



**CHILD CARE  
ALLIANCE  
LOS ANGELES**



# COACHING AS A COMPONENT OF ECE WORKFORCE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT





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The History, Development and  
Implementation of a Countywide  
Coaching Model

BY RANDI B. WOLFE, Ph.D.

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## About CCALA

**Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles** was founded in 1997. In the past 17 years, Child Care Alliance has become a recognized leader in Early Childhood Education (ECE) field. It is a partnership of ten agencies which deliver a myriad of child care services to communities through Los Angeles County.

The mission of the Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles is to make quality child care, early education and school readiness services accessible to all families in Los Angeles County through an alliance of community-focused alternative payment and resource and referral agencies. Members of the Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles are listed below.

## Member agencies

Child Care Resource Center  
City of Norwalk  
Connections for Children  
Crystal Stairs, Inc.  
Drew Child Development Corp.

International Institute of Los Angeles  
Mexican American Opportunity Foundation  
Options – A Child Care & Human Services Agency  
Pathways  
Pomona Unified School District



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Over the past 40 years, the member agencies of the Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles evolved from providing an individualized agency approach to a coordinated and effective professional development and coaching system throughout Los Angeles County.

### Program Evolution of the Gateways for Early Educators Program

- Since the early 1970's, the Child Care Alliance agencies delivered training workshops and designed coaching programs which were built on the existing child care development infrastructure funded by the California Department of Education. In the early 2000's, Alliance agencies embraced a theory of change grounded in the principle that positive child outcomes are largely determined by the education and training of ECE providers.
- In 2008, Child Care Alliance hosted a meeting with community stakeholders, including community colleges, First 5 LA, and LAUP to share information about our workforce development plan, including our provider training and coaching model and build relationships, foster collaboration, and align systems. We continue to build on this work and our ongoing collaborations in order to expand the success of the Gateways professional development system.
- In 2010, Child Care Alliance launched the Gateways passport program, a 40 hour training curriculum for ECE providers. That same year Child Care Alliance agencies piloted a coaching program with the Los Angeles County Office of Child Care's STEPs to Excellence Program to assist ECE providers improve their QRIS (Quality Rating Improvement system) scores and enhance the quality of care provided in their settings. The coaching model was later expanded to work with participants in the Los Angeles County Office of Child Care, Race to the Top (RTT).

The Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles is proud to offer this report. It documents the development of the coaching model, its structure and approach, and its impact based on data collected during the first two years of implementation. The report concludes with a discussion of lessons learned and implications for the field.



The Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles is a unique and significant collaboration of 10 member agencies that have been serving communities across Los Angeles County for more than 40 years. Formed in 1997, the Child Care Alliance works to ensure that parents and families experience seamless delivery of high quality, affordable, accessible early care and education services. The agencies are multi-faceted and vary somewhat in the programs and services they provide, but all are strongly rooted in and connected to their surrounding communities, possess the cultural competencies to work effectively with the diverse populations they serve, and have well-established relationships with a very large network of local early care and education (ECE) providers.

The Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles began offering coaching in a coordinated manner throughout a countywide network of seven agencies in 2012, augmenting their already-existing systemwide training program. This report documents the development of the coaching model, its structure and approach, and its impact based on data collected during the first two years of implementation. The report concludes with a discussion of lessons learned and implications for the field.

Research suggests that the quality of early childhood programs is largely determined by the education and training of providers. As such, developing effective means of encouraging workforce development is an issue with broad implications for both policy and practice. Given the emphasis on individualization and application of knowledge to practice implicit

“With the support and guidance of my coach, I have become more confident and dedicated to provide quality care. I have become a strong leader in my community.”

~Child Care Provider

in the coaching paradigm, coaching is emerging as a promising professional development strategy. The diversity and complexity of the ECE workforce in Los Angeles County creates a tremendous need for accessible opportunities that provide such individualization to address the wide array of providers' needs, goals, and abilities to navigate systems of higher education and workforce and professional development.

The impact of the Child Care Alliance is significant, reaching 9,000 licensed child care providers and 9,000 license exempt providers, serving over 40,000 children monthly through the management of publicly-funded child care subsidies, and annually processing 37,000 requests for child care referrals and 28,000 requests for information about other ECE resources. Child Care Alliance agencies are unique in their ability to engage ECE professionals who might miss out on more formal professional development opportunities such as college coursework.


Based on years of experience implementing successful coaching models as individual agencies, the Alliance successfully launched the Gateways for Early Educators program in 2008. Comprehensive and multi-faceted, Gateways was designed to offer individual coaching support in concert with training workshops provided throughout the agencies. This well-developed model includes a Coaching Manual, Coaching Core Competencies, a specifically designed coaching database and integrated data collection methods, as well as consistent coach standards and coordinated coach orientation and training. Together,

these components help ensure strong program fidelity and consistent high-quality standards.

In the 2013-2014 fiscal year, Child Care Alliance agencies offered 764 training workshops in 10 different coordinated and aligned topic areas to 2,943 unduplicated participants, and individualized coaching to 1,277 participants across Los Angeles County.

The Gateways for Early Educators coaching model is unique and has implications for practice and policy. The fact that the model was developed and is being implemented by a network of independent but associated agencies presents benefits and challenges. The benefits include the large size of the effort, which underscores the significance of program evaluation results. The collective agreement around policy, practice and funding decisions across organizations lends credibility to those decisions and the feasibility of successfully replicating them elsewhere. The nature of the agencies is another strength of the model. An additional benefit is the fact that funders recognize this model as an effective way to reach countywide populations.

Future research is necessary to establish the most effective way to balance the individualization of coaching with the need for consistency in program delivery and outcomes. Additional research on determining optimal caseloads and the relationship between caseloads and anticipated impact of coaching programs would provide critically needed guidance to program staff and decision makers.

 A growing body of research over the past 30 years consistently shows that the quality of early childhood programs is largely determined by the education and training of providers (e.g., early childhood teachers, program directors, family child care providers, center-based staff, etc.) (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011). Therefore, an increasingly widespread approach to improving children's experience and outcomes in early care and education (ECE) is to strengthen the knowledge and skills of providers through professional development initiatives.


Ensuring that professional development is individualized and emphasizes the application of knowledge to practice is emerging as a critical factor to the success of professional development activities. And coaching – because of its emphasis on individualization and application of knowledge to practice – is emerging as a promising strategy (Whitebook, Gombay, Bellm, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2009). Research suggests that coaching can improve observed quality and practices with children, and that coaching can have a positive effect on areas such as children's language and literacy outcomes (Isner et al., 2011).

Throughout Los Angeles County, many ECE providers face tremendous barriers to taking advantage of professional development opportunities to advance their education and build their careers. Large numbers of early childhood professionals cite their highest level of education as merely a few college credits; almost half of providers in regulated child care settings enter the profession with no more than a high school education (Whitebook et al., 2006). As such, there is a tremendous need for accessible opportunities that provide the necessary individualization to address the wide array of providers' needs, goals, and abilities to navigate systems of higher education and workforce and professional development.

For many years, the agencies that comprise the Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles recognized the need for providing coaching and developed various models to meet the needs of particular subgroups of the ECE workforce (e.g., license exempt family child care providers, QRIS participants). When a funding opportunity presented itself in 2010, the Child Care Alliance began to offer coaching in a coordinated manner throughout a countywide network of seven agencies, augmenting their already-existing system-wide training program. This report documents the development of the coaching model, its structure and approach, and its impact based on data collected during the first two years of implementation. The report concludes with a discussion of lessons learned and implications for the field.



# DEFINING AND DISTINGUISHING COACHING

 Wesley and Buysse provide an apt and concise description of coaching:

An adult learning strategy that focuses on an individual's competencies in a specific skill area...often used to support implementation of new practices.... Coaching is an interactive and iterative process involving questioning and listening in combination with observation, reflection and action. Coaches use modeling, prompting and sharing feedback to help learners incorporate new skills into practice. (2010, p. 150)

Within the research literature, attempts have been made to distinguish coaching from other forms of professional support (e.g., technical assistance, supervision, mentoring). According to Child Care Aware of America, formerly known as the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), coaching is subsumed in the larger construct of technical assistance. Child Care Aware of America defines technical assistance as activities such as:

- Providing material resources,
- Supporting management (budgeting, personnel management, fundraising),
- Supporting classrooms and family child care homes (room arrangements, daily scheduling),
- Supporting an individual teacher or provider (modeling developmentally appropriate practices, or reinforcing theories or practices taught in a training). (Schmalzried, 2007, p. 5)

Whitebook and Bellm note an important difference between coaching and supervision. While a coaching relationship is founded on support and encouragement, coaches do not conduct formal evaluations of their coaching recipients. Furthermore, while supervisors can be pedagogical leaders for teachers and utilize many coaching principles and strategies, supervisors have “the authority to fire, promote and make other decisions about a person's job status and livelihood” (2013, p. 37) which interferes with developing a purely coaching relationship. And while some coaches may do some assessment and evaluation in the course of their coaching, it is not linked to the recipient's continued employment.

In an effort to distinguish coaching from mentoring, Child Care Aware of America and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) note that

Coaching is a relationship-based process led by an expert with specialized and 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. (NAEYC and NACCRRA, 2011, p. 11)

The Center for Coaching and Mentoring provides a concise analysis of the difference between coaches and mentors in the following chart (Mentoring Center, 2009):

	<b>Mentor</b>	<b>Coach</b>
<b>Focus</b>	Individual	Performance
<b>Role</b>	Facilitator with no agenda	Specific agenda
<b>Relationship</b>	Self-selecting	Comes with the job
<b>Source of influence</b>	Perceived value	Position
<b>Personal returns</b>	Affirmation/learning	Teamwork/performance

Distinguishing mentors and coaches in this manner not only sheds light on the differences between the two approaches, but also serves to validate the theoretical and functional approach taken toward coaching in the model under discussion.

With respect to measuring the impact of coaching, the existing body of research is limited and inconclusive. Some studies have focused on quality as a broad construct. Others have focused on coaching aimed specifically at supporting children's development, particularly around language and literacy. Still others have examined how coaching has been used in ECE to encourage professional development.

Across the board, it has been difficult to determine the specific coaching features most consistently associated with evidence of effectiveness. In a meta-analysis of over 135 articles, Isner et al. found that the most common research questions concerned the impact of coaching on provider and/or child outcomes. However, the lack of specificity...about what is involved in the coaching limits the conclusions that can be drawn about effectiveness. A small number of articles did examine the details of coaching approaches but there is no accumulation of evidence showing the effectiveness of particular features in a variety of coaching contexts (2011, p. 7).

Limitations of existing research notwithstanding, there is some agreement about elements critical to the design of coaching models. For example, it has long been understood that receiving feedback is essential to helping learners (i.e., ECE providers) know whether they are applying new learning effectively. Likewise, there is substantial evidence to suggest that in order to improve knowledge and skills, training and professional development activities need to be coupled with on-site opportunities to put new learning into practice with the help of a skilled colleague (i.e., coach). Recognizing the need for individualization of coaching efforts, studies of ECE coaching programs across the country found that most models allow for such individualization. "The models, while providing overall guidelines on sequence and activities, also assume that some elements of pacing and selection of specific activities will be based on the practitioner's needs" (Fullan, 2000, p. 11) and that coaches will have the experience and content knowledge to facilitate such an individualized process.

There is wide variety across studies with respect to the characteristics of coaches, measures of fidelity of

implementation, and features of coaching models (Isner et al., 2011). For the most part, coaches tend to have levels of experience and education higher than the average teacher in an ECE program. Coaching models and activities tend to reflect the purpose of the project for which they were designed, as opposed to reflecting a particular theoretical framework. Likewise, the focus of coaching activities varies according to the purpose of coaching. If the focus is narrow (e.g., specific curriculum implementation), coaching tends to emphasize lesson planning, observation, teaching strategies, etc. If the focus is broader (e.g., overall quality improvement), coaching activities tend toward more reflection, goal setting, and collaborative problem-solving. In general, coaching is one piece of a larger professional development intervention, although there is little research that examines how well and how extensively coaching is coordinated with other professional development activities. The ideal dosage of coaching has not been established, but available survey data suggests that coaching visits most commonly happen on a weekly or bi-monthly schedule and extend for duration of less than one year.

As with other aspects of coaching parameters, variation exists with respect to optimal coaching caseloads, reflecting variation of project goals, settings in which coaching is provided,

"Coaching allowed me to fine tune my skills to have stronger, more effective positive interactions with the children."

~Child Care Provider

available resources, and intended intensity and duration of service provision. With respect to quality coaching, it is generally understood that “the intensive work to improve overall quality ratings requires limited caseloads” (Isner et al., 2011). Isner et al. (2011) examined coaching models in which participant caseloads ranged from 1-13. In one program, coaches working with center-based programs had caseloads of 22 centers while coaches working with family child care programs had caseloads of 5-6, reflecting the greater time intensity required in working with home-based providers. In a study of 130 Head Start and Early Head Start grantees, half of the 455 coaches had caseloads of 10 or less; 25% had caseloads of greater than 20 (Howard et al., 2013). In terms of programs, as opposed to participants, 65% of coaches worked with 1-4 programs, 25% worked with 5-9 programs, and 10% worked with 10-28 programs. LAUP, the agency that administers funding of the Gateways coaching model, maintains caseloads of eight providers for their Program Support (i.e., start up) coaches and 19 providers for their Quality Support coaches (Lopez, 2013).





The Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles is a unique and significant collaboration of 10 member agencies that have been serving communities across Los Angeles County for more than 40 years. Formed in 1998, the Child Care Alliance works to ensure that parents and families experience seamless delivery of high quality, affordable, accessible early care and education services. The agencies are strongly rooted in and connected to their surrounding communities, they possess the cultural competencies to work effectively with the diverse populations they serve, and they have well-established relationships with a very large network of local ECE providers. While each agency has its own mission and set of programs, there is considerable similarity among them. The array of services provided by the various agencies includes:

- Resource and referral services to link families with ECE and family support services;
- Training, technical assistance and coaching for ECE providers;
- Direct ECE and family support services (e.g., Head Start, Early Head Start, home visiting, family literacy initiatives, nutrition programs);
- Management of county- and state-funded subsidies for child care.

The reach and impact of the Child Care Alliance is significant. Collectively, the 10 agencies reach over 9,000 licensed child care providers and 9,000 license exempt providers (i.e., relative caregivers) across LA County. They serve over 40,000 children each month through the management of publicly-funded child care subsidies. Each year the agencies process 37,000 requests for child care referrals and 28,000 requests for information about other ECE resources and there are over 18,000 ECE providers in the Child Care Alliance database, including thousands of typically “hard-to-reach” license exempt providers. Aside from working directly with families and ECE providers, the Child Care Alliance and its member agencies are recognized as vital partners in efforts around ECE workforce development policy, advocacy, and frontier initiatives both in LA County and the State of California.

Generally speaking, professional development efforts of the Child Care Alliance focus on improving the supply and quality of the ECE workforce. Given their inclusive approach to defining the workforce, outreach and training programs include both licensed and license-exempt providers, child care centers and home-based family child care providers, and teaching staff in early childhood centers. Child Care Alliance agencies are unique in that they are able to engage ECE professionals who are not necessarily on a college track and those who might miss out on more formal professional development opportunities. As the following chart demonstrates, the extent of training provided by the Child Care Alliance is noteworthy (Savage & Pillado, 2013).

ANNUAL TRAINING PROVIDED BY CHILD CARE ALLIANCE AGENCIES			
YEAR	# of Training Sessions	Unduplicated Participants	Average Hours/Participant
2012	371	1,965	10.3
2013	764	2,943	9.9

Aside from training and technical assistance, seven of the Child Care Alliance agencies provide coaching services and are particularly well-qualified and situated to do so. First, they have significant understanding of the needs of adult learners and extensive experience providing effective training and technical assistance to child care providers and early childhood teachers. Second, because of the array of programs and services that they provide, the agencies are recognized, well-established and trusted entities in the communities they serve. Finally, they have an existing infrastructure that connects to a statewide Resource and Referral infrastructure (i.e., participant databases that includes every licensed provider and many license-exempt providers), a unique and long-standing relationship with California Community Care Licensing, and established systems of ongoing communication with ECE providers that assures easy access and broad visibility as well as reduced administrative and overhead costs.

## PAST EXPERIENCE WITH COACHING

Before coming together to develop a coaching model that could be integrated and implemented in a consistent fashion countywide through the Child Care Alliance, the seven agencies had been individually providing technical assistance, training and coaching services for years. While the overarching intent was to improve program quality and child outcomes, the specific size, scope and emphasis of the efforts often reflected funding parameters. Some initiatives targeted specific populations (e.g., family child care providers, license exempt providers). Others focused on strengthening specific skills, knowledge, and competencies (e.g., family literacy, program accreditation). What follows are examples of the kinds of efforts that the agencies were engaged in prior to the development of the comprehensive coaching model. As these examples demonstrate, the comprehensive model grew out of and reflects a strong foundation of extensive and intensive coaching experience.

Connections for Children is the agency that provides Resource and Referral (R&R) services to the Westside and South Bay communities of LA County. In 2001, Connections received a 3-year grant to provide site visits and coaching to ECE providers who wanted to earn accreditation. Each year Connections engaged a cohort of 10 family child care homes and seven center-based programs. During that same period, they had another 3-year grant through which coaches annually trained 25-35 providers in the implementation of a curriculum focused on supporting early literacy. Program evaluation comparing providers' abilities to implement the curriculum demonstrated a statistically significant difference between providers who received coaching and those who did not.

Building on these successful efforts, in 2003 Connections received a 5-year grant to launch the Family Child Care Resource Program. Program Specialists (i.e., coaches) each managed caseloads of 12-15 providers and focused on setting and achieving quality improvement goals based on annual Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCER) assessments. The success and design of this program significantly informed the development and structure of the comprehensive coaching model adopted by the Child Care Alliance some years later.

The Family Child Care Home Education Network (FCCHEN) is another example of a coaching program provided by several Child Care Alliance agencies that informed the development of the coaching model under discussion. As an example, Child Care Resource Center (CCRC), one of the largest R&R agencies, developed the FCCHEN in Antelope Valley in 1993 and expanded it to the San Fernando Valley in 1998.

Funded through the California Department of Education (CDE), coaching has been a central tenet of FCCHEN since its inception. At CCRC, three FCCHEN Child Development Coaches work with 37 licensed family child care (FCC) providers that collectively serve approximately 300 children. Each provider receives two coaching sessions per month. This intensive approach was chosen over serving more providers in a less intensive manner because of the needs and goals of the coaching recipients. The program targets FCC providers who serve children from birth to age 12 from low-income families, and aims to combine the standards of a first rate child care center with the intimacy of a home environment.

Coaching activities provide support and technical assistance focused on meeting program assessment goals and quality standards. FCCHEN members are assessed using the Family Child Care Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (FCCERS-R) and the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP). As well, FCCHEN programs are aligned with the California Infant/Toddler Curriculum Framework and the California Preschool Learning Foundations.

In addition to coaching, FCCHEN providers attend bi-monthly trainings for ongoing professional development, networking and relationship-building. Coaching and training are coordinated such that topics introduced at training sessions (e.g., lesson planning, choosing developmentally appropriate activities, implementing the California Infant/Toddler Curriculum Framework) are reinforced on an individual basis during coaching sessions.



By 2006, the advantages and need for a countywide approach to coaching and training was widely recognized by the Child Care Alliance. Many of the Child Care Alliance agencies had already developed successful coaching models and there was increasing interest in developing a consistent, replicable approach. As well, the hope was that by creating a countywide program of coordinated training, coaching, and technical assistance, the Child Care Alliance would be better positioned to secure funding to support further program development and implementation and ensure long-term sustainability.

“I learned I need to better myself in order for my children to benefit and achieve their developmental goals.” ~Child Care Provider

With these goals in mind, an inter-agency Workforce Development Committee was created and Gateways for Early Educators was launched in 2006. A comprehensive and multi-faceted program, Gateways was designed to make available seamless, intentional, individual support that could effectively bridge the gaps and address the barriers that ECE providers often face in their efforts to access professional development opportunities and advance along a career pathway.

While seeking funding specifically to implement the coaching component of Gateways, the committee worked together to launch other elements of the program that did not require external funding. For example, the need to align training content and format across all Child Care Alliance agencies required months of coordinated effort and cooperation, but not funding per se. Other aspects of Gateways developed and instituted without additional funding included a countywide training e-calendar and a comprehensive training database to track attendance, content, location, participant satisfaction, etc.

In 2010, an opportunity to solidify and expand the coaching component of Gateways presented itself with the creation of the Los Angeles County Early Care and Education Workforce Consortium. Funded by First 5 LA, the Consortium is administered by Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) and represents a 5-year investment of over \$50 million. The Consortium engages stakeholders from every part of the ECE field and functions as a complex, diverse collaboration among organizations and educational institutions to provide and improve education, training and professional development opportunities for the current and future ECE workforce. Securing five years of funding through the Consortium enabled the Child Care Alliance to offer Gateways coaching throughout its network of seven agencies and to take concerted steps toward building and strengthening the model, collecting countywide data, and beginning to evaluate its impact.

In broad terms, Gateways for Early Educators aims to address issues of access, training, education, and retention of early childhood educators by supporting providers at all levels (e.g., newcomers to the field as well as well-established ECE leaders; college graduates as well as community college students), offering professional development opportunities appropriate to providers' varying educational background and experience, and increasing access to higher education. The goals of the program include:

- Improving outcomes for children by enhancing the quality of the workforce,
- Developing inclusive educational and training pathways,
- Developing individual and group support systems to meet providers where they are,
- Setting uniformly high training and coaching standards for all member agencies,
- Providing a training and workforce development system that is seamless for participants.


Reflecting research on coaching and professional development, Gateways is a multi-faceted program that includes training, countywide systems development, and individualized quality and career coaching.

The training component of Gateways, called the Passport Training Program, is a 40-hour program for both new and seasoned ECE providers. The program aligns with the national policy recommendations put forth by Child Care Aware of America, and the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies and focuses on 10 curriculum areas widely recognized as essential for working effectively with young children (e.g., child growth and development, learning environments and curriculum, families and community, special needs and inclusion). Gateways training activities are offered at community-based sites in a variety of languages, annually reaching more than 2900 participants. In order to assure continuity and comparability of quality of training content and delivery, Child Care Alliance agencies utilize uniform methods of assessment, data collection and reporting tools.

While the Passport Training Program is offered by all of the Child Care Alliance agencies, only seven of the agencies also offer individualized, on-site technical assistance (i.e., coaching). Given the demographics of the ECE workforce in LA County (e.g., ethnic and economic diversity, limited exposure to higher education, significant family and parenting responsibilities, older and non-traditional adult learners), this two-pronged approach is particularly necessary and effective.

Gateways coaching includes two distinct categories of activities, although in many cases participants receive both kinds of coaching, sometimes delivered by a single coach.

- **Quality Coaching** provides site-based technical assistance, helping to make lasting quality improvement by reinforcing and supporting what is learned through participation in Gateways training activities. Quality coaching includes initial site visits to observe and gather information, individualized support and technical assistance, and helping providers to construct realistic, attainable quality improvement plans.
- **Career Development Coaching** help providers plan individualized educational pathways for advancing in the ECE field and navigating the system of higher education. Career development coaching helps providers access formal and informal training opportunities, navigate college application and admission processes, and mitigate barriers that might otherwise limit access to higher education (e.g., language barriers, scheduling conflicts).

 The Gateways coaching model reflects current research and recommendations on coaching, best practice and program design. By making coaching available to the full spectrum of ECE professionals, the model aligns with recommendations that both center-based and family child care providers be included in quality improvement efforts with attention paid to their differing needs (Taylor & Bryant, 2002). By intentionally reaching out to providers in myriad settings and communities and providing coaching in multiple languages, the model guards against serving only those who seek out assistance or are easy to reach because of background or setting.

NAEYC and Child Care Aware of America have analyzed the critical and distinguishing characteristics of coaching with respect to focus, relationships, process, duration and delivery. In all respects, the Gateways coaching model reflects these characteristics.

- **Focus:** The model focuses on performance-based outcomes and supports the development of specific skills and practices. As well, the focus of the coaching is embedded in the recipient's broader professional development plan.
- **Relationships:** The model allows for the kinds of interactions that foster trust and respect. Recipients may select their own coach and the coach does not serve as a supervisor per se.
- **Process:** Coaching begins with a collaborative agreement between the coach and the recipient to set guidelines and goals. The coaching process includes questioning, listening, observation, reflection, feedback, prompting, modeling and practice. Coaching occurs through planned onsite contacts and concludes when the agreed upon goals have been achieved.
- **Duration:** Depending upon the agreed upon goal, coaching can occur one time or over a series of sessions.
- **Delivery:** Coaching is provided face-to-face, over the phone, technology-based, or in a combination of delivery modes. (NAEYC & NACCRRA, 2011, pp. 7-8)

## Philosophy

The philosophy underlying the coaching model is based on the following concepts:

- The coaching relationship is a collaborative partnership; coaches and early childhood educators work together to set goals, create plans and assess progress.
- Coaching is rooted in the belief that all early childhood educators have strengths.
- Experiential knowledge can be extended and enhance learning.
- Conversation can give voice to feelings and ideas, and to create the conditions in which changes can occur in thought and action.
- Dialogue can cross barriers of race, gender, class, professional standing, etc.
- Coaching aims to translate theory into practice.

## Goals

While Gateways coaching is individualized by design and intent, there are general overarching goals for all provider participants. These include:

- Promoting independence, self-reliance, and resourcefulness among Gateways participants so as to avoid unnecessary, unproductive reliance on coaches or the coaching process.
- Promoting ongoing professional development, both in terms of training and formal education.
- Grounding all goals in research-based materials or practices common throughout the field.



## Expected Knowledge and Skills

The model rests on four core competencies that define what coaches need to know and what coaches need to be able to do. Adhering to these competencies assures consistency in coaching design, structure, and delivery regardless of various work settings or coaching relationships. The four core competencies are:

- **Core Area 1 – Building Relationships:** Coaching relationships are trusting and respectful, create a climate for growth, build shared ownership of the coaching relationship and process, and assess the impact of the coaching process through self-assessment and provider feedback.
- **Core Area 2 – Facilitating Shared Goal-Setting and Planning:** Coaches work with providers to develop professional improvement plans, gather information, set goals and objectives, develop and implement action plans, periodically review action plans, and apply a solution-focused approach to problem-solving.
- **Core Area 3 – Communication Skills:** Recognizing that effective communication is essential to building a successful, culturally-competent coaching relationship, coaches use a diverse array of methods to meet providers' needs and learning styles, utilize active listening, and engage in insightful inquiry and reflective practice.
- **Core Area 4 – Modeling Best Practices:** Relying on their own experience and expertise, coaches assist providers to implement best practice and put theory into practice, demonstrate and model behavior and teaching strategies, and encourage experimentation, self-discovery, and alternative ideas and solutions.

## Career Coaching: Components and Coaching Activities

The Career Coaching aspect of Gateways encourages providers to develop personalized educational pathways for advancement in the child care field and to navigate entry to the higher education system. The Coach works with participating early childhood educators to reflect on career objectives, set individual goals, and develop a Career Goal Development Plan through which progress and goal achievement can be tracked.

Six components comprise the Career Coaching model:

During the **Invitation Phase**, information is disseminated about career development options and the program is marketed by all Child Care Alliance agencies – those agencies that provide coaching as well as those that do not. Regardless how they learn about it, providers can enroll in the coaching program through one of the seven agencies that offer it.

The **Introduction Stage** is an opportunity for the Career Coach to meet one-on-one with each interested provider to gather information, learn about their career goals, and share possible options and strategies.

The **Planning Phase** is collaborative and helps build a collegial relationship that recognizes the knowledge and expertise of both coach and participant, and fosters information sharing.

During the **Action Stage**, participants move forward on their career goals with support from their coach (e.g. attending trainings, conferences, workshops, pursuing higher education).

The **Reflection Stage** is a time for feedback and sharing information, as well as confirming and affirming newly gained information and strategies toward improving child care quality.

**Evaluation** is a critical component that provides the means to continually gain information about the successes and challenges of the project design and make improvements to best support participants and improve child care quality. As well, program evaluation informs the field by building the research on evidenced-based coaching practice and outcomes.

## Quality Coaching: Components and Coaching Activities

The Quality Coaching aspect of Gateways encourages early childhood educators to improve the quality of early care and education by conducting initial site visits to observe and gather information, offering individualized support and technical assistance, and helping providers develop realistic, attainable Quality Improvement Plans through which to track progress and goal achievement.

As with Career Coaching, six components make up the Quality Coaching model:

The **Initiation Phase** is a time for the coach to visit the site, and for the coach and the participant to get to know each other and begin to build a relationship.

During the **Observation Stage** the coach may observe the participant in various aspects of practice, the participant may observe the coach modeling strategies/activities, and the participant and coach may observe various aspects of the environment.

The **Collaborative Planning Phase** is done together and helps foster a collegial relationship, recognizing the knowledge and expertise of both participants and coaches, and fostering information sharing.

During the **Action Stage** strategies planned to achieve the set goals are implemented. The Coach facilitates and supports practice, provides opportunities for new experiences, and models different approaches.

The **Reflection Stage** is a time for feedback and sharing information, as well as confirming and affirming newly gained information and strategies toward improving child care quality.

**Evaluation** is a critical component that provides the means to continually gain information about the successes and challenges of the project design and make improvements to best support providers and improve the quality of early care and education. As with Career Coaching, program evaluation also serves to inform the field by building the research base on evidenced-based coaching practice and outcomes.

## Outreach And Enrollment

Outreach to identify and engage providers as participants in Gateways coaching is largely conducted by circulating flyers and making announcements at Gateways training events. Subsequently, coaches follow up with individual phone calls or emails to providers who express interest in coaching services. Additional outreach takes place in the context of other projects. For example, the Child Care Initiative Project (CCIP), a statewide initiative of the California Resource and Referral Network that is funded through the California Department of Education, focuses on capacity development of newly licensed early care and education providers. As such, many of the providers engaged in CCIP are interested and receptive to working with coaches in order to achieve their expansion goals (e.g., changes in licensing, numbers of children served, age range served).

The Gateways coaching model allows for rolling enrollment and reflects varying capacity across the participating agencies. Which agency serves a particular participant is determined by the participant's zip code of employment. Agencies track enrollment using a standardized, centralized Gateways database and also maintain individual agency waitlists. There are established procedures for tracking when participants complete or exit the coaching program. When participants exit the program because they have achieved their goals, they are sent a Coaching Participant Program Completion Letter.

## Caseloads, Dosage And Duration

The Child Care Alliance recognizes the advantages to keeping caseloads relatively small and matching the intensity of services with the degree of need. However, an intersection of changes in the funding landscape and lessons learned during initial implementation led to a situation in which coaches were carrying caseloads of 50 and aiming at monthly visits. Based on numerical data and anecdotal information gathered over the first two years of implementation, it became increasingly clear that, given available funding levels, such an equation of caseloads and dosage was compromising the quality of service and jeopardizing the quality, consistency and fidelity of the program. So beginning in 2014-15, the Child Care Alliance is hoping to reduce caseloads to 25 participants per coach.

With respect to dosage and duration, initially the number of coaching sessions and contact hours per participant varied between those receiving Quality Coaching and those receiving Career Coaching. Based on an assumption that Quality Coaching would require a more intensive level of service, the intent was to provide an hour per month of Quality Coaching over a 12-month period, and 45 minutes per month of Career Coaching over a 12-month period.

As the project has evolved, more and more participants are engaging in both Quality and Career Coaching and the level of service intensity appears to be roughly the same. So at the present time, the model aims at one hour per month per participant for both Quality Coaching and Career Coaching. The precise manner in which coaching sessions and hours are expended is flexible and determined on an individual basis. Participants generally receive coaching support over a 12-month period, but the duration may be shortened if goals are met more quickly. Whether a participant continues to receive coaching after the first 12 months is determined on an individual basis, in consultation with the site supervisor at each agency.

## Coach Qualifications

The minimum qualifications for coaching positions have been agreed upon by all Child Care Alliance agencies. Each agency, following its own human resource policies, then determines its specific hiring practices and procedures, and develops position descriptions incorporating the following:

- Minimum of a BA/BS in Child Development or a related field
- Minimum of 3 years experience in a child care setting
- Experience and ability to work with adult learners and diverse client populations
- Good problem-solving skills
- Familiarity with child care provider population
- Effective written and verbal communication skills
- Knowledge of Resource & Referral and other community resources
- Familiarity with various early care and education assessment tools
- Familiarity with higher education requirements
- Valid California driver's license
- Bilingual capability preferred

## Supervision and Support of Coaches

While the need to supervise and support coaching staff is widely recognized, doing so consistently in a system-wide fashion is challenging because of the fact that seven independent agencies provide Gateways coaching. Direct supervision of Gateways coaches is provided by each agency, so the supervisorial structure may vary depending on the size of the agency, size of the staff, range of programs and services provided by the agency, number of coaches employed, and in some cases, other job responsibilities assumed by coaching staff.

In an effort to provide support across agencies and to assure consistency of coaching knowledge, competencies,


and practice, Gateways coaches receive an orientation and focused preparation upon employment, as well as ongoing training throughout the year. The initial orientation is intended to familiarize new coaches with the Gateways Coaching Manual, the range and expectations of coaching activities, Child Care Alliance systems of data collection, administrative responsibilities (e.g., coaching forms, tracking coaching goals), and quality improvement tools.

With respect to ongoing training and support, coaches from all seven agencies meet monthly with the Child Care Alliance Program Director to discuss common challenges, share strategies and problem-solving approaches, assure relative fidelity of coaching implementation, and track and revise coaching goals and practices. Supervisors and internal evaluation researchers also attend these meeting to provide feedback and to stay current on information, updates, and program implementation and improvement. Monthly conference calls augment the monthly meetings.

With respect to professional development, coaches receive ongoing training on new resources, quality improvement tools, and best practice relevant to coaching. During the 2013-14 program year coaches received training on:

- California Early Learning Foundations and Curriculum Frameworks
- Environmental Rating Scales (ERS)
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
- Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)
- Adult Involvement Scale (AIS)
- Child Abuse Identification and Reporting
- Reflective Practice
- Race To The Top (RTT) Frameworks and Quality Matrix

While the highly individualized nature of the coaching model precludes strict fidelity in terms of coaching activities and service delivery, the Gateways database assures that coaching goals are consistently tracked, achieved or revised, and provides a centralized method for collecting data through which to compare coaching effectiveness, dosage, duration, and content throughout the Child Care Alliance network.

 The Gateways coaching program officially launched in February, 2012, as one of the programs that make up the Los Angeles County Early Care and Education Workforce Consortium funded by First 5 LA and LAUP. Five months of initial program data was presented in the 2012 Annual Report, providing preliminary information on training and coaching aspects of the Gateways program (Savage & Pillado 2012). More extensive data and evaluation results were reported in the 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports explicating two years of full project implementation and demonstrating the impact and potential of the coaching model.

## Program Goals and Evaluation Questions

Gateways embeds research questions into the goals of the program to ensure that research and evaluation activities provide continual program feedback, improvement and evaluation. This ongoing integration of evaluation and implementation is an important strength of the coaching model. Five goals guide the research and program evaluation. Each goal is evaluated by examining related questions, illustrative examples of which are provided below.

- **GOAL 1:** Ensure access to professional development services for the early care and education workforce that is culturally, linguistically and geographically representative of the children in Los Angeles County.

Sample Evaluation Question: Do the demographics of the Gateways coaching participants reflect those of children 0-5 years in Los Angeles County?

- **GOAL 2:** Provide necessary resources to assist Gateways participants in increasing the quality of child care in Los Angeles County.

Sample Evaluation Question: How long does it take Quality Coaching participants to achieve their quality improvement goals?

- **GOAL 3:** Provide necessary resources to assist Gateways participants in increasing the education and/or professional growth of early childhood educators in Los Angeles County.

Sample Evaluation Question: What areas of professional growth are Career Coaching participants targeting?

- **GOAL 4:** Ensure delivery of a seamless, coordinated and accessible system of quality improvement for early childhood educators in Los Angeles County.

Sample Evaluation Question: Are STEP<sup>1</sup> and Gateways programs coordinated and aligned so that the process of intake, quality improvement and rating is coordinated and seamless?

- **GOAL 5:** Ensure continual program improvement based on lessons learned from evaluation as well as continual evaluation improvement based on lessons learned from program.

Sample Evaluation Question: To what extent are evaluation findings used to inform and improve program practice?

<sup>1</sup> STEP (Steps to Excellence Program) is a quality rating and improvement system administered by the LA County Office of Child Care for licensed child care programs serving children ages 0-5. A subset of Gateways coaching services specifically target STEP programs, providing coaching assistance to improve their initial STEP quality assessment scores and achieve higher quality ratings.

## Implementation of Coaching Services

The following table provides an overview of data collected during the first two full years of implementation (June 2012-July 2014). Over time coaching has been provided to a growing number of participants and goal numbers were exceeded. Given the greater intensity of quality coaching, it is reasonable that the number served through quality coaching is significantly smaller than the number served through career coaching.

COACHING PARTICIPANTS	July 2012- June 2013		July 2013- June 2014	
	GOAL	ACTUAL	GOAL	ACTUAL
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF COACHING PARTICIPANTS</b>	1,000	1,079	1000	1,277
<b>QUALITY COACHING</b>				
Total # of Quality Coaching Participants		321		379
Total # of Coaching Sessions		1,965		3,087
Average # of Coaching Sessions Per Participant*		6.1		7.9
Total # of Hours		1,587		3,043
<b>CAREER COACHING</b>				
Total # of Career Coaching Participants		940		1,168
Total # of Coaching Sessions		7,068		10,503
Average # of Coaching Sessions Per Participant*		7.2		8.6
Total # of Hours		4,390		7,952

\*NOTE: Participants generally have one coaching session per month. The average number of coaching sessions seems lower than that because of rolling enrollment. For example, if a participant enrolls in May, the data would reflect that she had two sessions during that program year - one in May and one in June.

## Quality Improvement and Career Goals

The following table helps to demonstrate the impact and success of the coaching model as reflected in the number of goals set by participants and rates of goal achievement. The individualization of the model allows participants to self-select the focus areas of their Quality Improvement and Career Goals.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND CAREER GOALS	July 2012- June 2013	July 2013- June 2014
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF COACHING PARTICIPANTS</b>	1,079	1,277
<b>QUALITY COACHING</b>		
Total # of Participants Setting Quality Improvement Goals	321	335
Total # of Quality Improvement Goals Sets	249	471
# of Goals Completed	151	255
# of Goals Existing or In Progress	255	216
Main Focus Areas:		
• Learning Environments	74%	74%
• Special Needs and Inclusion	18%	20%
• Adult-Child Interactions	8%	6%
<b>CAREER COACHING</b>		
- Total # of Participants Setting Career Goals	758	1,097
- Total # of Career Goals Set	1,271	1,816
- # of Goals Completed	395	999
- # of Goals Existing or In Progress	826	817
- Main Focus Areas:		
• Educational Development	64%	56%
• Career and Professional Development	18%	22%
• Marketing Development	5%	5%
• Quality Development and Other Development	5%	17%


On average, the length of time between initial development and completion of Quality Improvement and Career Goals is about 5-6 months. While the time frame appears similar, Career Coaching participants are more likely to work simultaneously on multiple goals while Quality Coaching participants tend to work on fewer goals at a time. So during the same time period, a Career Coaching participant may complete multiple goals while a Quality Coaching participant completes fewer goals (Savage & Pillado, 2013).

During the 2013-14 program year, 88% of the 1,277 coaching participants developed at least one goal within the first month of enrollment. Across the year, 61% of Career Coaching participants and 68% of Quality Coaching participants completed at least one goal. However, because many of these participants have multiple goals and/or are co-enrolled in both Quality and Career Coaching components, even though they complete a goal they continue in the program in order to pursue their additional goals. Of those who did not complete at least one goal, 99% are currently working on a goal.

With respect to markers of overall professional development, the following chart represents some of the major milestones achieved by the coaching participants.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES	July 2012- June 2013		July 2013- June 2014	
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF COACHING PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>1,079</b>		<b>1,277</b>	
Enrolled in college	299	28%	38	3%
Attained or applied for a CA Child Development Permit	195	18%	109	8.5%
Enrolled in adult education courses	20	2%	10	1%
Released data to the CA ECE Workforce Registry	906	84%	1065	83%



 The Gateway for Early Educators coaching model is a unique in important ways that can inform and influence practice and policy in the field.

### **Benefits of a Multi-Agency Collaboration**

The Child Care Alliance coaching model is unusual in that it was developed and is being implemented across a network of 10 independent but associated agencies. While seven of the agencies administer the coaching model, all 10 agencies conduct outreach to providers at all levels (i.e., center-based, family child care providers, license exempt providers, etc.).

Implementing a consistent coaching model across such a large network creates important opportunities for impacting systems and policy development. When coaching practices are successfully provided to over 1,200 participants who work in diverse communities and serve diverse populations, evaluation results pointing to consistent areas of impact and effectiveness are all the more noteworthy. Likewise, when policy, practice and funding decisions are agreed upon and successfully implemented across seven independent organizations, it lends credibility to those decisions and the feasibility of successfully replicating them elsewhere.

Another benefit to the model stems from the nature of the participating agencies themselves. The Child Care Alliance agencies that offer coaching have strong roots in their communities, long histories of community-based efforts and involvement, and years of experience offering ECE training and professional development activities. As such, providers tend to have a long-lasting relationship with the agencies and are inclined to trust agency staff and take advantage of new programs offered by the agencies. Likewise, agency staff can easily identify and outreach to community providers because their relationships are well-developed and long-standing, not solely based on the coaching program.

An additional distinguishing characteristic of the Child Care Alliance agencies providing coaching is the fact that, given the broad scope of their services and the funding streams for which they are responsible (e.g., subsidized child care funding), they can provide training and technical assistance to every segment of the ECE workforce rather than being constrained by funding parameters and the like. For example, they provide coaching to ECE programs participating in California's Race to the Top QRIS (Quality Rating and Improvement System), and they also provide coaching to a wide array of license-exempt providers (i.e., relative care) and others with less access to formal professional development opportunities and higher education. The issue of providing services to the license-exempt workforce is significant in that 58% of infants and toddlers and 33% of preschool-aged children experience some form of license-exempt care each year (Harder & Company, 2014).

### **Challenges of a Multi-Agency Collaboration**

Alongside the benefits of a multi-agency collaboration are particular challenges posed by the structure. One example concerns staff supervision. Individual coaches are employed by individual agencies, not the Child Care Alliance. As such, it is difficult to establish strict consistency with respect to issues such as personnel policies, lines of communication, job responsibilities outside of coaching, and staff supervision, orientation and training. This variation across agencies also poses challenges to program evaluation and drawing consistent conclusions about the coaching model, its implementation and impact.

Recognizing this challenge, the Child Care Alliance has instituted monthly meetings and conference calls for coaches in order to strengthen cross-agency communication and relationships, provide consistent program orientation and ongoing training to coaches, and create opportunities for shared learning and problem-solving. As well, research and evaluation staff attends the monthly meetings in order to stay abreast of network-wide challenges and discrepancies, as well as collective decisions and points of agreement. Finally, Child Care


Alliance central staff provides over-arching coordination and ensures cross-agency consistency in terms of coaching documents, documentation, data collection, policies and procedures.

Related to the challenge of staff supervision is the issue of fidelity of implementation. Although all of the coaches rely on the Gateways Coaching Manual and the orientation developed by the Child Care Alliance, they are working in different communities that face different challenges, and the seven agencies vary in terms of size, complexity and scope of services. As a result, the goals, focus and implementation of coaching activities is not as precisely parallel across the network as it might be, for instance, if all of the coaches were working with Head Start programs located in the same city. Recognizing this challenge, formative evaluation is an ongoing and integrated part of the program, data is collected consistently using a system-wide database, and program evaluation is analyzed in the aggregate as well as by individual agency. In this way, comparisons can be made across the network and lessons can be learned both from collective and individual accomplishments and difficulties.

## **Areas for Future Research**

As research has suggested, the fact that coaching is an individualized process is critical to its success. However, the flexibility and individualization that make coaching particularly effective as a means of professional development also make it difficult to assure fidelity of implementation and consistency of outcomes. Future research is necessary to establish the most effective way to balance the individualization of coaching with the need for consistency.

Another ongoing challenge concerns caseloads. It is perhaps realistic, if sometimes frustrating, that funding parameters often dictate decisions about caseloads. But regardless of how caseloads are determined, expectations of coaching programs need to be aligned accordingly with respect to dosage, duration, intensity of services, and anticipated outcomes. Future research on optimal caseloads and anticipated impact of coaching programs would provide critically needed guidance to program staff and decision makers.

 This paper presents a description of the Gateways coaching model after two years of full program implementation. While the field will benefit from additional research on the potential, impact, and critical characteristics of coaching as a means of professional development and improving the quality of early care and education, the Gateways coaching program serves as a valuable model from which others can learn. Specifically, the Gateways coaching program provides:

- A model that effectively pairs training with coaching in order to derive the greatest benefit from training opportunities and ensure that new learning is successfully put into practice.
- Demonstrated experience of the need to maintain caseloads small enough to allow coaches to invest the requisite time with each participant, maintain individualization of coaching services, and continue to provide coaching until all goals have been achieved.
- A model of successfully instituting a countywide coaching program that engages a wide network of community-based organizations, serves large numbers and a highly diverse population, and is inclusive of all segments of the ECE workforce, along with an understanding of the inherent benefits and challenges to such an approach.

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