaching is different from mentoring, yet has many commonalities. A coach is a learning partner, who uses reflective practices to share the learning progress that the educators are making towards their identified goals. A mentor uses their knowledge and experiences to help guide their mentees holistically.

GUIDING QUESTION: Where and how do the following strategies that build trust and support reciprocal relationships show up when planning for and/or engaging with individuals and their context?

	Practices to Intentionally Build Trusting Relationships
1	**Interconnectedness** Coaches and mentors foster positive relationships with the understanding that every relationship affects other relationships. As such, the [NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct](#) is a tool that may be used to invite discussion on how to begin to live and guide one's practice with integrity while developing a connection to the field of early childhood and promoting professionalism.
2	**Respecting individuals** Coaches and mentors establish a warm, respectful, professional relationship in this reciprocal relationship. They are mindful of the educator's preferred learning style, experiences and perceived culture to build responsive relationships. Every co-learner is valued for who they are as individuals first, with unique temperaments and dispositions that are part of who they are as people.
3	**Being present** Coaches and mentors are engaged, connected and focused on listening intently to their partner. ● Coaches enter a coaching conversation by preparing to be present and fully available to listen, pause and reflect in the shared space with their co-learner. This allows the educator to develop problem solving and creative solutions without imposed directives. ● A Mentors' (peer) presence on site makes the relationship consistently available due to proximity, with the possibility for conversations to occur in the moment.
4	**Active listening and reflective questioning** Coaches and mentors give the clear message that they are fully attending to their partner by leaning in with their senses, using body language and focusing their attention, as they respond in a way that lets their partner know they were heard. ● Coaches use clarifying questions to prompt shared understanding, ask questions to gain awareness, offer alternatives, brainstorm and help the educator think about their plan. ● Mentors facilitate reflection with their co-learner to support the application of new ideas and practices to learn in the field.

	Practices to Intentionally Build Trusting Relationships
5	**Awareness and Learner Orientation** Coaches and mentors notice what is happening around them and inside themselves at the moment. ● Coaches use self-reflective practices to bring out their human qualities and model responsive communication to support, guide and bring their best selves forward into the coaching process as they learn more about their partner's capacity and style of learning. ● Mentors (peers) may need some guidance on learning how to recognize and be fully aware of the skills and knowledge they hold which can be used to model and share good practices.
6	**Authentic communication** Coaches and mentors provide honest and open dialogue when they communicate with educators. ● Coaches take note of how their communication is received and check in with their partner about their perception of the message so that mutual understanding is achieved. This is to ensure the coaching relationship continues to be based on objective and honest feedback as they collaborate on current and next steps. ● Mentors provide work related shared experiences that will enhance their partner's food for thought and consideration while building confidence.
7	**Follow through** ● Coaches share resources in a timely manner to support the advancement of new knowledge and promote shifts in thinking to help educators build new practices. ● Mentors support their partner by checking in for new knowledge their partner may want to share, a strategy they may wish to try, or an opportunity to reflect on their classroom experiences.
8	**Responsive acknowledgement**

Practices to Intentionally Build Trusting Relationships
Coaches and mentors demonstrate flexibility of thinking when reacting to changes in program needs, as well as current or world events that impact individuals as humans. Both roles require being mentally prepared and ready to support and guide while being aware of emotions and feelings of self and others when adapting to situations.

Sections of Ways of Being in this document were adapted and modified from A Framework for Coaching in Early Childhood Settings, Bank Street Education Center, 2022. Practices and strategies were influenced by the work of Elena Aguilar and Dynamic Coaching Systems.

PRACTICES TO SUPPORT EDUCATORS

INTRODUCTION: An educator's goal is for each child to see their potential and make strides to achieve it. Educators do this by inspiring children in a creative, inclusive, and caring environment that makes learning come alive. They offer experiences for children to become lovers of learning and eager discoverers with opportunities to experience a sense of compassion for others and a sense of wonder in the world around them.

BIG IDEA: Whether a program uses a defined curriculum, or the educator creates their own learning activities, the day-to-day experiences of young children need to be intentional and responsive to children's interests, abilities, and learning needs.

GUIDING QUESTIONS: How do we support educators in creating developmentally appropriate, responsive, culturally attuned, and engaging meaningful experiences? As coaches, how do we work as co-learners, supporting the construction of goals and providing ongoing reflective feedback? In our role as a mentor, how do we share our experience and our own learning over time to support the goals our mentee has created?

	Practices to Support Educators
1	**Reflection** Coaches and mentors are aware of their own beliefs and values, recognize others may possess different versions, and respect others' uniqueness and right to be different. Coaches and mentors take a moment to be mentally prepared and are cognizant of their emotions and the emotions of others, so they are ready to support and guide with care. ● Coaches nurture reflection skills by modeling thoughtful consideration of the many sides of an issue, asking questions to nudge thinking about why we do what we do and sharing excitement that inspires motivation. ● Mentors engage in conversation, share their experience, and offer guidance in an effort to promote mindfulness of one's practice.
2	**Strength-Based** Coaches and mentors use strength-based language to remind their partners about what they know and do well while identifying opportunities for continued development and growth in their teaching practice.
3	**Goals** Educators develop their goals with support to develop them or reflect upon them. ● Coaches help their partners create and focus on specific goals in order to make consistent and meaningful shifts in practice. These goals serve as anchors for educators' reflective work. ● Mentors are aware of their partners' goals and use them to guide conversations with examples, sharing experiences and providing reflective prompts.
4	**New Practice** Coaches and mentors share knowledge about developmentally appropriate practices that support child development and the dispositions essential to navigating the world (curiosity, flexibility, creativity, critical thinking, purposefulness, and how to work with others), all to foster understanding and implementation of new teaching practices. ● Coaches have knowledge of adult learning approaches and integrate these in their work with their partners.

	Practices to Support Educators
	●Mentors ask their partners about their learning preferences or might have an innate understanding of how best to support adults with accessing new learning, but mentors may need to talk with colleagues and consider professional learning for themselves about this topic.
5	**Creating Experiences** Coaches and mentors support and motivate their partners to grow children's individual and collective interests and abilities. Coaches and mentors help their partners use this information to provide or create experiences that are developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and relevant so that children engage in meaningful activities.
6	**Documentation** ●Coaches may objectively document children's behaviors, their partner's practice, and the discussions that occur in coaching sessions, always sharing them with their partner. If their partner is unfamiliar with observing and documenting practices, the coach helps to find professional learning resources and/or may support this learning in coaching sessions. ●Mentors support their partners to recognize shifts in thinking, new practice, and growth over time ensuring they are aware of their acquisition of new knowledge and skills.
7	**Family Partnerships** Understanding the importance of two way communication with families based on mutual trust and understanding of the child is essential. Educators will be supported to pay attention to different cultural perspectives and use families' ideas to create programming, tailor instruction, and guide behavior practices to support the child. Coaches and mentors help their partners find ways to build relationships with families. By sharing what learning looks like in the classroom and listening to family input about their goals, priorities, and culture, a feeling of partnership will be nurtured and the relationship between home and school is enhanced.

	Practices to Support Educators
8	**Reframing** Coaches and mentors use curiosity, flexible thinking, and a growth mindset to support critical thinking with their partner after hearing something that has provoked them to interpret and analyze a situation from a different point of view. ● Coaches can use this reframing approach when their partner perceive families to be resistant or minimally responsive. Coaches encourage their partner to be empathetic and culturally responsive in their connections with families to build strong relationships and support the diverse needs of families. ● Mentors share examples of when reframing has led them to see things from a totally new perspective, allowing insight into the function of a behavior or a new way of thinking.
9	**Tracking Progress** Coaches and mentors support their partners to think through the steps they need to take to meet their goals. ● Coaches and educators share responsibility of tracking goals and any developing practices to foster an ongoing cycle of reflection and growth. Mapping the highlights gathered during coaching conversations, educators will be able to construct a story of their progress. ● Mentors listen to their partner talk about their goals, support thinking about what they plan to try, and follow through at a future meeting to ask about implementation efforts and impact of the new practice on the educator, families, and/or children.
10	**Life-Long Learning** Coaches and mentors encourage their partners to engage in life-long learning through multiple types of professional development possibilities. Coaches and mentors model this through their own continuous learning and share how their learning experiences have shifted their thinking, ways of being (the way we interact with others and live in the classroom), and beliefs.

Adapted and modified from A Framework for Coaching in Early Childhood Settings, Bank Street Education Center, 2022

DEVELOPMENT, IDENTITY AND CULTURE

DEVELOPMENT, IDENTITY, AND CULTURE

INTRODUCTION: Every part of human development, identity and culture are constantly working simultaneously within the context of the coach or mentor partnership. Coaches and mentors recognize that these aspects of being human are to be held as essential parts of what is brought to the work or the setting. Coaches may have more formal training in coaching practice while mentors are emerging or established leaders who are invited to support other colleagues or organically move into that type of peer partnership and learning role. Both coaches and mentors commit and practice seeking continuous learning as a way to maintain and bolster their knowledge and practice.

BIG IDEA: Understanding the full spectrum of child development while also understanding and valuing the whole adult learner are at the center of a meaningful coaching/mentoring relationship.

GUIDING QUESTION(S): How are coaches and mentors cognizant of their own culture, values and beliefs and the roles they play in the relationship? How might coaches and mentors help educators think about the ways children grow and learn within the context of their family and community culture?

Understanding the Whole Child	
1	Coaches and mentors have an in-depth understanding of child development and can help their partners understand and make connections between practice and child development theories through the lens of cultural context while addressing implementation of planned learning experiences for children.
2	Coaches and mentors with their partners hypothesize about the meaning of a specific situation, then create and try out strategies to test out the hypothesis in an effort to understand the situation.
3	Coaches and mentors, along with families, help educators think of and see children through the lens of their family and culture context.

Understanding the Whole Adult	
1	Coaches and mentors are curious about their partners' learning dispositions and create space and time to learn about their learning preferences and dislikes as a way to meet their individual needs.
2	Coaches and mentors use adult learning principles in their work with educators. ● Coaches understand and can apply principles of adult learning theory in their approaches with their partners. ● A mentor may understand adult learning in context as they live within similar contexts as their partner and may utilize this experience to support their partners' learning while they themselves may seek more formal adult learning training opportunities.
3	Coaches and mentors shine a light on educator practices. ● Coaches ask permission, lean in with curiosity and explore with their partner their level of understanding about diverse early childhood concepts. Coaches look for and highlight their partner's knowledge and skills when the opportunity arises. ● A mentor may highlight their partners' practice and knowledge as they may lean in to suggest supportive ideas.

Culture	
1	Coaches and mentors model awareness. ● Coaches are attuned to who they are as well as curious about who their partners are and create the space within the partnership to learn more about their identity, beliefs, values and linguistic background and how these shape interactions with children and families. ● Mentors may have an already established relationship and may know many aspects of an educator's identity and beliefs. *
2	Coaches and mentors are eager to learn more about the context in which the work takes place, inclusive of neighborhoods, communities, family, group and center/classroom setting. Coaches and mentors lean into the partnership to learn more about the context and understand and value their partner as the expert in their context. ● Mentors may share the same or similar environmental experiences as their partner and utilize that experience when providing advice.
3	Coaches and mentors build deep trusting relationships enabling the coach and/or mentor and partner to explore the role of privilege and bias and the impact these have on children, families and communities who experience systemic racism and oppression.
4	Coaches and mentors self-reflect about their own biases. They make the time to continuously learn about racism, biases, systematic oppression, mental health, and disabilities. They make space to listen, discuss and share their learnings with their partners moving through conversations with sensitivity.
5	Coaches continuously self-reflect in an effort to raise their awareness of how their intentions and interactions may impact the relationship with their partner. They help their partner understand the impact of their approaches with children and families and support an increasing awareness about how those approaches may or may not have the intended impact.

*Mentors strive to develop their mentoring skills including the understanding of the educator's identity and lived experiences from their perspective.

*Coaches and mentors understand that educators themselves may have been historically impacted by systematic oppression.

Adapted and modified from A Framework for Coaching in Early Childhood Settings, Bank Street Education Center, 2022.
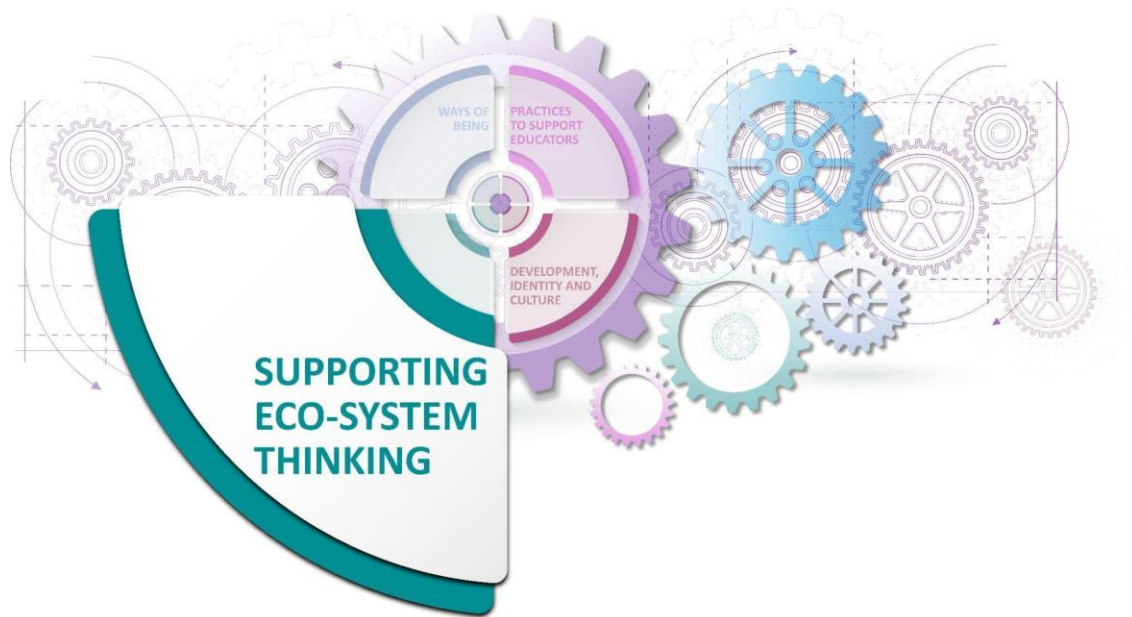
ECO-SYSTEM THINKING

INTRODUCTION: In general, an ecosystem is a space where organisms work together to form a bubble of life (National Geographic). It is easy to only see what is in the bubble, or context, in which the work takes place. Think of Eco-System(s) Thinking as supporting educators to think about their impact on the system in which they work. Every part of an ecosystem depends on every other factor either directly or indirectly. A change will affect every part. Extending this thought through the lens of Systems Thinking, interactions have effects on what can be seen, like educator practices; and what can be felt, like the culture and climate of the setting.   Coaches and mentors are thought partners and interact in ways that should affect both the individual and the context in which they work by:

- addressing **perspectives to increase understanding**,
- cultivating an environment that allows for sharing of beliefs about personal and professional practices that inform decisions (**for example, exploring mental models**),
- and supporting curiosity around how to **pay attention to change, testing assumptions, and seeking the bigger picture**.

Here's a great resource for an introduction to Systems Thinking. The bolded concepts above are reference to the Systems Thinking habits in this resource.
https://thinkingtoolsstudio.waterscenterst.org/cards

BIG IDEA: Coaches and mentors are thought partners and can influence the climate of the early childhood setting through interactions that foster perspective sharing and curiosity about change.

GUIDING QUESTION(S): There are many competing issues that arise in the course of a teaching life. How do coaches and mentors prioritize what to pay attention to, when to explore perspectives, how to identify belief structures, and help their partners recognize their impact; not only on their own practice, but the system in which their practice lives?

Supporting Eco-System Thinking	
1	Coaches and mentors understand their own beliefs, perspective, and inherent bias. They remain aware of their bias in order to remain open, inquisitive, and supportive of emerging conversations that reveal their partners' beliefs and perspectives.
2	Coaches and mentors are alert to and navigate a continuum of openness ranging from perceived resistance to "trying to please." ● Coaches work with partners to learn more about the nature of resistance to build the relationship and explore strategies. ● Mentors, given the nature of the relationship, may provide advice based on experience or support awareness about resistance through a narrative of practice.
3	Coaches and mentors are aware of a prevailing culture of the setting that seems to generate behaviors within that setting. ● Coaches demonstrate cultural humility by spending time in the setting, observing, interviewing, and/or reviewing artifacts to gain awareness of settings culture. ● Mentors who are part of the setting may be aware of a prevailing culture and need to check their assumptions by engaging in conversation with others to gain perspective.
4	Coaches and mentors are able to monitor and model their own self-care practices and collaborate with others to manage stress, including reaching out to others to share experiences and support each other.
5	Coaches and mentors engage partners in forming habits that encourage thinking about their own thinking process and what they pay attention to.

	● Coaches may have an understanding of Systems Thinking and utilize strategies that support thinking habits that cultivate curiosity, meaningful connections, and reflection. (Waters Center for Systems Thinking) ● Mentors may have lived experiences similar to their partner that they can draw upon to provide an example as a prompt for their partner to think about their perspective and the culture of their setting.
6	Coaches and mentors empower partners to exercise their potential to impact their own practice and by extension their setting culture by demonstrating confidence, exercising competence, and facilitating connectedness with peers. ● Coaches model confidence and are humble about their knowledge, allowing their partner's knowledge to shine while supporting the need to connect with peers as co-learners. ● Mentors are confident about their knowledge as they share their lived experiences and support the need to connect with peers as co-learners.

Adapted and modified from A Framework for Coaching in Early Childhood Settings, Bank Street Education Center, 2022.

Implementation

Use of this document is permitted for educational purposes with appropriate attribution to the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood noting that the document heavily references other sources such as the *Framework for Coaching in Early Childhood Settings: Drawing on Bank Street College of Education's Developmental-Interaction Approach (2022)*, the International Coaching Federation, Waters Center for Systems Thinking, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The CT Office of Early Childhood intends to utilize this document in the following ways:
- A companion source to the CT Technical Assistance Provider Core Knowledge and Competency Framework to design professional learning experiences that build knowledge and skills with coaches and mentors who:
  - Act as faculty supervising practicum and student teaching experiences.
  - Serve in the role of coach or mentor as a professional learning modality for early care and education settings (centers, family childcare, public schools).
  - Are identified staff in early care and education settings who serve in a dual role as an internal coach or mentor to other staff or other settings.
  - Are existing technical assistance providers who are coaching and mentoring their peers and new incoming technical assistance providers.
- A source to anchor the third role of the Early Childhood Professional outlined in the Unifying Framework - Professional Preparation Faculty and Trainers
  - As Connecticut continues to align with the Unifying Framework, the Coaching and Mentoring Framework will be a source to broaden the scope of knowledge and skills across higher education faculty and trainers who prepare early childhood educators.

- A product that supports the Blue Ribbon Panel *Goal 1B: Supporting career mobility through education/training pathways like apprenticeships and other resources for "upskilling"...*
    - CT early childhood workforce initiatives may utilize this framework to support individuals who provide training, coaching and mentoring in ways that address "upskilling" that could include building leadership skills as well as introductory early childhood skills.

Glossary

- **Adult Learning Theory** - The study of how adults learn (andragogy) and how it is different from how children learn (pedagogy). There are key assumptions and principles that operationalize adult learning. https://www.learnupon.com/blog/adult-learning-theory/
- **Adult Learning** - Based on adult learning theory, adult learning addresses the styles and preferences adults bring to their learning experiences and the strategies facilitators utilize to design and deliver learning experiences that will be most impactful for the learner.
- **Authentic Communication** - a communication style characterized by honesty, integrity, empathy and self-awareness. Includes sharing of feelings and being an active listener (giving full attention and expressing interest) https://www.masterclass.com/articles/authentic-communication#7njJf5kvmOt1Z2kKV0OYRG
- **Co-learner** – Coaches and mentors are actively engaged in the learning environment with the educator in a mutual learning process.
- **Cultural humility**: A lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique to understand personal and systemic biases and develop respectful relationships with diverse individuals and communities.
- **Eco-system thinking:** An approach that considers the interconnectedness of various elements within a system in the work context.
- **Educator** - Early childhood educators provide direct service to children ages birth through age eight. https://powertotheprofession.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Power-to-Profession-Framework-03312020-web.pdf
- **Framework** - a basic conceptual structure of ideas https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/framework#examples
- **Identity:** The combination of characteristics, experiences, beliefs, and values that define an individual. In the coaching and mentoring context, it includes an educator's personal and professional self-concept, which influences their teaching practices and interactions with children, families, and colleagues.
- **Interconnectedness:** The state of being connected or related to one another, often used in the context of relationships and systems.
- **Reflective Practice** - the ability to reflect on actions to engage in a process of continuous learning (Donald Schon)

https://libguides.cam.ac.uk/reflectivepracticetoolkit/whatisreflectivepractice#:~:text=Reflective%20practice%20is%20the%20ability,a%20process%20of%20continuous%20learning.

- **Ways of Being** - refers to how you are within a relationship. Coaching approaches included in this framework are active listening, observing without judgment, flexible thinking, and empathic responding among others. This element of effective coaching is divided into two sections- 1) Sense of Purpose in Building Trusting Relationships and 2) Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions of Promoting Reflective Practice.

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Appendix A

History

Connecticut professional learning practitioners have learned a lot over the years about coaching models and coaching practices. That was evident in a collaboration with Head Start, UConn Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, EASTCONN/RESC Alliance, All Our Kin, CT Birth to Three, OEC Quality Improvement, and Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. This partnership produced the Coaching Institute, which was a 2-day event for about 100 people involved in providing technical assistance to early care and education settings. It also sparked the [Foundations of Coaching Video](#) where we highlight the Rush & Shelden (2011) coaching characteristics as foundational knowledge regardless of the coaching model used.

Connecticut turned its attention to coaching in 2008 with the redesign of professional learning addressing the Preschool Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks. Coaching supports were added to training components with great success. Since then, other OEC initiatives (see list in appendix) have embedded coaching as a foundational method for professional learning delivery.

Looking ahead, mentoring is emerging as a method to support recruitment of new technical assistance providers and for peer to peer learning in settings. The CT Workforce Pipeline Project has become a testing ground for supporting mentorship in programs and the upcoming apprenticeship work will need some additional coaches and mentors, both outside programs and inside programs, for successful implementation.

Connecticut's history and focus on current work providing quality improvement supports, as well as future initiatives point to the need for this flexible framework that provides existing and future coaches and mentors a playbook from which to grow their capabilities. It supports the foundation for building out the role of Professional Preparation Faculty and Trainer as noted in the Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession (2020 copyright) as one of the three roles identified within the early childhood profession.

List of other Connecticut Office of Early Childhood initiatives which have embedded coaching as a foundational method for professional learning delivery.

- Training Wheels
- Preschool Development Grant 2016-2019
- Birth to Three – Connecticut Birth to Three System
- Connecticut Pyramid Partnership
- Quality Improvement Supports (QIS) provided coaching for programs focusing on Standards, Curriculum and Assessment
- Continuous Quality Improvement Supports (CQIS) continued to provide coaching for programs focusing on Standards, Curriculum and Assessment
- State Head Start Supplement provided quality enhancement services across Federally funded Head Start programs in Connecticut