

***COACHING COMPETENCIES* for  
COLORADO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION  
March 2009**

## **Introduction**

### **1. Why and how the competencies were developed**

In the Spring of 2007, representatives from various early childhood education coaching initiatives in Colorado began meeting monthly with a goal of gaining a better understanding of the scope and nature of early childhood coaching projects around the state. In addition, the group wanted to explore how a common set of principles or standards for coaching and more systematic professional development opportunities for coaches might support our work and promote stronger outcomes for our coaching efforts. The group adopted the name Colorado Coaching Consortium.

A survey of coaching initiatives statewide showed that a significant amount of coaching is being done, with common broad goals but great variability in practice. The Consortium determined that a set of shared standards, in the form of coaching competencies, could be helpful in guiding coaching work around the state.

In a day-long work session in December 2007, a group of 34 coaches, program supervisors, and other representatives of diverse coaching initiatives joined with Consortium members to begin crafting a definition of coaching and a set of coaching competencies for the early childhood field in Colorado. Using business and life coaching competencies developed by the International Coach Federation as a springboard, this work group completed an in-depth analysis of the skills and dispositions required for effective professional development coaching with early childhood educators seeking to provide high quality services to children and families. Consortium members then took the results of this day's work and synthesized them into the attached document.

The competencies described are not meant to be used as requirements for hiring or by which coaches would be evaluated, but rather as a description of best practice. The Consortium believes that these Early Childhood Education Coaching Competencies can be a useful resource to support coaching work in the following ways:

- As a professional development tool for programs and initiatives that employ coaches
- As a coach self-assessment tool to review and strengthen skills and dispositions
- As a guide for selection of professionals interested in becoming coaches
- As a tool for strengthening professional identity among early childhood educators who are doing coaching
- As a tool for promoting coaching as a profession
- To inform ongoing conversation on the role of coaching in early childhood education professional development and how to support coaching efforts in Colorado

There is still a great deal to be learned about "best practice" in coaching. Under what circumstances is coaching likely to be most effective? Are specific approaches more effective with coachees who have particular backgrounds? How long does it take to create sustainable change and what other factors contribute to success? Given these and other unknowns, this is meant to be a "living" document. We expect that as we learn more about what works and why in this relatively new profession, the competencies described here may change and grow. As we share this document around the state, the Consortium will be

seeking avenues for all stakeholders to continue to share what is being learned from our collective experience.

## 2. Core Values

Some underlying themes are woven throughout each section of the competencies that have emerged as core values and beliefs. While coaching is viewed as a relationship between “co-learners”, we believe that the coach’s primary role is to be responsive to the goals and needs of the person being coached, in the service of positive outcomes for children and families. Additional themes include:

- Coaching requires authentic collaboration; to be effective it must be a partnership.
- Coaching requires respectful, professional regard for the coachee.
- Coaching is not static; being in a learning relationship is a dynamic process.
- Coaching goes beyond the surface of quality practice to explore the roots of what supports children’s growth and development.
- Coaching relies on being open to possibilities and welcoming the unexpected.
- Coaching promotes self-reflection and experimentation as primary learning strategies.
- Coaching is a parallel process. The coach practices and models behaviors and dispositions that support the coachee’s learning.
- Coaching should assist coachees to develop self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-directed action to benefit the children and families whom the coachee serves.

The Consortium welcomes your feedback and comments. Please contact any of the members on the attached list.

### Definition of Coaching:

Coaching is a learning process based on a collaborative relationship that is intentionally designed to promote sustainable growth in the necessary attitudes, skills, and knowledge to effectively implement the best practices for the development of young children and their families.

At present, early childhood coaching initiatives in Colorado typically are designed to achieve specific outcomes for children, teacher/administrator professional development, and program quality, with the understanding that there are various ways to achieve these outcomes and that they may be expressed in different ways in different programs. Coaching activities may include technical assistance or consulting, collaborating, or cognitive coaching. Technical assistance includes providing information, expertise, or resources to a coachee. Collaborating refers to working side-by-side with a coachee as a teaching strategy, for example, to arrange interest centers in a classroom). In cognitive coaching, the coach is facilitating the coachee’s problem-solving processes by supporting self-reflection, and clarifying and testing ideas. Any one interaction between a coach and a coachee may include any or all of these approaches.

As defined here, coaching is most effective when it is embedded in a broader professional development system that includes opportunities for practitioners to learn about the theoretical foundations of early childhood education, to see effective instructional and leadership strategies demonstrated, to try out new strategies, and to receive feedback. Coaching is particularly effective in supporting the reflection required to successfully translate new learning into practice.

## Competencies<sup>1</sup>:

### Setting the Foundation

#### *Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards*

A code of ethics is one of the criteria that set professionals apart from other workers (Katz and Ward, 1991). Coaches may have to make difficult decisions that have moral and ethical implications during their work coaching early childhood providers. The importance of a code of ethics is to provide guidance when there are ethical problems in areas of “power and status, multiplicity of clients; ambiguity of data base; role ambiguity” (Katz, 1978).

*The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct (Revised 2005)* serves as a resource to assist coaches in resolving ethical dilemmas. The standards of ethical behavior are based on: commitment to core values, appreciation of childhood as unique, grounding one’s work on current knowledge of child development and learning, appreciation of child and family bonds, and understanding the child within the context of the family. The NAEYC Code states that when the issues involve young children, its provisions should be broadly applied to include specialists who do not work directly with children. “Above all we shall not harm children.” This principle has precedence over all others. The document can be found on-line at <http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/PSETH05.asp>

Another NAEYC document, *Code of Ethical Conduct: Supplement for Early Childhood Educators*, references those involved in “mentoring” and provides specific direction that “everything we do in our role as educators of adults is intended to further this ultimate commitment” to the healthy development and welfare of young children. The core values include to “respect the critical role of a knowledgeable, competent, and diverse early childhood education workforce in supporting the development and learning of young children” and to “base practice on current and accurate knowledge of early childhood education, child development, adult development and learning, as well as other relevant disciplines.” The Supplement outlines ethical responsibilities to adult learners. This document can be found on-line at <http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/ethics04.asp>.

The *ICF Code of Ethics* provides specific guidelines on professional conduct with clients. (The Consortium has chosen to use the term “coachees”.) This document includes a philosophy statement and “Standards of Ethical Conduct” for coaches working in a variety of contexts. Many of these standards are applicable to coaching in early childhood education settings and are excerpted in the Appendix.

In combination, these three documents can provide guidance to coaches on maintaining high standards of professionalism in general, and support for decision-making in specific early childhood coaching situations.

Competencies related to applying a code of ethics in practice:

- a. Has a working knowledge of and uses the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment, and the Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators to guide decision-making when one important value is in conflict with another.
- b. Has a working knowledge of and uses the relevant ICF Standards of Ethical Conduct to guide professional conduct in coaching interactions.

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<sup>1</sup> These competencies were adapted with permission from Core Competencies of the International Coach Federation (ICF)

*Establishing the Coaching Agreement:* Ability to understand and explicitly align requirements of the specific coaching initiative with the needs and expectations of the coachee.

- a. Effectively explains the goals and parameters of the coaching initiative in which the coach and coachee are partnering. These may include time commitment, logistics, expected outcomes and measures of success, reporting requirements, resources available, confidentiality, roles of other parties, etc. (e.g. funders, project coordinators, evaluators).
- b. Sets mutually defined goals and coaching agendas that align those of the coachee, the early childhood program in which the coachee works, the coaching initiative, and the coach.
- c. Reaches agreement about roles and responsibilities of the coach and the coachee, and expectations for coaching interactions (e.g. norms related to missed appointments, giving and receiving feedback, follow-through on tasks, etc.)
- d. If the coachee is participating in more than one coaching initiative, assists in coordinating coaching efforts.
- e. Determines whether there is an effective match between his/her coaching method/skills and the needs of the prospective coachee.

### Co-Creating the Relationship

*Establishing Trust with the Coachee:* Ability to create a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust.

*Coaching Presence:* Ability to be present and in relationship with the coachee in the moment, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident

- a. Demonstrates respect for and interest in the coachee's individual strengths, learning style, goals, and cultural context. For example:
  - uses language that is non-sexist, non-racist, non-technical, non-jargon
  - uses teaching tools that match the coachee's learning style (e.g. metaphor, concrete examples, charts and other visuals, etc.)
- b. Demonstrates appreciation for the coachee's perspective, even when it is different from one's own
- c. Recognizes the importance of coachee "self-discovery".
- d. Establishes and maintains clear agreements
- e. Maintains professional boundaries
- f. Maintains professionalism by being on time, organized, and prepared for each coaching session
- g. Models openness to learning and taking risks.
- h. Provides ongoing support for new behaviors and actions, focusing on learning opportunities even when outcomes are disappointing
- i. Celebrates coachee successes and capabilities for future growth
- j. Is fully attentive, shifting perspectives and coaching approaches as needed in the moment
- k. Uses humor and play effectively to create lightness and energy
- l. Remains focused on the coachee's needs when disagreements or conflicts surface.

### Communicating Effectively

*Active Listening:* Ability to focus completely on what the coachee is communicating to understand the coachee's intent in the context of their values and goals, and to support coachee self-expression.

- a. Encourages, explores, and accepts without judgment the coachee's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs, suggestions, etc.

- b. Distinguishes between the coachee's words, tone of voice, and body language to hear with the "3<sup>rd</sup> ear" what is actually being said
- c. Summarizes, paraphrases, and restates to reflect back what the coachee has said for clarity and understanding
- d. Makes the coachee's communication a focal point of the interaction by integrating and building on their perspective.

*Powerful Questioning:* Ability to ask questions that provide information and stimulate thinking in support of the coachee's learning and goals.

- a. Asks questions that elicit the coachee's perspective
- b. Asks questions that facilitate vision and create challenge
- c. Asks questions that create greater clarity

*Direct Communication:* Ability to communicate effectively during coaching sessions, and to use language that has the greatest positive impact on the coachee.

- a. Is clear, articulate, and direct in communicating coaching objectives, providing feedback, and making recommendations.
- b. Uses reframing to give the coachee another perspective on their wants or concerns
- c. Develops communication pathways that specify how information will be shared with administrators, teachers, families, and funders

### Facilitating Learning and Results

*Creating Awareness:* Ability to integrate and accurately evaluate multiple sources of information, and to make interpretations that help the coachee to gain awareness in support of their goals.

- a. Helps the coachee to evaluate alignment of values, goals, and actions
- b. Identifies the thinking behind the coachee's underlying concerns
- c. Assists the coachee to identify major strengths and major areas for learning and growth
- d. Communicates insights and broader perspectives to help the coachee see different, interrelated factors that affect them and their program
- e. Helps the coachee to discover for themselves alternative viewpoints and find new possibilities for action

*Planning and Goal Setting:* Ability to develop and maintain a strength-based, effective coaching plan with the coachee

- a. Consolidates collected information to establish a coaching plan with the coachee that addresses concerns and major areas for learning and program improvement
- b. Supports the coachee in prioritizing goals and actions and creates an implementation plan with goals that are attainable, measurable, specific and have target dates
- c. Targets early successes that are important to the coachee
- d. Supports ongoing reflection with the coachee to determine progress on goals and whether adjustments to the plan are necessary
- e. Helps the coachee identify and access different resources needed to achieve their goals

*Designing Actions for Implementation:* Ability to create with the coachee opportunities for ongoing learning and actions that will most effectively accomplish agreed-upon goals

- a. Promotes active experimentation and self-discovery, assisting the coachee to identify and act on opportunities that will enable them to demonstrate, practice and deepen new learning and practices

- b. Chooses the coaching mode most appropriate for the specific objectives and learning needs of the coachee, i.e. uses consulting (technical assistance, collaborating, or cognitive coaching methods depending on the coachee's level of information and skill in addressing a goal
- c. Demonstrates and models processes and actions that can help the coachee achieve their goals
- d. Harmonizes seemingly conflicting perspectives to evoke creative solutions aligned with coachee's goals
- e. Supports the coachee in acting strategically to take advantage of activities, partnerships, and/or environmental conditions that will contribute to achieving their goals.

*Managing Progress and Accountability:* Ability to maintain focus on the coachee's stated priorities while recognizing the coachee's responsibility for action and progress

- a. As needed, identifies possible actions that will lead to agreed-upon goals
- b. Follows through on own commitments
- c. Supports the coachee in self-reflection on progress: what has been learned and/or accomplished since previous coaching session(s)
- d. Checks in, as needed, with the coachee to see how things are going (e.g. coaching plan and outcomes, agreed-upon course of action)
- e. When barriers to progress are identified, engages the coachee to explore alternative ideas and solutions, evaluate options, and make decisions
- f. Continuously works to align the coachee's goals with current activities and direction
- g. Encourages coachee self-development in making decisions, addressing key concerns, determining priorities, and in other competencies needed for continuous program improvement

#### Assessing Success of the Coaching Partnership

Success of the coaching partnership can be assessed on two levels: the best practices of the coach and the improved practices of the coachee.

*Assessing Coach Practice:* Engages in continual self reflection of their professional practices and how their practices influence the coachee's performance and outcomes.

Uses both self reflection and feedback tools, such as:

- a. The Coaching Competencies for Colorado Early Childhood Education: A Self-Evaluation Checklist.
- b. A method of getting feedback from coachee regarding the coachee's experience of and satisfaction with the coaching partnership.

*Assessing Coachee Outcomes:* Fosters a conversation that facilitates the coachee's determination of measureable criteria for success, and the coachee's ability to clarify and determine gains in their thinking, skills, knowledge and practices. In the initial meetings, it is important to foster discussion about the specific criteria for success of stated individual and programmatic goals and outcomes.

Develops measurable criteria for success, in partnership with coachee, in the following areas:

- a. Expansion of the coachee's ability to **self reflect, self analyze and self modify**
- b. Shift in the coachee's **dispositions** (beliefs, attitudes and/or thinking) in relation to their individual practices and/or program framework
- c. Increase in the coachee's **skills and knowledge**.
- d. The coachee's improved **practices/application** of dispositions, skills, and knowledge, in relation to their individual and program goals

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## APPENDIX A

### Glossary of Terms

#### Consulting

A relationship in work or educational settings in which a person helps clarify immediate concerns and needs, and facilitates the resolution of specific work-related issues pertaining to individuals, clients, or programs.

Source: Combination of definitions from Concordia University, 2007; [www.mnsmart.org](http://www.mnsmart.org); and <http://community.fpg.unc.edu/discussions/wiki-pd-approaches>

#### Dispositions

The values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities and affect student learning, motivation, and development, as well as the educator's own professional growth. Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values, such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice.

Source: National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. 2002. *Professional standards for the accreditation of schools, colleges, and departments of education*. Washington, DC: Author.

#### Mentoring

A relationship in work or educational settings in which a respected, experienced person partners with a less experienced person to support and nurture personal and/or professional growth by providing and recommending structured opportunities for reflection and observation.

Source: Combination of definitions from Concordia University, 2007; [www.mnsmart.org](http://www.mnsmart.org); and <http://community.fpg.unc.edu/discussions/wiki-pd-approaches>

#### Parallel Process

When methods used by supervisors to address the concerns of workers are similar to those used by workers to address client problems and needs.

Source: Gutierrez, GlenMaye, & Delois, 1995; in *Supervision As Collaboration in the Human Services: Building a Learning Culture*, Karen Hopkins & Michael Austin, SAGE, 2004

#### Technical Assistance

A relationship in work or educational settings in which an expert with specific technical/content knowledge provides information and resources to individuals and their organizations to address an identified need and to improve performance.

Source: Combination of definitions from Concordia University, 2007; [www.mnsmart.org](http://www.mnsmart.org); and <http://community.fpg.unc.edu/discussions/wiki-pd-approaches>



## APPENDIX B

### The International Coach Federation CODE OF ETHICS

NOTE: This is not the full text of the ICF Code of Ethics. The Consortium has excerpted those portions most relevant to coaching initiatives in early childhood education. To view the complete document, go to <http://www.coachfederation.org>

#### Part One: The ICF Philosophy of Coaching

The International Coach Federation (ICF) adheres to a form of coaching that honors the client as the expert in his/her life and work and believes that every client is creative, resourceful, and whole.

Standing on this foundation, the coach's responsibility is to:

- Discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve;
- Encourage client self-discovery;
- Elicit client-generated solutions and strategies;
- Hold the client responsible and accountable.

#### Part Three: The ICF Standards of Ethical Conduct

##### Professional Conduct At Large

As a coach:

1. I will conduct myself in a manner that reflects positively upon the coaching profession, and I will refrain from engaging in conduct or making statements that may negatively impact the public's understanding or acceptance of coaching as a profession.
2. I will not knowingly make any public statements that are untrue or misleading, or make false claims in any written documents relating to the coaching profession.
3. I will respect different approaches to coaching. I will honor the efforts and contributions of others and not misrepresent them as my own.
4. I will be aware of any issues that may potentially lead to the misuse of my influence by recognizing the nature of coaching and the way in which it may affect the lives of others.
5. I will at all times strive to recognize personal issues that may impair, conflict or interfere with my coaching performance or my professional relationships. Whenever the facts and circumstances necessitate, I will promptly seek professional assistance and determine the action to be taken, including whether it is appropriate to suspend or terminate my coaching relationship(s).
6. I will accurately create, maintain, store and dispose of any records of work done in relation to the practice of coaching in a way that promotes confidentiality and complies with any applicable laws.

##### Professional Conduct with Clients

7. I will be responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern any physical contact that I may have with my clients.
8. I will not become sexually involved with any of my clients.
9. I will construct clear agreements with my clients, and will honor all agreements made in the context of

professional coaching relationships.

10. I will ensure that, prior to or at the initial session, my coaching client understands the nature of coaching, the bounds of confidentiality, financial arrangements and other terms of the coaching agreement.
11. I will accurately identify my qualifications, expertise and experience as a coach.
12. I will not intentionally mislead or make false claims about what my client will receive from the coaching process or from me as their coach.
13. I will not give my clients or prospective clients information or advice I know or believe to be misleading.
14. I will not knowingly exploit any aspect of the coach-client relationship for my personal, professional or monetary advantage or benefit.
15. I will respect the client's right to terminate coaching at any point during the process. I will be alert to indications that the client is no longer benefiting from our coaching relationship.
16. If I believe the client would be better served by another coach, or by another resource, I will encourage the client to make a change.
17. I will suggest that my clients seek the services of other professionals when deemed appropriate or necessary.
18. I will take all reasonable steps to notify the appropriate authorities in the event a client discloses an intention to endanger self or others.

#### **Confidentiality/Privacy**

19. I will respect the confidentiality of my client's information, except as otherwise authorized by my client, or as required by law.
20. I will obtain agreement from my clients before releasing their names as clients or references, or any other client identifying information.
21. I will obtain agreement from the person being coached before releasing information to another person compensating me.

*NOTE: Guidelines for sharing information may be established by particular coaching initiatives. These guidelines should be clearly communicated to coachees as part of the coaching agreement.*

#### **Conflicts of Interest**

22. I will seek to avoid conflicts between my interests and the interests of my clients.
23. Whenever any actual conflict of interest or the potential for a conflict of interest arises, I will openly disclose it and fully discuss with my client how to deal with it in whatever way best serves my client.
24. I will disclose to my client all anticipated compensation from third parties that I may receive for referrals of that client.