QUALITY SUPPORT COACHING AT LAUP

What is the LAUP coaching model?

The study showed that LAUP’s quality support coaching model has a set of key components: (1) resources such as using research and evidence based practices by experienced and committed coaches, (2) provision of support such as the formation of positive and collaborative relationships and observation of instruction and feedback loops and (3) outcomes such as motivation for improving quality and reflection on practices. The study revealed that the model followed some of the best practices in the literature on effective coaching models, namely (1) a strong emphasis on the coach-provider relationship and (2) active engagement of providers in developing their own knowledge and practices.

Key Features of the LAUP Coaching Model

LAUP’s coaches are usually seasoned early-childhood professionals whose aim is to work directly with classroom teachers to set and support achievement of goals focused on enhancing classroom quality. This work primarily occurs during coaches’ monthly visits to programs and classrooms. According to the model, each LAUP classroom is expected to have one coaching visit per month, and coaches must provide written documentation (an “activity log”) of the substance of the visit (for example: goals, progress and next steps) at the end of the visit or shortly thereafter. Coaches are expected to

Study Procedures

The study involved three components: (1) fall and spring interviews with lead teachers in 42 classrooms, (2) 159 debriefing conversations following monthly coaching visits with coaches and providers (teachers and/or directors/owners of programs) from 10 case-study programs, and (3) a self-administered questionnaire completed by all 16 quality-support coaches (referred to as “coaches” in the remainder of this brief). The analysis focused on bringing together what we learned from each data source to identify overarching themes. We then compared our key findings to aspects of coaching important for positive outcomes for children and providers, according to the literature.
provide additional support as needed, such as responding to a provider’s requests for support or information between visits or attending parent meetings to support a provider in working with parents. Box 1 describes the three theories upon which the LAUP coaching model is based: process consultation, active and appreciative inquiry and servant leadership.

**The theory of change for LAUP quality coaching**

LAUP brings multiple resources to quality-support coaching and has developed a multifaceted approach to enacting change through this process. While the coaching process LAUP aims to implement is complex, our findings from the 2011–2012 study showed that a set of key components can be identified. These components identified in the research process are shown in Figure 1, an illustration of LAUP’s affirming approach to improving quality.

While the resources LAUP brings are varied, together they reflect a committed, experienced coaching staff focused on continuous learning and feedback. In all their work, they aim to employ research and evidence-based practices to help ensure that they achieve the outcomes depicted on the right-hand side of the model. The coaching staff focus on five key activities: relationship-building, information-sharing, introducing a new perspective in the classroom, setting goals and developing action plans and engaging in observation and feedback cycles. Through these activities, coaches aim to give teachers the motivation to improve quality on their own, and the tools to do so.

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### Box 1. Theories Underlying the LAUP Coaching Model

**Process consultation.** According to Schein (1999), an effective helping relationship must focus on process rather than on outcomes — in the case of LAUP coaching, on how to achieve goals rather than on a specific goal. Ultimately, the relationship should help the provider feel affirmed and motivated.

**Active and appreciative inquiry.** To build the relationship, the coach must engage in active inquiry — listening and learning by asking questions. The coach must also use appreciative inquiry; that is, the coach’s questions should highlight what is working, rather than the problems, to help providers build on their existing strengths. Active and appreciative inquiries are facets of, yet independent from, process consultation.

**Servant leadership.** Servant leadership calls for leaders to be authentic, present, vulnerable, accepting of ideas and useful. Servant leaders strive to help people learn to be the best they can be, not by trying to mold them into someone else but by supporting them in their growth.

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### Figure 1.

**LAUP Quality-Support Coaching as Documented in the Research: Affirmation and Support in a Climate of Continuous Improvement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Provision of Support</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committed, experienced coaching staff focused on continuous learning and feedback</td>
<td>Positive, affirming, collaborative relationships formed</td>
<td>Motivation for improving quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and evidence-based practices</td>
<td>Information about best practices shared</td>
<td>Informed, intentional teaching using evidence-based practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Viewing the classroom with new perspective</td>
<td>Reflection on practices and continuous improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goal setting and action plans</td>
<td>Higher quality leading to better outcomes for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation of instruction and feedback cycles</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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LAUP Coaching in the Context of the Literature

How does LAUP coaching compare to elements characteristic of coaching, as described in the literature?

According to the literature, coaching is typically ongoing and individualized, builds on the strengths and newly attained skills of providers, is reciprocal between providers and coaches, and is non-evaluative. In addition, coaching is usually goal-focused, with one or more goals collaboratively selected and followed until achieved. All of these coaching elements were also characteristic of the LAUP coaching model.

How does LAUP coaching exemplify key factors of effective coaching models discussed in the literature?

The literature highlighted the following five factors that may affect the efficacy of coaching:

1. **Sufficient time for coaching.** Several studies indicated that time is a critical issue for coaches, who often face a host of challenges associated with completing their visits with providers (such as holidays and trainings).

2. **Positive coach-provider relationships.** The research highlights the importance of a strong relationship between coaches and providers, with findings underscoring the need for coaches to be respectful and to build positive, collaborative relationships with providers.

3. **Consistency in implementation.** The studies reflect the importance of consistency in how coaches spend their time and in their expectations about their own duties.

4. **Active engagement of providers.** A recent synthesis of studies showed that methods and practices that actively involved adult learners in acquiring, using, and evaluating new knowledge and practices were associated with the most positive outcomes.

5. **Specificity and focus in coaching.** Despite limited evidence, there is a growing consensus that specificity in coaching, such as identifying a specific content focus, is vital.

We found that two of these factors were prominent in the implementation of LAUP coaching: (1) a strong emphasis on the coach-provider relationship and (2) active engagement of providers in developing their own knowledge and practices.

Coaches and providers both viewed their relationship as central to their work together and described it positively. Coaches also actively engaged providers in identifying the goals and focus of their work. Note that both of these factors are critical to the theories that informed the design of LAUP’s coaching model (process consultation, active and appreciative inquiry and servant leadership).

The remaining three factors were not consistently implemented across providers and programs. Most coaches and some providers reported that finding enough time for coaching was a challenge. The use of a consistent approach was also an issue; although there was some consistency across coaches (perhaps due to the use of common tools like the Classroom Assessment Scoring System [CLASS]), by design, the LAUP coaching model encourages flexibility in meeting provider needs. Finally, the degree of specificity in the coaching process varied due in part to the flexibility inherent in the LAUP model. Nonetheless, some coaches used specific, measurable goals in their work with providers. Table 1 provides additional detail regarding LAUP’s implementation of these factors.

LAUP’s Next Steps

In response to the key study findings, LAUP has identified a number of “next steps” for quality support coaching:

- An important implication of the findings is that coaches should be supported to maintain a common understanding of CLASS. At the time of this publication, LAUP was in the process of publishing a definition of a high-quality preschool experience. In large part, this definition is based on the constructs represented in CLASS. This will enable coaches to rely on a common definition of ideal teacher-child interactions as they work with teachers to improve their instruction.

- To address the recommendation that activity/goal logs be used as effectively as possible to extend work of coaching, LAUP will coordinate efforts among supervisors, coaches and other staff to ensure that goals and activities are written clearly, with a reasonable amount of specificity and with a consistent understanding of pre-defined goals.
### Table 1.
LAUP Implementation of Key Coaching Factors in the Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaching Factors¹⁹</th>
<th>Degree of Implementation Among LAUP Coaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sufficient time</strong></td>
<td>Inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Finding enough time is important yet challenging for coaches.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Coaching duration and intensity are important for uptake in instructional practices and for influencing child outcomes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strong coach-provider relationship</strong></td>
<td>Prominent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relationship building and respect for providers are important.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to define the coaching role is helpful to supporting the relationship.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consistency in implementation</strong></td>
<td>Inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Greater consistency across coaches/consultants in the ways in which coaching elements are implemented and expectations for duties may be important features.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provider engagement</strong></td>
<td>Prominent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Active engagement and involvement of providers are important.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specificity and focus</strong></td>
<td>Inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Efforts that are specific and targeted may be most effective.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It’s crucial that coaching be “aligned and targeted to a standardized lens, language, and metric for classroom practice.”²⁵</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

¹⁹ LAUP = Learning About Universal Practices.
Another key suggestion from the study is that LAUP consider ways to encourage teachers to reflect on their work, particularly as it relates to instructional interactions with children. In the coming year, coaches will add “Open-Ended Question Cards” to their tool kit. Based on Bloom’s Taxonomy, these cards are designed primarily for teachers to elicit thinking and verbal responses from their students and may also be used by coaches to engage teachers in reflective analysis. Questions on these cards include, “How do you know that?” “Why is this important?” and “Is there anything you would change? Why?”

A final “next step” in studying the LAUP coaching model is that LAUP researchers will use the findings in this report to design and carry out a series of case studies of successful implementations of the model. A key intent of the LAUP study will be to inform and improve coaches’ practice by focusing on examples of coaching at its best. The hope is that specific examples of successful coaching will serve as models to help all coaches to reflect on their work.

Endnotes