

**Strengthening Educator Social Emotional Learning Through Practice-Based Coaching
in Early Childhood Settings**

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A Professional Project Submitted to Western Oregon University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of:

Master of Science in Education

June 2026

MASTER'S DEGREE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Completion Term: Spring 2026

Type of exit requirement: Professional Project

The supervisory committee met with the candidate for a final evaluation in which all aspects of the candidate's program were reviewed. The committee's assessment and recommendations are:

Recommendations:

- ✓ Degree should be awarded

Recommendations:

- ✓ Exit Requirement has been approved
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Professional Project

Introduction

In early care and education (ECE) classrooms, educators weave moments of learning into everyday interactions—comforting a crying toddler, supporting a peer conflict, or guiding a child through frustration. These interactions are not incidental; they form the foundation of social and emotional learning (SEL). As the ECE field increasingly recognizes SEL as central to children’s development, school readiness, and long-term well-being, empirical research consistently demonstrates that high-quality SEL practices support emotional regulation, executive function, social competence, and engagement in learning while reducing challenging behaviors (Domitrovich et al., 2007; Hemmeter et al., 2016).

Despite this growing consensus, many ECE programs struggle to translate SEL theory into sustained, high-fidelity classroom practice embedded within daily routines. One-time workshops and isolated training events often increase teacher knowledge; however, findings regarding long-term implementation remain inconclusive without ongoing coaching and structured follow-up (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015). This gap between professional development and consistent classroom practice presents a persistent challenge in early childhood education.

This professional project addresses that gap through the development of a Practice-Based Coaching (PBC) Toolkit (binder) designed to support lead teachers in their role as emerging coaches. The project prepares and supports lead teachers as internal coaches and facilitators of SEL implementation. Rather than focusing on broad, simultaneous implementation across multiple centers, this project centers on building internal coaching capacity as the foundation for sustainable Pyramid Model implementation (Fixsen et al., 2005; Hemmeter et al., 2021; Snyder et al., 2015). The toolkit is designed for use within a facilitated Community of Practice (CoP),

where lead teachers engage in reflective dialogue, develop coaching dispositions, and apply structured coaching cycles to support classroom-based SEL practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Snyder et al., 2015).

Research Question

This project is guided by the following question:

How can practice-based coaching help early childhood educators strengthen their implementation of embedded social and emotional learning practices?

Professional Context and Leadership Commitment

My commitment to early care and education is rooted in more than three decades of professional experience. I have served as a preschool and kindergarten teacher and, for nearly two decades, as a director of schools and child care centers. Throughout my career, I have pursued roles that support educators, strengthen instructional practice, and cultivate professional growth. I believe deeply in strengths-based leadership and reflective practice. Supporting teachers to recognize their capacities, refine their practice, and grow in confidence continues to shape my professional identity.

Research and lived experience reinforce that stable, responsive relationships are foundational to children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Educators play a critical role in creating these relational conditions. As a leader, I intentionally cultivate positive relationships with staff, children, and families. I facilitate leadership structures, including weekly meetings with center directors, skip-level meetings with teachers, a biweekly director cohort, and a monthly lead teacher cohort titled *Leading Together*. These structures position collaboration, reflection, and coaching as central mechanisms for strengthening SEL implementation across classrooms.

This project builds directly on these leadership structures by deepening the role of lead teachers as instructional leaders and emerging coaches.

Context of the Project

Professional Role and Setting

This project takes place within a multi-site early care and education program serving children from six weeks to six years of age across four centers. The program serves infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children and employs approximately 30 full-time teaching staff.

In my leadership role, I oversee staff hiring and onboarding, professional development planning, policy development, and instructional leadership. I design and facilitate professional learning experiences and support the early stages of Pyramid Model implementation across centers. At the time of this project, multiple administrators have completed Pyramid Model train-the-trainer coursework, and the program is working toward building internal capacity for sustained implementation.

Background Information: Oregon State University Family Resource Center Early Care and Education Centers

The Oregon State University (OSU) Family Resource Center (FRC) Early Care and Education Centers operate across the Corvallis and Bend campuses. These centers serve infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children while functioning as essential student-success and employee-wellbeing resources for the broader university community. The centers operate under a model that blends high-quality early education practices, inclusive family engagement, and equitable access to comprehensive child and family support services.

Across the four ECE centers, the student body is socioeconomically and culturally diverse. Approximately 45% of enrolled children are from OSU parenting-student families,

meaning their parents are current OSU students balancing coursework, employment, and caregiving responsibilities. All parenting-student families qualify for a 50% reduced child-care tuition rate, allowing ECE access to remain attainable even for students with limited financial resources. Another 45% of children are from OSU employee families, reflecting the university's commitment to supporting staff and faculty wellbeing, retention, and work-life balance. The remaining 10% of enrolled children are community families funded through Oregon's Baby Promise program, a state-funded initiative designed to expand access to early learning for families who qualify for low-income status. Baby Promise families receive fully covered monthly child-care tuition, along with two free snacks, one free lunch daily, free formula, free bottles, and free diapers and wipes, providing comprehensive support that reduces economic barriers and ensures continuity of care.

The centers serve a highly diverse community, including a significant number of international student families representing countries across multiple continents. Many families speak languages other than English at home, adding rich cultural and linguistic diversity to the classroom context. This multilingual, multicultural community often benefits from additional communication support, cross-cultural relationship building, and intentional belonging-centered practices within the school. The centers' enrollment profile-spanning undergraduate and graduate parenting students, university staff and faculty, low-income community members, and international families, positions OSU FRC ECE programs as uniquely diverse early learning environments where children's and families' needs vary widely.

Together, these characteristics create a school context where equity-centered social-emotional learning is both essential and deeply relevant. The complexity of family backgrounds, financial circumstances, stress levels, cultural identities, and daily living demands highlights the

need for a schoolwide SEL implementation plan that strengthens adult SEL capacities, supports culturally responsive environments, and ensures that every child receives high-quality, relationship-centered SEL experiences across all classrooms and age groups.

Participants and Project Focus

This professional project focuses specifically on lead teachers participating in a Community of Practice, who are being prepared to take on coaching roles within their classrooms and teams. These educators bring varying levels of experience in leadership and coaching and represent a critical bridge between program-wide initiatives and daily classroom practice.

Rather than targeting all teaching staff directly, this project prioritizes lead teacher development as a strategic entry point for change, recognizing that these individuals will serve as key facilitators of coaching, modeling, and implementation support within their respective classrooms.

Professional development content aligns with the Pyramid Model for Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Young Children. The project intentionally selects and sequences pre-existing Pyramid Model materials, including: training visuals; coaching tools; self-assessment instruments; and implementation resources. By curating these materials into a coherent professional development toolkit, the project illustrates how evidence-based frameworks can be operationalized to build adult capacity and strengthen SEL implementation across classrooms.

Rationale and Need for the Project

Professional development in early childhood education frequently relies on episodic or one-time workshops. Although these sessions increase knowledge, they rarely lead to sustained instructional change without structured coaching and reflective feedback cycles (Artman-Meeker

et al., 2015). Teachers in my professional setting consistently express a desire for collaboration and reflection; however, formalized systems for sustained coaching and leadership development remain limited.

This project responds to a critical need to shift from isolated training toward coaching-supported, job-embedded professional learning systems. Research in implementation science emphasizes that sustainable change is most effective when it is phased, supported by internal capacity, and grounded in ongoing coaching (Fixsen et al., 2005).

Through both research and professional reflection, I recognized that attempting to implement the Pyramid Model broadly across multiple centers without first establishing strong coaching structures would limit long-term success. As a result, this project intentionally narrows its focus to developing a structured toolkit that supports lead teachers in their transition from peer to coach.

This identity shift is essential. Without intentional support, educators stepping into coaching roles may default to directive or evaluative practices, rather than engaging in reflective, collaborative coaching. By focusing on coaching dispositions, reflective practice, and structured PBC cycles, this project lays the groundwork for sustainable SEL implementation across classrooms.

This focus on lead teachers as emerging coaches is also particularly significant within the context of the current early childhood workforce crisis. Early childhood programs across the country continue to experience staffing shortages, educator burnout, turnover, and challenges sustaining high-quality professional learning systems. Within these realities, developing internal coaching capacity through lead teachers provides a more sustainable and relationship-centered approach to implementation support. Rather than relying solely on outside consultants or isolated

professional development events, this model strengthens leadership pathways from within programs while supporting ongoing reflection, collaboration, and educator growth over time. In this way, lead teachers serve as a critical “vehicle” for sustainable Pyramid Model implementation across classrooms and teaching teams.

Additionally, this work responds to broader workforce challenges in early childhood education, including burnout and turnover, by fostering professional agency, leadership pathways, and supportive learning communities.

Connection to Key Frameworks and Theoretical Lenses

Practice-Based Coaching (PBC)

Practice-Based Coaching (PBC) is an evidence-based professional development framework that improves instructional practice through collaborative goal setting, focused observation, and reflective feedback (Hemmeter et al., 2016). This project uses PBC not only as a structure, but as a coaching mindset, emphasizing relationships, strengths-based feedback, and educator agency.

Pyramid Model for Social and Emotional Learning

The Pyramid Model provides a tiered framework for promoting young children’s social and emotional competence through nurturing and responsive relationships, supportive learning environments, targeted social-emotional teaching strategies, and individualized interventions for children with persistent behavioral needs (Fox et al., 2010; Hemmeter et al., 2016). Within early childhood settings, social and emotional learning (SEL) includes children’s developing ability to identify and regulate emotions, build positive relationships, engage in problem-solving, demonstrate empathy, and participate successfully in social interactions (CASEL, 2020). This project aligns coaching tools and reflective processes with Pyramid Model practices, supporting

educators in intentionally embedding SEL into daily routines, interactions, and classroom environments with fidelity.

Adult Learning and Professional Identity Development

Grounded in andragogy (Knowles, 1973), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991), this project recognizes that adult learners construct meaning through reflection and experience. The Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) serves as a space for educators to develop coaching identities, engage in dialogue, and build leadership capacity.

Project Design Overview

This professional project centers on the development and implementation of a Practice-Based Coaching Toolkit/binder for lead teachers. The toolkit is designed to support coaching identity development, reflective practice, and structured coaching cycles within a Community of Practice.

Key components include:

- **Coaching Foundations and Identity Development**

Tools that support the shift from peer to coach, including reflection prompts, coaching dispositions, and language frameworks.

- **Practice-Based Coaching Tools**

Structured guides for goal setting, observation, and reflective feedback aligned with PBC cycles.

- **Coaching Language and Reflective Practice Resources**

Sentence starters, scenario-based exercises, and reflection tools to support a non-evaluative coaching stance.

- **Community of Practice Integration**

Materials designed for use within ongoing cohort meetings, supporting collaborative learning and sustained professional growth.

Alignment with M.S.Ed. Program Goals

This professional project aligns with the mission of the Western Oregon University Master of Science in Education program by integrating research, leadership, and practice to improve educational outcomes. It demonstrates the application of evidence-based frameworks in authentic settings, supports professional growth through reflective practice, and builds leadership capacity among educators.

By designing a coaching toolkit grounded in research and professional experience, this project reflects the program's emphasis on innovation, inquiry, and meaningful impact in educational practice.

Conclusion

Sustainable implementation of social-emotional learning in early childhood education requires more than training—it requires intentional systems of support grounded in relationships, reflection, and coaching. By focusing on the development of lead teachers as coaches, this project establishes a strategic and sustainable pathway for strengthening SEL practices across classrooms.

Through the creation of a Practice-Based Coaching toolkit and the facilitation of a Community of Practice, this project centers educator growth as the foundation for improving outcomes for young children, families, and the broader early learning community.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

For more than thirty years in early care and education (ECE), I have watched hundreds of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and kindergarteners learn to take their first turns, share their first toys, navigate their first conflicts, and discover the calming power of a trusted adult's presence. Long before I heard the term *social and emotional learning* (SEL), I witnessed children developing emotional regulation through simple routines with a trusted adult—during diaper changes, mealtimes, circle time gatherings, and moments of peer disagreement. What research now defines as SEL has long been central to early learning, even when the field lacked shared language or formalized frameworks to name and support it.

High-quality early care and education programs are strongly linked to children's social and emotional development. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines SEL as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve goals, feel empathy for others, establish supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (CASEL, 2020). In early learning settings serving children from approximately 6 weeks to 6 years of age, SEL develops through nurturing relationships, responsive environments, and intentional adult interactions. Educators play a central role in shaping these experiences, as children's social and emotional competencies are built through daily relational exchanges rather than isolated instructional moments.

Despite the recognized importance of SEL in early childhood, many educators receive limited pre-service or in-service preparation specific to SEL implementation. Professional development is often delivered through one-time trainings that increase awareness but do not

consistently translate into sustained classroom practice. Research increasingly demonstrates a persistent gap between SEL theory and implementation, particularly in emotionally demanding ECE environments characterized by high stress, limited resources, and high staff turnover. Without ongoing, job-embedded support, educators may struggle to integrate SEL practices with fidelity or sustain them over time.

Emerging evidence suggests that practice-based coaching (PBC) offers a promising response to this challenge. PBC is a collaborative, cyclical professional learning model that emphasizes goal setting, focused observation, reflection, and feedback. When educators engage in coaching relationships grounded in trust and reflective dialogue, they are more likely to translate SEL concepts into intentional practice embedded within daily routines and interactions. Coaching also provides relational and emotional support, which is particularly critical in trauma-impacted early childhood contexts where educator wellbeing directly influences instructional responsiveness.

As the director of campus-based early care and education programs considering implementing the Pyramid Model framework across multiple centers, this inquiry is grounded in both scholarly research and applied leadership experience. The literature review seeks to not only synthesize research, but to inform a practical, scalable professional learning model within a real-world early care and education system.

Guiding Question of the Literature Review

The guiding question informing this literature review is:

How can practice-based coaching help early childhood educators strengthen their implementation of embedded social and emotional learning practices?

To inform the design of the proposed professional development project, this review sought to understand:

1. What evidence exists supporting practice-based coaching (PBC) as a mechanism for changing educator practice?
2. How does adult SEL and educator wellbeing influence child SEL implementation?
3. What does research indicate about embedding SEL into daily early childhood practice?
4. What implementation systems support fidelity and sustainability of SEL initiatives?

This literature review synthesizes research across four interconnected themes that collectively address the implementation gap in early childhood SEL. The first theme examines practice-based coaching as a job-embedded professional learning framework and highlights its role in supporting the transfer of SEL practices from training into classroom implementation. The second theme explores educator readiness, adult SEL, and emotional wellbeing, emphasizing that adult social-emotional competence is a prerequisite for effective child SEL instruction. The third theme focuses on embedding SEL intentionally into daily practice and examines evidence linking embedded SEL to positive child outcomes, including social competence, executive function, and long-term wellbeing. The fourth theme draws on implementation science to examine coherence, fidelity, and sustainability, underscoring the importance of professional learning systems that integrate coaching, leadership support, and reflective collaboration.

Together, these themes position practice-based coaching as a central mechanism for strengthening SEL implementation in early childhood education. By attending to educator wellbeing, instructional intentionality, and system-level supports, the literature suggests that sustainable SEL practice requires more than curriculum adoption or isolated training events. This review provides the conceptual and empirical foundation for a professional project designed to operationalize these findings through a structured, coaching-centered SEL professional learning mode.

Methodology of Literature Review

This literature review was conducted using a structured search process designed to identify peer-reviewed empirical and theoretical studies related to social and emotional learning (SEL), practice-based coaching (PBC), and Implementation Science in early childhood education (ECE). Search was conducted between January 2025 and February 2026 using the following databases and websites:

- ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)
- WOU Hamersly Library
- National Institute of Health (NIH)
- Google Scholar
- National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI)
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Search terms included combinations of the following keywords:

- “Practice-based coaching” AND “early childhood”
- “Social emotional learning” AND “early childhood”
- “SEL implementation fidelity”

- “Adult SEL” AND “teacher wellbeing”
- “Pyramid Model” AND “coaching”
- “Early childhood implementation science”
- “Educator burnout” AND “early childhood”

Search terms that included “practice-based coaching,” “Pyramid Model,” and “implementation fidelity” yielded the most directly relevant results.

Articles were initially screened by title and abstract for alignment with the guiding question. Full-text review was conducted for studies that:

- Focused on birth–age 5 populations
- Addressed educator professional development or coaching
- Examined SEL practices or implementation systems
- Were published in peer-reviewed journals (2005–2025)

Priority was given to:

- Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods)
- Meta-analyses and systematic reviews
- Foundational SEL and Implementation Science literature

Studies focusing exclusively on K–12 contexts without early childhood relevance were excluded unless they provided foundational theoretical frameworks applicable to ECE.

Key Terms and Conceptual Definitions

For clarity and theoretical alignment, the following key terms are used throughout this literature review:

- **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL):** Defined by CASEL (2020) as the process through which individuals acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes to manage emotions, establish relationships, and make responsible decisions.
- **Practice-Based Coaching (PBC):** A cyclical professional learning model involving collaborative goal setting, focused observation, reflection, and feedback designed to support implementation of evidence-based practices (Snyder et al., 2015).
- **Adult SEL:** The social and emotional competence of educators, including emotional regulation, reflective capacity, empathy, and stress management, which influences classroom climate and child outcomes.
- **Embedded SEL:** The intentional integration of social-emotional practices within daily routines, interactions, and instructional planning rather than through isolated lessons.
- **Implementation Fidelity:** The degree to which practices are delivered as designed within an evidence-based framework (Century et al., 2010).

Literature Review Overview

This literature review is organized into four interconnected themes that collectively address the central guiding question. Each theme synthesizes empirical and theoretical literature and builds toward a coherent argument for a coaching-centered professional learning model in early childhood settings.

The four themes are:

- **Practice-Based Coaching as a Mechanism for Translating SEL into Practice**
- **Adult SEL, Educator Readiness, and Emotional Capacity**
- **Embedding SEL in Daily Practice and Its Impact on Child Outcomes**
- **Implementation Coherence, Fidelity, and Sustainability**

Each theme includes key subthemes and concludes with a brief synthesis that connects the literature to the overall project design.

Theme 1: Practice-Based Coaching as a Mechanism for Translating SEL into Practice

This first theme provides a working understanding of practice-based coaching (PBC) and explains why it is uniquely positioned to support sustained SEL implementation in early childhood settings. The literature in this section is organized into three subthemes:

1. The limitations of one-time training
2. PBC as a bridge between training and classroom practice
3. Coaching as a relational and fidelity-supportive system

The Limitations of One-Time Professional Development

A consistent finding across early childhood professional development literature is that workshop-based training alone rarely produces sustained changes in teacher behavior, particularly in complex relational domains such as SEL (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Zaslow et al., 2010; Fixsen et al., 2005). While training increases awareness and conceptual knowledge, it does not reliably translate into implementation fidelity.

Fixsen et al. (2005) found that training alone resulted in minimal transfer of skills to practice. In contrast, professional learning models that included coaching and performance feedback produced significantly higher implementation rates. Similarly, Joyce and Showers (2002) reported that fewer than 10% of educators implemented new instructional strategies after workshop-only training, compared to over 80% when coaching was included.

SEL implementation is particularly vulnerable to breakdown when professional development is limited to isolated training events. Educators must respond moment by moment

to children’s emotional cues. This work requires practice, reflection, and feedback—not simply exposure to strategies.

Practice-Based Coaching as a Bridge Between Training and Practice

Practice-based coaching (PBC) addresses this gap by offering a structured, cyclical process that includes collaborative goal setting, focused observation, reflection, and performance-based feedback (Snyder et al., 2015). Rather than assuming educators can independently apply new knowledge, PBC positions implementation as a supported learning process.

Rakap, Gulboy, and White (2025), in their meta-analysis of PBC research, found consistent improvements in educator practice quality when coaching cycles explicitly integrated observation and targeted goal setting. Similarly, Hemmeter et al. (2009, 2016) and Baughan et al. (2019) demonstrated that coaching was the primary driver of fidelity in Pyramid Model implementation.

These studies collectively indicate that fidelity is less a function of curriculum exposure and more a function of ongoing relational coaching support.

Coaching as a Relational and Fidelity-Supportive System

Schachter et al. (2022) found that effective coaching relies heavily on relational strategies such as active listening, modeling, co-reflection, and collaborative goal setting. Coaching is “relationship based, active and individualized... rather than a one-off training” (p. 3). These relational dynamics mirror the emotionally attuned interactions educators are expected to cultivate with children.

Golden et al. (2023) further demonstrated that even low-resource coaching models, such as text-based coaching, significantly increased teachers’ use of targeted SEL strategies. This

finding suggests that coaching need not be intensive to be impactful—but it must be sustained and structured.

Together, the literature indicates that coaching functions as the mechanism through which SEL training becomes embedded, consistent, and sustained.

Theme 1 Synthesis

Across studies, PBC emerges as a critical driver of sustained SEL implementation. Training introduces concepts. Coaching builds capacity. When coaching is embedded within professional learning systems, educators are more likely to translate SEL theory into consistent classroom practice. This theme establishes coaching as the foundation upon which the remaining themes are built.

Theme 2: Adult SEL, Educator Readiness, and Emotional Capacity

This theme examines educator readiness as a multidimensional construct influenced by emotional competence, stress levels, and access to reflective support. The literature suggests that adult SEL is not secondary to child SEL. It is a precondition for it.

Educator Emotional Labor and Stress

Early childhood educators engage in continuous emotional regulation while supporting children through distress, conflict, and transitions. Research indicates that educators in birth-to-five settings experience high levels of stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout (Jeon et al., 2018; Whitaker et al., 2015).

Exposure to trauma-impacted family contexts increases the risk of secondary traumatic stress (Lipscomb et al., 2013; Zarate et al., 2019). Without reflective or relational support, these stressors may limit educators' capacity to implement SEL practices consistently.

Readiness for Change and Emotional Capacity

Tidus and Williford (2025) found that educators' emotional regulation and reflective capacity significantly influenced their responsiveness to coaching. Educators demonstrating openness and emotional stability were more likely to integrate SEL strategies effectively. Conversely, educators experiencing chronic stress often required additional emotional and relational support before instructional change could occur. This suggests that readiness for change is not solely cognitive. It is emotional.

Coaching as Emotional and Reflective Support

Dolby et al. (2023) demonstrated that structured reflective practices, including video analysis and dialogue, supported educators' ability to remain emotionally available during stressful transitions. Zarate et al. (2019) similarly found that adult SEL interventions reduced stress and improved regulation. These findings position coaching not only as an instructional support, but as a trauma-informed, regulation-supportive professional learning structure.

Theme 2 Synthesis

Strengthening adult SEL and educator readiness is foundational to strengthening child SEL outcomes. Coaching creates psychologically safe spaces where educators can process emotional demands and engage in growth-oriented practice change. Without adult capacity, implementation fidelity is unlikely.

Theme 3: Embedding SEL in Daily Practice and Its Impact on Child Outcomes

Research consistently demonstrates that embedded, relational SEL practices produce stronger outcomes than isolated curricular approaches (Blewitt et al., 2021; Denham et al., 2012; Murano et al., 2020). In early childhood settings, SEL unfolds through daily interactions,

transitions, caregiving routines, and overall classroom climate (Hamre, 2014). Rather than existing as a discrete subject area, SEL is enacted moment by moment within the relational fabric of classroom life.

SEL as an Embedded, Relational Practice

Multiple studies highlight that early childhood educators view SEL as inherently integrated into their daily work. Blewitt et al. (2021), in a qualitative exploration of educators' perspectives, found that teachers described SEL as “embedded in what we do for every child” (p. 4). Participants emphasized that SEL occurs continuously through routines such as mealtimes, transitions, free play, and conflict resolution rather than through stand-alone lessons. Educators identified responsive language, emotional modeling, and relationship-building as central mechanisms for supporting children's development.

This perspective aligns with broader theoretical frameworks emphasizing the relational nature of early learning. Hamre (2014) argued that emotionally supportive teacher–child interactions serve as the primary pathway through which children develop self-regulation, social understanding, and emotional competence. From this standpoint, SEL is not an instructional add-on but a defining feature of high-quality early childhood practice. Effective implementation depends less on curriculum adoption and more on educators' capacity to embed supportive interactions consistently throughout the day.

Intentional SEL Planning and Instructional Alignment

Although SEL is inherently relational, research indicates that intentional planning strengthens its impact. Haslip and Terry (2023) found that individualized lesson planning aligned with SEL objectives was significantly associated with improvements in children's emotional

regulation, prosocial behavior, and social awareness. Their findings suggest that deliberate use of targeted teaching strategies directly supports children's social-emotional development.

Denham et al. (2012) similarly emphasized the importance of instructional alignment, noting that intentionally connecting emotional language, modeling, and guided practice supports children's social competence and problem-solving skills. While spontaneous, responsive interactions remain essential, intentional planning ensures that SEL opportunities are systematic rather than incidental. Together, this research suggests that embedded SEL is most effective when educators design environments that provide repeated, developmentally appropriate opportunities for children to practice and refine social-emotional skills.

Immediate Classroom-Level Outcomes of Embedded SEL

Embedded SEL practices are associated with measurable improvements within classroom contexts. In a meta-analysis of preschool SEL interventions, Murano et al. (2020) found moderate positive effects on children's social-emotional competence and behavior, particularly when practices were integrated consistently across classroom routines. These findings indicate that classroom-wide, sustained approaches produce stronger outcomes than isolated lessons.

Collectively, this research demonstrates that when SEL is intentionally woven into daily practice, educators observe tangible improvements in children's behavior, regulation, and social engagement within the classroom environment.

Longitudinal Impact of Early SEL

Beyond immediate classroom benefits, longitudinal research underscores the enduring impact of early social-emotional learning experiences. Nix et al. (2014) demonstrated that preschool interventions focused on social-emotional development predicted sustained improvements in executive function and academic adjustment in later grades. Similarly, Jones,

Greenberg, and Crowley (2015) found that kindergarten social competence significantly predicted later academic achievement, mental health outcomes, and overall wellbeing into adulthood.

These findings suggest that early SEL experiences establish foundational competencies that extend well beyond the preschool years. The developmental benefits of embedded SEL are not transient; rather, they contribute to long-term educational and public health outcomes.

Relationships Beyond the Classroom Context

Effective SEL implementation extends beyond classroom routines to include strong family–teacher partnerships and culturally responsive practices. Lewis et al. (2023) emphasize that when educators actively engage families and honor children’s cultural and relational contexts, social-emotional learning becomes more meaningful and developmentally aligned. Similarly, Driscoll and Pianta (2010) found that supportive teacher–family relationships are associated with improved child adjustment, classroom engagement, and emotional security.

Together, these studies suggest that embedded SEL is strengthened when relational systems extend across home and school environments. Continuity of emotional support across contexts reinforces children’s developing regulation skills and social competence, positioning family engagement as a core component of effective SEL implementation.

Theme 3 Synthesis

Collectively, the literature reviewed in this section demonstrates that embedded, intentional SEL practices support both immediate classroom functioning and long-term developmental outcomes. SEL is most effective when educators integrate social-emotional strategies consistently across routines, transitions, interactions, and instructional planning rather than treating SEL as a separate curriculum.

However, this body of literature also underscores a critical implication: embedded SEL requires intentionality, consistency, and educator capacity. High-quality implementation depends on educators' ability to plan for SEL, respond relationally in real time, and sustain emotionally supportive environments throughout the day. These demands reinforce the necessity of professional learning structures, such as practice-based coaching, that support educators in embedding SEL with fidelity and confidence. When SEL is intentionally woven into daily practice, it becomes a powerful mechanism for promoting children's lifelong wellbeing and success.

Theme 4: Implementation Science and Sustainability in SEL Systems

This final theme draws on implementation science to examine how SEL initiatives scale and sustain within real-world early childhood settings.

While substantial research has identified evidence-based SEL practices and frameworks, scholars consistently caution that “what works” under controlled conditions often fails to scale or sustain in real-world early childhood settings. This implementation gap is especially pronounced in early care and education (ECE) environments characterized by high staff turnover, limited resources, and emotionally demanding work. As a result, the literature increasingly highlights the need for coherent professional learning systems rather than isolated trainings to support high-fidelity, sustainable SEL implementation.

Implementation Science in Early Childhood Education Environments

Implementation science provides a valuable lens for understanding why many well-designed SEL initiatives fail to produce consistent outcomes when scaled across programs. Fixsen et al. (2005) argue that implementation is not a single event but a staged process that unfolds over time and requires attention to competency development, organizational supports,

and leadership alignment. Their synthesis of implementation research emphasizes that effective implementation depends not only on the intervention itself, but also on the systems and structures that enable practitioners to use new practices with fidelity. Without these system-level drivers, even evidence-based SEL frameworks struggle to sustain beyond initial training efforts.

Durlak and DuPre (2008) similarly emphasized that program outcomes are directly linked to implementation quality, noting that initiatives delivered with higher levels of fidelity produce stronger and more consistent effects. In early childhood settings—where SEL practices are enacted through dynamic daily interactions rather than scripted lessons—fidelity depends heavily on ongoing educator support, reflective opportunities, and alignment with program-wide expectations. Taken together, this body of research suggests that SEL implementation challenges are rarely due to ineffective practices themselves, but rather to insufficient attention to the systems that support their sustained use.

Fidelity, Coaching, and Program-Wide SEL Implementation

Within early childhood SEL frameworks, fidelity is increasingly understood as a system-level outcome, rather than an individual educator responsibility. Research on the Pyramid Model provides a strong illustration of this principle. Hemmeter et al. (2016) found that programs implementing the Pyramid Model with fidelity demonstrated significant improvements in classroom climate, teacher practices, and child social-emotional outcomes. Importantly, these outcomes were most evident in programs that invested in coaching, leadership support, and data-informed decision-making.

Subsequent studies further reinforce the role of coaching as a primary driver of fidelity. Hemmeter et al. (2021) demonstrated that professional development efforts incorporating coaching led to more consistent implementation of Pyramid Model practices and stronger child

outcomes than training alone. Fox et al. (2010) similarly emphasized that program-wide implementation requires intentional systems for professional development, coaching, and leadership to ensure practices are implemented as designed (p. 9). Their findings underscore that fidelity is not an individual educator responsibility, but a collective organizational effort. When coaching, leadership messaging, and professional development structures are aligned, educators are more likely to sustain SEL practices across classroom contexts.

These findings align with broader implementation science literature, underscoring that fidelity is not achieved through compliance or monitoring, but through supportive systems that build educator capacity over time. Coaching functions as the mechanism through which fidelity is nurtured, allowing educators to receive feedback, reflect on challenges, and adapt practices while maintaining alignment with evidence-based frameworks.

Coherent Professional Development Systems in Early Childhood Education

Beyond individual coaching relationships, the literature emphasizes the necessity of coherent professional development systems that integrate training, coaching, and leadership support. Zaslow et al. (2010) identified coherence as a defining feature of effective early childhood professional development, noting that fragmented or one-off learning opportunities rarely lead to sustained change. Instead, professional learning must be ongoing, aligned with practice, and embedded within organizational structures.

Desimone (2009) similarly argued that effective professional development is characterized by coherence, active learning, and sustained duration. In early childhood SEL initiatives, coherence involves aligning training content, coaching practices, and program expectations around shared SEL goals. Century, Freeman, and Rudnick (2010) further

emphasized that sustainable implementation depends on building internal capacity rather than relying solely on external experts.

Together, these studies suggest that professional development systems must be intentionally designed to support SEL implementation over time. When educators experience alignment across training, coaching, and leadership messaging, they are more likely to internalize practices and sustain them despite contextual challenges such as staffing changes or shifting priorities.

Implications for SEL Professional Development Design

The literature reviewed in this theme carries important implications for the design of SEL professional development initiatives in early childhood settings. First, it underscores the value of lead teachers as internal coaches, a strategy that builds organizational capacity while promoting sustainability. When coaching expertise is distributed within programs, SEL practices are less vulnerable to disruption caused by staff turnover or funding changes.

Second, the research highlights the role of communities of practice as a mechanism for sustaining learning and reflection. Ongoing collaborative spaces allow educators to share challenges, examine practice, and reinforce shared SEL commitments. Finally, the literature emphasizes the importance of aligning SEL initiatives with existing program structures and leadership priorities to avoid fragmentation and initiative fatigue.

These implications directly inform the design of professional learning models that integrate practice-based coaching, peer collaboration, and leadership support as interconnected components rather than standalone strategies. Within the context of ongoing workforce instability in early childhood education, these findings further support the importance of

developing lead teachers as internal coaching supports who can sustain reflective professional learning systems over time.

Theme 4 Synthesis

Collectively, the literature reviewed in this section demonstrates that implementation fidelity and sustainability of SEL practices depend on coherent, system-level professional learning structures. Evidence from implementation science and early childhood research consistently shows that training alone is insufficient to sustain SEL practices over time. Instead, high-quality SEL implementation emerges when programs invest in aligned systems that include coaching, leadership engagement, and ongoing opportunities for intentional reflection and learning.

This body of research reinforces a central argument of the literature review: practice-based coaching serves as the engine of SEL implementation, while coherent professional development systems function as the infrastructure that sustains it. By embedding coaching within broader organizational supports, early childhood programs are better positioned to maintain fidelity, adapt to contextual challenges, and ensure that SEL practices endure. These findings provide a strong theoretical and empirical foundation for the professional project described in the following section, which is designed to operationalize these principles through a structured, sustainable SEL professional learning model.

Gaps in the Literature

Although the literature demonstrates strong evidence for social and emotional learning (SEL) practices, practice-based coaching (PBC), and Implementation Science frameworks independently, several important gaps remain at their intersection. First, much of the SEL research base emphasizes either child-level outcomes or curriculum-based interventions, with

comparatively less attention to the professional learning structures required to sustain embedded SEL practices in early childhood settings serving children birth through age five. While studies highlight the importance of relational, classroom-wide SEL approaches, fewer examine how educators are supported over time to consistently implement these practices with fidelity.

Second, research on practice-based coaching in early childhood education frequently focuses on discrete skill acquisition or implementation of specific evidence-based practices. Although coaching has been identified as a primary driver of fidelity within frameworks such as the Pyramid Model, there appears to be limited scholarship that examines coaching as part of a comprehensive, system-level professional learning model that simultaneously addresses adult SEL, educator wellbeing, and long-term sustainability.

Third, Implementation Science literature underscores the importance of leadership alignment, organizational support, and coherent professional development systems. However, relatively few studies explore how these implementation factors function within multi-site early childhood systems, particularly those integrating coaching, peer collaboration, and internal capacity-building strategies such as lead teacher coaching models.

Finally, while adult SEL and educator wellbeing are increasingly recognized as foundational to child SEL outcomes, the research base remains fragmented. Studies often examine educator stress, burnout, or emotional competence separately from coaching and implementation fidelity. There is a need for integrated models that position adult SEL not only as a protective factor for educators, but as a structural component of sustainable SEL implementation.

Collectively, these gaps suggest the need for research and applied professional learning models that integrate practice-based coaching, adult SEL support, embedded instructional

strategies, and implementation science principles within cohesive early childhood systems.

Addressing these intersections may contribute to stronger fidelity, sustainability, and long-term impact of SEL initiatives in early care and education settings.

Conclusion

Across the literature reviewed, a clear and compelling picture emerges regarding how early childhood educators can best support social and emotional learning for children ages birth through 5 years. Collectively, the research underscores that effective SEL implementation is not achieved through isolated curricula or one-time professional development, but through relational, reflective, and systemically supported practices that attend to both child and educator needs. When examined together, the four themes of this literature review highlight the interdependence of coaching, adult SEL, embedded instructional practice, and implementation systems in sustaining high-quality SEL in early care and education settings.

The first theme establishes practice-based coaching as a critical mechanism for translating SEL knowledge into consistent classroom practice. Across studies, PBC emerges as an evidence-based approach that supports educators through collaborative goal setting, focused observation, feedback, and reflection. These coaching relationships help bridge the persistent gap between training and practice by providing job-embedded support that mirrors the relational nature of SEL itself. Particularly within Pyramid Model implementation, coaching is consistently identified as the primary driver of fidelity, underscoring its central role in supporting educators' use of SEL strategies within daily routines and interactions.

The second theme emphasizes the importance of educator readiness, adult SEL, and emotional wellbeing as foundational conditions for effective child SEL instruction. Research demonstrates that educators' capacity to model emotional regulation, engage empathically with

children, and sustain emotionally supportive environments is directly shaped by their own social-emotional competence and access to reflective support. In trauma-impacted early childhood contexts, where educators frequently navigate high levels of emotional labor, stress, and secondary trauma, professional learning models that center adult SEL and psychological safety are especially critical. Coaching is increasingly conceptualized not only as an instructional support, but as a regulation-supportive, trauma-informed space that promotes educator resilience and readiness for change.

The third theme highlights the significance of embedding SEL intentionally within daily practice to support positive child outcomes. Rather than being delivered through discrete lessons, SEL is most effective when woven throughout caregiving routines, transitions, play, and instructional planning. Research consistently links embedded SEL practices to improvements in children's social competence, emotional regulation, executive function, and long-term wellbeing. These findings reinforce that high-quality SEL implementation depends on educators' ability to respond relationally in real time and intentionally design environments that provide repeated opportunities for children to practice social-emotional skills.

Extending these findings, the fourth theme draws on implementation science to emphasize the importance of coherence, fidelity, and sustainability in SEL initiatives. The literature consistently demonstrates that training alone is insufficient to sustain SEL practices over time. Instead, sustainable implementation requires coherent professional learning systems that integrate coaching, leadership engagement, and ongoing opportunities for reflection and collaboration. Coaching functions as the engine of SEL implementation, while aligned professional development structures serve as the infrastructure that supports fidelity and endurance. Programs that invest in internal capacity—such as lead teacher coaching and

communities of practice—are better positioned to adapt to contextual challenges and maintain SEL practices despite staff turnover or resource constraints.

Taken together, these four themes reinforce the need for a holistic, systems-oriented approach to SEL professional learning in early childhood education. Effective SEL implementation requires attending simultaneously to educator practice, adult SEL and wellbeing, instructional intentionality, and organizational supports. Practice-based coaching emerges as a unifying framework that addresses these interconnected needs by supporting educator growth, emotional regulation, and sustained practice change.

This literature review provides a strong conceptual and empirical foundation for the professional project that follows, which is designed to operationalize these findings through a structured, coaching-centered SEL professional learning model. By integrating practice-based coaching, adult SEL supports, embedded instructional strategies, and coherent implementation systems, the proposed project seeks to strengthen educator capacity and promote sustainable SEL practices that support the long-term wellbeing and development of young children.

Chapter 3: Project Design and Development

Introduction

This chapter describes the design and development of a Practice-Based Coaching Toolkit for lead teachers to support Pyramid Model implementation in early care and education settings serving children from birth to age five. Drawing on the research presented in Chapter 2, this chapter outlines the context in which the project was developed, the methods used to design the toolkit, and the process of bringing the project to completion.

The project is grounded in four key frameworks identified in the literature: Practice-Based Coaching as a professional learning model, the Pyramid Model as a social-emotional framework for young children, the CASEL framework as a foundation for adult social-emotional competence, and implementation science as a guide for sustainable and high-fidelity practice. This chapter details how these frameworks informed the development of a practical, accessible toolkit designed to bridge research and daily classroom implementation.

Context

Professional Role and Setting

I serve as the Director of Campus Early Care and Education at Oregon State University within the Family Resource Center. In this role, I oversee four early care and education centers serving children from infancy through preschool age. These centers include a mix of full-day, year-round programs and a short-term care model designed to support student parents and university-affiliated families.

Across the four centers, we serve a diverse population of families, including undergraduate and graduate student parents, university employees, and community members.

The programs operate within a university context, which presents both opportunities and complexities, including a high reliance on student employees and ongoing workforce challenges.

Demographics and Data

Based on internal enrollment data and administrative records from the Oregon State University Family Resource Center Early Care and Education Centers, approximately 45% of enrolled children are from parenting-student families, 45% are from university employee families, and 10% are community members supported through state-funded programs such as Baby Promise. Many families served include international students and families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The workforce includes a combination of full-time professional educators and student employees, creating a dynamic but often unstable staffing structure. Like many early childhood programs nationally, the centers are navigating an ongoing workforce crisis, including staffing shortages, turnover, and limited substitute pools. These realities directly impact program quality, consistency, and the ability to implement new initiatives effectively. These demographic estimates are derived from program enrollment patterns observed through my administrative role overseeing the centers.

Personal Connection and Positionality

With over 30 years of experience in early childhood education, including roles as a preschool and kindergarten teacher and more than 20 years in leadership positions, I bring a strengths-based, relational approach to my work. I am deeply committed to professional development, educator's growth, and creating high-quality learning environments for young children.

My leadership philosophy centers on the belief that strong relationships, reflective practice, and ongoing learning are essential for both educator effectiveness and child outcomes. This project reflects my passion for supporting educators in meaningful, sustainable ways and my belief that coaching, rather than compliance-based professional development, is the most effective path toward lasting change.

The Identified Need

The need for this project emerges from the intersection of several factors: increasing expectations for social-emotional learning in early childhood, state policy shifts prohibiting suspension and expulsion in early learning settings, and the realities of a strained early childhood workforce. While the Pyramid Model provides a comprehensive framework for supporting children's social-emotional development, educators often struggle to translate the framework into daily classroom practice without sustained support. Additionally, traditional professional development models are insufficient for building the depth of understanding and skill required for implementation.

There is a clear need for a structured, accessible system that supports educators in implementing Pyramid Model practices through ongoing coaching. Specifically, there is a need to build the capacity of lead teachers to serve as peer coaches, supporting their colleagues through Practice-Based Coaching. This project addresses that need by developing a practical toolkit designed to guide and support lead teachers in this role.

Design Methods

Research Process

The development of this project was informed by an extensive review of literature related to Practice-Based Coaching, social-emotional learning, the Pyramid Model, adult learning

theory, and implementation science. Research was conducted using academic databases including ERIC and Google Scholar, as well as professional resources and publications from organizations specializing in early childhood education.

Search terms included “practice-based coaching,” “Pyramid Model,” “early childhood social-emotional learning,” “adult SEL,” “implementation fidelity,” and “professional learning communities.” Sources were selected based on relevance, credibility, and alignment with the project’s focus, with an emphasis on peer-reviewed research and widely recognized frameworks in the field.

The literature highlighted the importance of coaching as an effective professional learning strategy, the role of adult social-emotional competence in implementation, and the need for structured systems to support fidelity and sustainability.

Reflection and Revision Process

As I began developing this professional project, my initial focus was broad in scope, centered on the implementation of the Pyramid Model framework across two of our Early Care and Education centers. This approach reflected both the urgency and importance of program-wide social-emotional learning support, as well as my leadership role in advancing this work across multiple sites. However, as I progressed through my research, writing, and early stages of design, it became increasingly clear that the scope of the project needed to be refined in order to create a meaningful, manageable, and high-quality outcome.

Through ongoing reflection and feedback, I recognized the importance of narrowing my focus and “starting somewhere” with intentionality. This realization was grounded in both the literature and my professional context. Research on implementation science emphasizes that sustainable change requires attention to competency development, coaching structures, and

phased implementation rather than attempting broad, simultaneous systems change (Fixsen et al., 2005). Additionally, literature on Practice-Based Coaching highlights the critical role of coaching cycles (goal setting, focused observation, and reflective feedback) in supporting educator practice and ensuring fidelity of implementation (Snyder et al., 2015).

As a result of this reflection, I shifted the focus of my project from large-scale Pyramid Model implementation to the development of a targeted coaching toolkit (binder) designed specifically for the lead teachers I am mentoring through a Community of Practice (CoP). This decision represents strategic and research-informed refinement. This refinement was also informed by the realities of the current early childhood workforce crisis and the need for sustainable implementation systems that can be maintained within existing program structures. Developing lead teachers as internal coaches creates opportunities for distributed leadership, ongoing reflective support, and professional growth pathways that strengthen programs from within while supporting long-term Pyramid Model implementation.

Rather than attempting to directly implement the Pyramid Model across multiple centers, this project prioritizes supporting and building the capacity of lead teachers who will, in turn, serve as coaches and key drivers of implementation within their own classrooms and teams.

This shift also reflects a deeper understanding of adult learning and professional identity development. Through both research and practice, I came to recognize that one of the most critical entry points for successful implementation is supporting educators in making the identity shift from peer/colleague to coach. This transition requires intentional support in developing reflective practices, adopting a non-evaluative stance, and building the dispositions necessary for effective coaching relationships. Without this foundational work, coaching efforts may default to directive or evaluative approaches, limiting their effectiveness and sustainability.

The development of this toolkit, therefore, is not simply a collection of resources: it is a structured support system designed to guide lead teachers through this identity shift and into effective coaching practice. It incorporates reflection tools, coaching language supports, and structured opportunities for ongoing learning within the CoP framework. By beginning with this focused group of emerging coaches, the project establishes a strong foundation for broader Pyramid Model implementation, aligning with both implementation science principles and the long-term vision for program-wide SEL integration.

This reflection and revision process has been a critical component of my learning. It has strengthened my understanding of how to translate research into practice, reinforced the importance of strategic focus, and deepened my appreciation for the complexity of systems change in early learning environments. Ultimately, narrowing the scope of this project has resulted in a more intentional, impactful, and sustainable approach—one that centers educator growth as the foundation for improving outcomes for young children.

Design Decisions and Rationale

The design of the toolkit was guided by several key decisions grounded in the literature. First, the decision to center the project on Practice-Based Coaching reflects research demonstrating that coaching is more effective than traditional professional development in changing educator practice (Fixsen et al., 2005; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Snyder et al., 2015; Hemmeter et al., 2016). The cyclical structure of goal setting, observation, and reflection provides a practical and sustainable framework for professional growth.

Second, the integration of the Pyramid Model as the content focus ensures alignment with evidence-based practices for supporting young children's social-emotional development.

Organizing the toolkit around the Pyramid Model tiers supports clarity and usability for educators.

Third, the inclusion of adult social-emotional learning components reflects research emphasizing that educator well-being, self-awareness, and emotional regulation are foundational to effective teaching and implementation of SEL practices.

Finally, the incorporation of implementation science principles informed the inclusion of fidelity tools, coaching logs, and systems for ongoing support. These elements are critical for ensuring that the work is not only initiated but sustained over time.

Project Description

The final product is a comprehensive Practice-Based Coaching Toolkit designed for lead teachers in early care and education settings. The toolkit is intended to be used as both a physical binder and a digital resource, providing flexibility and accessibility for educators.

The toolkit is organized into three major sections:

1. Foundations and Coaching Mindset

Provides an overview of the Pyramid Model, the role of social-emotional learning, and the program's coaching philosophy. This section also supports the identity shift from peer/colleague to coach, including reflection tools and key coaching dispositions.

2. The Practice-Based Coaching Cycle

Serves as the anchor of the toolkit and includes templates and tools for goal setting, focused observation, and reflective feedback.

3. Adult SEL and Reflective Practice

Provides tools to support educator self-awareness, emotional regulation, and reflective

practice, reinforcing the role of adult social-emotional competence in effective implementation.

This structure was intentionally designed to balance theoretical grounding with practical application, ensuring that the toolkit is both comprehensive and user-friendly.

Tools and Resources

The development of this project utilized a combination of digital and professional resources. These included word processing and document design tools for creating the toolkit, as well as existing professional resources related to the Pyramid Model and coaching practices. The completed toolkit will be shared with the project committee through a Google document link for review and accessibility. For implementation within the early care and education program, the toolkit will be provided to lead teachers in both digital Word document format and as a printed hard-copy binder to support ongoing access and practical use during coaching and Community of Practice activities.

In addition, collaboration with colleagues, including center directors and lead teachers, informed the design process by providing insight into practical needs and usability considerations. Existing professional development structures, such as Communities of Practice and coaching cohorts, also informed the design and intended implementation of the toolkit.

Timeline

The project was developed over two academic terms, following a phased approach:

- **Phase 1 (Winter Term): Research and Planning**

Conduct literature review, identify key frameworks, and develop initial project concept and structure.

- **Phase 2 (Late Winter Term): Initial Design**

Create the outline and initial components of the toolkit, including templates and organizational structure.

- **Phase 3 (Early Spring Term): Development and Refinement**

Expand toolkit sections, align content with research, and refine tools for usability.

- **Phase 4 (Late Spring Term): Finalization**

Complete final revisions, organize materials for presentation, and prepare Chapter 4 artifacts.

Evaluation Procedures

The quality and effectiveness of the project will be evaluated through feedback from professional colleagues, including center directors, lead teachers, and coaching participants through Community of Practice cohorts. Feedback will focus on usability, clarity, alignment with practice, and relevance to educator needs.

As elements of the toolkit are implemented in real-time within the program, informal feedback and observations will be used to inform revisions. Indicators of effectiveness may include increased educator confidence, improved implementation of Pyramid Model practices, and enhanced engagement in coaching processes.

Ethical Considerations

This professional project involved the design and creation of educational materials and did not involve the collection of data from human subjects. Therefore, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was not required.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the context, design process, and structure of the Practice-Based Coaching Toolkit developed for this project. Grounded in research and informed by real-world practice, the toolkit is designed to support lead teachers in implementing coaching practices and the Pyramid Model within early care and education settings. Chapter 4 will present the toolkit itself, including sample artifacts and materials developed through this project.

Chapter 4: The Project

This professional project resulted in the development of a *Practice-Based Coaching Toolkit* for Lead Teachers, designed to support the implementation of Pyramid Model-aligned social-emotional learning (SEL) practices across Oregon State University Family Resource Center early care and education programs. The purpose of this project is to address the identified problem of practice described in Chapter 1: while there is increasing recognition of the importance of social-emotional learning, inclusion, and relationship-based practices in early childhood settings, lead teachers often need practical structures, coaching tools, and reflective supports to strengthen their capacity to coach teaching teams in implementing these practices consistently and sustainably. In response to this need, and informed by the research presented in Chapter 2, this project is designed as a practical, research-informed toolkit to support lead teachers in developing coaching knowledge, strengthening reflective practice, and building confidence in facilitating Practice-Based Coaching cycles.

Grounded in the literature on Practice-Based Coaching (Snyder et al., 2015), the Pyramid Model (Hemmeter et al., 2016), educator social-emotional competence, and implementation science (Fixsen et al., 2005), the toolkit translates research into a usable professional resource for practice. The project reflects a shift from an earlier, broader implementation plan toward a more focused and feasible product: a toolkit that supports lead teachers as the coaching “vehicle” for broader Pyramid Model implementation.

Project Overview

The completed project is organized as a professional coaching toolkit/binder consisting of three major sections: (1) Foundations of Coaching Mindset; (2) The Practice-Based Coaching Cycle; (3) Adult SEL and Reflective Practice. Together, these sections include original artifacts created for this project, as well as curated evidence-based resources drawn from Pyramid Model and Head Start materials to support implementation. The intended audience for the toolkit is lead teachers serving in coaching roles within early childhood settings, particularly those transitioning from peer or colleague roles into Practice-Based Coaching roles. The toolkit is also designed to support use within Communities of Practice meetings and ongoing professional development contexts.

The toolkit was intentionally designed with the understanding that developing a coaching identity is an ongoing process that occurs over time through reflection, dialogue, and repeated opportunities for practice within Communities of Practice. While several artifacts share common themes such as reflective practice, emotionally supportive coaching, and adult social-emotional learning, each artifact serves a distinct purpose within the coaching process. Some tools focus on strengthening reflective communication and coaching language, while others support emotional awareness, implementation planning, coaching identity development, or ongoing self-assessment. Together, the artifacts are intended to function as interconnected supports that build upon one another throughout the first year of coaching development and implementation.

This chapter presents the completed project by highlighting key components and representative artifacts from each section of the toolkit. While the full project is included in the shared Google Drive folder, this chapter provides a detailed overview of a selected few artifacts that illustrate the design, structure, and research-based foundations of the project. Each

highlighted artifact is described in terms of its purpose, content, and connection to the literature and professional standards that informed its development.

Detailed Presentation of the Project

The following section presents selected artifacts from the Practice-Based Coaching Toolkit developed for this professional project. To illustrate the structure, purpose, and research-based foundations of the toolkit, this chapter highlights representative artifacts from each of the three major sections: (1) Foundations of Coaching Mindset; (2) The Practice-Based Coaching Cycle; and (3) Adult SEL and Reflective Practice. Each artifact is described in relation to its intended purpose, connection to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and role in supporting lead teachers in implementing reflective, relationship-based coaching practices within early childhood settings. The artifacts are designed to be used within Communities of Practice meetings, small-group discussions, one-on-one coaching conversations, and before and after focused observation and reflection sessions as part of ongoing Practice-Based Coaching cycles.

Section 1: Foundations of Coaching Mindset

This section focuses on supporting lead teachers in developing the foundational mindset, reflective dispositions, communication shifts, and relationship-centered practices needed to engage in effective Practice-Based Coaching. These artifacts primarily support the transition from peer or colleague roles into reflective coaching roles by helping educators strengthen coaching language, reflective dialogue, curiosity, and collaborative communication practices.

The artifacts included in this section are designed to support the transition from peer or colleague roles into reflective coaching roles by emphasizing strengths-based communication, curiosity, self-awareness, and relationship-centered coaching practices. Through reflective prompts, coaching sentence stems, and coaching language tools, these resources help coaches

build confidence in facilitating collaborative conversations that support educator growth and psychologically safe professional learning environments. These artifacts are intended to be used within Communities of Practice meetings, small-group reflection activities, and one-on-one coaching conversations to strengthen coaching capacity and support sustainable implementation of Pyramid Model-aligned practices.

Figure 1: Coaching Sentence Stems to Strengthen Coaching Conversations

Coaching Sentence Stems to Strengthen Coaching Conversations	Reflection for Coaches
Directions: Use these sentence stems as prompts during coaching conversations, reflection meetings, or observation feedback discussions. Select stems that feel natural to you and practice integrating them into your coaching language over time. Sentence Stems to Invite Reflection Use these prompts to encourage thinking, reflection, and self-discovery. • What are you noticing about...? • What do you make of...? • What feels important here? • What might you try next? • What stood out to you <i>in</i> that moment? • What are you wondering about now? • What do you think contributed to that outcome? Sentence Stems to Lead with Curiosity Use these prompts to explore ideas and open dialogue. • Tell me more about that. • I'm wondering... • What do you think contributed to that? • What possibilities do you see? • What might be another perspective? • What do you think is beneath that challenge? • What feels worth exploring together? Sentence Stems to Honor Strengths Use these prompts to help teachers identify strengths and build from what is working. • What felt effective to you? • Where do you see your strengths showing up here? • What is already working that we can build on? • What supported your success <i>in</i> that moment? • What did you do that seemed to support children well? • What strengths do you want to carry forward?	After a coaching conversation, reflect: When did I slip into advising or problem-solving? When did I use curiosity and reflective questioning? Which coaching phrases felt natural to me? Which ones do I want to practice more intentionally? Practice Goal One sentence stem I want to intentionally practice this week: How I will use it in a coaching conversation: Reminder Coaching is not about having the answers. Coaching is about creating the conditions for reflection, growth, and shared learning.

As shown in Figure 1, this artifact supports lead teachers in strengthening reflective coaching conversations through the intentional use of coaching language. The sentence stems help coaches shift from directive responses toward curiosity, reflection, and collaborative dialogue during Practice-Based Coaching conversations.

This artifact aligns with research emphasizing that effective Practice-Based Coaching is grounded in reflective dialogue, collaborative communication, and relationship-based support that promotes educator growth and sustained implementation of effective practices (Snyder et al., 2015; Schachter et al., 2022). Unlike other reflective tools included later in the toolkit, this artifact specifically focuses on strengthening coaching communication skills and helping lead teachers practice non-evaluative, strengths-based language during coaching conversations. The tool also reflects adult learning and implementation science research highlighting the importance of psychologically safe coaching interactions that support professional growth and implementation fidelity (Knowles, 1973; Fixsen et al., 2005).

Figure 2: From Peer Language to Coach Language

From Peer Language to Coach Language

Instead of Saying (Peer Language)	Try Saying (Coaching Language)	Coaching Intention
Here's what I would do.	What options have you considered?	Promote reflection and decision-making
You should try...	What might happen if you tried...?	Invite exploration rather than direct
Let me tell you how I handle that.	What have you already tried?	Honor existing strengths and experience
That didn't work.	What did you notice about how that went?	Encourage reflection without judgment
Let me fix that for you.	How can I support your thinking about this?	Position the coach as partner
I think you need to...	What feels like a next step for you?	Support ownership
You might be doing too much.	What <i>feels</i> manageable right now?	Use empathy and reflection
I would have handled that differently.	What are you wondering about after that experience?	Open reflective dialogue
Here's the problem I see.	What challenge feels most important to think through together?	Co-define challenges
Good job.	What do you think went well?	Deepen self-reflection beyond praise
That was hard.	What helped you get through that moment?	Surface strengths and resilience
Don't forget to...	What supports would help you remember or plan for that?	Build problem-solving

As shown in Figure 2, this artifact supports lead teachers in shifting from peer-based habits of advising and directing toward reflective coaching language grounded in curiosity, collaboration, and partnership. The tool provides practical examples of language shifts that strengthen reflective dialogue, support adult learning, and build trust within Practice-Based Coaching conversations.

This artifact aligns with research emphasizing that effective Practice-Based Coaching is grounded in reflective dialogue, collaborative communication, and relationship-based support that promotes educator growth and sustained implementation of effective practices (Snyder et al., 2015; Schachter et al., 2022). Unlike other reflective tools included later in the toolkit, this artifact specifically focuses on strengthening coaching communication skills and helping lead teachers practice non-evaluative, strengths-based language during coaching conversations. The tool also reflects adult learning and implementation science research highlighting the importance of psychologically safe coaching interactions that support professional growth and implementation fidelity (Knowles, 1973; Fixsen et al., 2005).

Figure 3: Head-Heart-Hands Reflection for Coaches

Head-Heart-Hands Reflection for Coaches	
Directions: Use this tool independently, during coaching preparation, or as a reflection activity within a Community of Practice. Respond to each section honestly. Revisit the tool over time to notice growth and emerging insights. Head What am I learning about being a coach? Reflect on your developing understanding, insights, and shifts in thinking. • What am I learning about the role of a coach? • What new understandings do I have about coaching as partnership? • What am I learning about using reflection, curiosity, and listening? • What assumptions about coaching am I examining or rethinking? • What is stretching my thinking as I grow into this role? Reflection Notes:	Hands What actions will I take to strengthen my coaching practice? Reflect on intentional actions and next steps. • What coaching practices do I want to strengthen? • What is one action I can take to deepen trust in a coaching relationship? • What is one reflective question or coaching strategy I want to practice? • What support or resources would help me continue growing? • What is one next step I will take in my coaching practice? Reflection Notes:
Heart What feelings arise as I move from peer to coach? Reflect on emotions, tensions, and internal responses connected to this identity shift. • What feelings come up as I move into a coaching role? • Where do I feel confident? • Where do I feel uncertain or uncomfortable? • What tensions do I notice in balancing peer relationships and coaching responsibilities? • How is trust <u>influencing</u> my experience in this role? Reflection Notes:	Growth Commitment One insight I want to carry forward: One action I commit to taking: Community of Practice Discussion Be prepared to share these prompts in our next Community of Practice group: • What emotions or tensions are common in this identity shift? • How can we support one another as we grow into coaching roles? Reminder Coaching growth is developmental. Reflection helps turn experience into <u>learning</u>, and learning into intentional practice.

As shown in Figure 3, this artifact supports lead teachers in reflecting on their evolving identity as coaches through the Head-Heart-Hands framework. The tool encourages self-awareness, emotional reflection, and intentional goal setting as coaches transition from peer relationships toward reflective, relationship-based coaching practices.

This artifact aligns with research emphasizing that reflective practice, adult social-emotional competence, and emotionally supportive coaching structures are essential components of effective Practice-Based Coaching and sustained implementation of new practices (Dolby et al., 2023; Snyder et al., 2015). Unlike the previous artifacts that focus primarily on communication and coaching language, this reflection tool centers on emotional awareness, coaching identity development, and intentional self-reflection as educators transition into leadership and coaching roles. The tool also reflects adult learning and implementation science research highlighting the importance of emotional readiness, reflective dialogue, and self-awareness in supporting long-term professional growth (Knowles, 1973; Fixsen et al., 2005).

Section 2: The Practice-Based Coaching Cycle

This section of the toolkit focuses on supporting lead teachers in implementing the core components of the Practice-Based Coaching (PBC) cycle, including collaborative goal setting, focused observation, reflective feedback, and action planning. The artifacts included in this section are designed to provide practical structures and tools that guide coaches through ongoing coaching conversations and support consistent, strengths-based implementation of Pyramid Model-aligned practices. Through planning templates, reflective coaching tools, and observation supports, this section emphasizes collaborative reflection, educator agency, and relationship-based coaching practices. These artifacts are intended to be used during one-on-one coaching meetings, before and after classroom observations, and within Communities of Practice discussions to support ongoing professional growth, implementation fidelity, and sustainable coaching systems within early childhood settings. Unlike the mindset-focused artifacts presented in Section 1, the tools in this section are designed to support the organizational and implementation structures of the coaching cycle itself, including planning, observation, reflection, and collaborative goal setting.

Figure 4: Coaching Language Shift Tool: From Telling to Reflective Coaching

**Coaching Language Shift Tool:
From Telling to Reflective Coaching**

Directions:

Review the statements below and practice shifting from "telling" language to reflective coaching language. Use these examples as a guide during coaching conversations. Notice which types of statements feel most natural and which require more intentional practice.

Instead of saying...	Try saying...
You should try...	What have you tried so far?
That didn't work because...	What do you think contributed to that outcome?
Here's what I would do...	What might be another approach?
They need more structure	What patterns are you noticing?
You need to fix this	What feels most important to address right now?
That's not developmentally appropriate	How does this align with what we know about child development?
You handled that wrong	What do you think went well? What might you try differently?
Just follow the plan	How is the plan working for you and the children?
They're not listening	What do you notice about how they are responding?
You need to be more consistent	What routines feel most predictable right now?
Try this strategy	Would you like to explore some strategies together?
You need better transitions	What is happening during transitions?
That behavior is a problem	What might the child be communicating?
You need to calm down	What are you noticing in yourself right now?
That parent is difficult	What might be their perspective?

Reflection Questions

After using this tool, reflect:

- When do I tend to default to "telling" or advising?
- Which reflective questions feel most natural for me to use?
- Which language shifts feel challenging or unfamiliar?
- How does shifting my language impact the tone and trust in my coaching conversations?
- How might this shift support teacher reflection and growth?

Growth Goal

One coaching language shift I want to strengthen is:

One action I will take to practice this shift is:

Follow-Up Discussion for Community of Practice Coaching Cohorts

Be prepared to discuss:

- What language shifts felt most natural?
- What felt challenging when moving away from advising?
- How did reflective language impact your coaching conversations?
- How can we support one another in strengthening reflective coaching language?

Reminder:

Shifting from telling to reflective coaching is a developmental process. With intentional practice, coaching language becomes more natural and strengthens relationships, trust, and meaningful professional growth.

As shown in Figure 4, this artifact supports coaches in shifting from directive, advice-giving language toward reflective, curiosity-based coaching conversations. The tool provides practical examples of language shifts that encourage educator reflection, collaborative problem-solving, and trust within Practice-Based Coaching cycles.

This artifact aligns with research emphasizing that effective Practice-Based Coaching relies on reflective dialogue, collaborative communication, and relationship-based coaching practices rather than directive feedback or evaluation (Snyder et al., 2015; Schachter et al., 2022). The tool also reflects adult learning and implementation science research highlighting the importance of psychologically safe coaching environments, reflective practice, and educator agency in supporting sustained professional growth and implementation fidelity (Knowles, 1973; Fixsen et al., 2005).

Figure 5: Practice-Based Coaching Cycle Planning and Reflection Template

Practice-Based Coaching Cycle Planning and Reflection Template Directions: Use this template to prepare for, document, and reflect on one coaching cycle. Complete each section during the planning, observation, and reflection phases of the PBC cycle. Use the prompts to support intentional coaching and collaborative dialogue. Practice-Based Coaching Cycle Planning Template 1. Shared Goal Setting Teaching practice or focus area: Why is this goal meaningful right now? How does this connect to children's social-emotional learning, inclusion, or Pyramid Model practices? How was this goal co-developed with the teacher? 2. Focused Observation Planning What specific practices or indicators will I observe?	What evidence or examples will I note? What am I listening and looking for during the observation? 3. Reflective Feedback Planning Strengths I want to name or reinforce: Reflective questions I may use to facilitate thinking: Possibilities or next ideas I may help the teacher explore: 4. Next Steps and Action Plan One action the teacher will try before our next check-in: Support I will provide as coach:
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As shown in Figure 5, this artifact supports coaches in organizing, documenting, and reflecting on the Practice-Based Coaching cycle through intentional planning, focused observation, reflective feedback, and collaborative goal setting. The template helps translate Practice-Based Coaching processes into consistent, strengths-based coaching practices that support reflection, implementation, and ongoing professional growth.

This artifact aligns with research emphasizing that effective Practice-Based Coaching supports sustained educator growth through collaborative goal setting, focused observation, reflective feedback, and ongoing coaching cycles grounded in supportive relationships (Snyder et al., 2015; Hemmeter et al., 2016). Unlike earlier artifacts focused on coaching identity and communication, this tool is designed to support the practical implementation and organization of the coaching cycle itself. The template helps coaches document observations, organize reflection, monitor progress, and strengthen implementation fidelity over time. The tool also reflects Implementation Science research highlighting the importance of coherent systems, ongoing

reflection, and structured supports in sustaining evidence-based instructional change (Fixsen et al., 2005; Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

Section 3: Adult SEL and Reflective Practice

This section of the toolkit focuses on strengthening adult social-emotional learning (SEL), self-awareness, emotional regulation, and reflective practice as foundational components of effective coaching and teaching in early childhood settings. The artifacts included in this section are designed to support educators and coaches in reflecting on their own emotional responses, stress management, communication practices, and professional growth while engaging in relationship-based work with children, families, and colleagues. Through reflective prompts, self-assessment tools, and guided coaching conversations, this section emphasizes the importance of adult wellbeing, emotionally supportive professional learning environments, and psychologically safe coaching relationships. These artifacts are intended to be used within Communities of Practice meetings, reflective supervision conversations, individual coaching sessions, and ongoing professional development activities to support educator resilience, reflective capacity, and sustainable implementation of social-emotional learning practices. Whereas earlier sections focus primarily on coaching mindset and implementation structures, the artifacts in this section extend more intentionally into adult social-emotional learning, emotional awareness, stress management, and reflective capacity as foundational support for sustainable coaching and teaching practices.

Figure 6: Adult SEL and Reflective Practice

Adult SEL & Reflective Practice	
Directions for Coaches Use these reflective sentence starters to guide supportive coaching conversations that promote educator self-awareness, emotional regulation, and professional growth. These questions are intended to invite reflection—not to evaluate, <u>problem-solve</u>, or offer immediate advice. Select one or two questions at a time based on the educator's needs and the context of the conversation. Allow space for pause, listening, and deeper thinking. Approach each conversation with curiosity, empathy, and a strengths-based lens, using reflection as a pathway for building trust, insight, and shared learning. Self-Awareness <i>Understanding thoughts, feelings, and triggers</i> • What emotions did you notice coming up for you <u>in</u> that moment? • What felt most challenging? What felt successful? • What patterns are you noticing in your responses? • What might have been influencing your reaction (e.g., stress, environment, time)? • When do you feel <u>most calm</u> and connected in the classroom? Emotional Regulation <i>Responding with intention</i> • What did you notice happening in your body? • What helped you stay regulated—or <u>made it harder</u>? • What strategies help you reset when feeling overwhelmed? • What might help you create a pause before responding next time? • How can we <u>build in</u> support so you're not managing this alone? Perspective-Taking <i>Understanding behavior as communication</i> • What do you think the child was trying to communicate? • What need might the child have been expressing? • How might the child have been feeling? • What patterns are you noticing in this behavior? • How might the environment or routine be influencing this?	Strengths-Based Reflection <i>Noticing what's working</i> • What went well during that interaction? • What strengths did you bring to that moment? • What is already supporting this child's success? • What small success can we build on? Reflective Growth <i>Learning over time</i> • What are you learning about yourself as an educator? • How has your thinking shifted? • What is one small goal to focus on next? • What support would be most helpful right now? Identity & Purpose <i>Connecting to your "why"</i> • What kind of educator do you want to be in moments like this? • How does this connect to your values? • What keeps you grounded in this work? Coaching Reminder • Ask 1–2 questions at a time • Allow space for thinking and reflection • Lead with curiosity, not judgment • Listen more than you speak Our Commitment We believe that adult social-emotional competence is the foundation for supporting children's development. Through reflection, connection, and intentional practice, we grow together.

As shown in Figure 6, this artifact supports educators in strengthening self-awareness, emotional regulation, and reflective practice through guided coaching conversations and reflective prompts. The tool provides coaches with reflective sentence stems designed to support adult SEL, relationship-based care, and responsive interactions within early childhood settings.

This artifact aligns with research emphasizing that adult social-emotional competence, reflective practice, and emotional regulation are foundational to educators' ability to effectively implement social-emotional learning and maintain responsive, relationship-based classroom environments (Jeon et al., 2018; Denham et al., 2012). Unlike earlier artifacts focused on coaching conversations or implementation systems, this tool specifically centers on educator emotional awareness, stress management, and reflective processing within emotionally demanding early childhood environments. The tool also reflects research highlighting the role of emotionally supportive professional learning structures in strengthening educator wellbeing, self-awareness, and sustained implementation of SEL practices (Dolby et al., 2023; Snyder et al., 2015).

Figure 7: Self-Assessment: Adult SEL and Reflective Coaching Practices

Adult SEL & Reflective Practice	Strengths-Based Reflection
Directions for Coaches Use these reflective sentence starters to guide supportive coaching conversations that promote educator self-awareness, emotional regulation, and professional growth. These questions are intended to invite reflection—not to evaluate, <u>problem-solve</u>, or offer immediate advice. Select one or two questions at a time based on the educator's needs and the context of the conversation. Allow space for pause, listening, and deeper thinking. Approach each conversation with curiosity, empathy, and a strengths-based lens, using reflection as a pathway for building trust, insight, and shared learning. Self-Awareness <i>Understanding thoughts, feelings, and triggers</i> - What emotions did you notice coming up for you in that moment? - What felt most challenging? What felt successful? - What patterns are you noticing in your responses? - What might have been influencing your reaction (e.g., stress, environment, time)? - When do you feel <u>most calm</u> and connected in the classroom? Emotional Regulation <i>Responding with intention</i> - What did you notice happening in your body? - What helped you stay regulated—or <u>made</u> it harder? - What strategies help you reset when feeling overwhelmed? - What might help you create a pause before responding next time? - How can we <u>build in</u> support so you're not managing this alone? Perspective-Taking <i>Understanding behavior as communication</i> - What do you think the child was trying to communicate? - What need might the child have been expressing? - How might the child have been feeling? - What patterns are you noticing in this behavior? - How might the environment or routine be influencing this?	Strengths-Based Reflection <i>Noticing what's working</i> - What went well during that interaction? - What strengths did you bring to that moment? - What is already supporting this child's success? - What small success can we build on? Reflective Growth <i>Learning over time</i> - What are you learning about yourself as an educator? - How has your thinking shifted? - What is one small goal to focus on next? - What support would be most helpful right now? Identity & Purpose <i>Connecting to your "why"</i> - What kind of educator do you want to be in moments like this? - How does this connect to your values? - What keeps you grounded in this work? Coaching Reminder - Ask 1–2 questions at a time - Allow space for thinking and reflection - Lead with curiosity, not judgment - Listen more than you speak Our Commitment We believe that adult social-emotional competence is the foundation for supporting children's development. Through reflection, connection, and intentional practice, we grow together.

As shown in Figure 7, this artifact supports coaches in reflecting on their own social-emotional competence, coaching mindset, and effectiveness in facilitating reflective practice within Practice-Based Coaching cycles. The self-assessment tool encourages ongoing reflection, emotional awareness, and intentional professional growth while supporting psychologically safe coaching relationships and collaborative learning within Communities of Practice.

This artifact aligns with research emphasizing that effective Practice-Based Coaching requires ongoing reflection, emotional awareness, psychologically safe coaching relationships, and intentional self-assessment to support sustained educator growth and implementation fidelity (Snyder et al., 2015; Schachter et al., 2022). While other artifacts within this section focus on guided reflection and emotional processing, this self-assessment tool is designed to help coaches monitor their own growth, identify areas for continued development, and strengthen reflective leadership practices over time. The tool also reflects research highlighting the importance of adult SEL, educator wellbeing, and reflective professional learning systems in supporting long-

term sustainability of coaching and social-emotional learning initiatives (Jeon et al., 2018; Fixsen et al., 2005).

Reflection on NAEYC/Professional Standards

Consistent with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Professional Standards and Competencies, particularly Standard 4: Developmentally, Culturally, and Linguistically Appropriate Teaching Practices and Standard 6: Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator, this project emphasizes reflective practice, collaborative learning, professional communication, and relationship-based teaching and coaching practices. Connections are also evident across Standard 1 (Child Development and Learning in Context), Standard 2 (Family–Teacher Partnerships and Community Connections), and Standard 3 (Observation, Documentation, and Assessment), as these competencies are embedded throughout the coaching tools and implementation supports included in the project.

Conclusion

This chapter presented selected artifacts from the Practice-Based Coaching Toolkit developed to support lead teachers in implementing Pyramid Model-aligned social-emotional learning practices through reflective, relationship-based coaching. The highlighted artifacts demonstrate how the toolkit translates research on Practice-Based Coaching, adult social-emotional learning, reflective practice, and implementation science into practical tools designed for use within early childhood coaching contexts. Through reflective prompts, coaching language supports, planning templates, and self-assessment tools, the project emphasizes collaboration, educator growth, psychologically safe coaching relationships, and sustained implementation of effective practices.

The design of this toolkit reflects the problem of practice identified in Chapter 1 and is grounded in the research reviewed in Chapter 2. Additionally, the development process described in Chapter 3 informed the intentional structure and organization of the toolkit as a practical, research-informed professional resource. Together, these artifacts demonstrate a commitment to strengthening educator capacity through reflective coaching systems, Communities of Practice, and relationship-centered professional learning. Chapter 5 will provide a reflection on the project development process, including professional growth, challenges, limitations, and implications for future implementation and continued refinement of the toolkit.

Chapter 5: Reflection

Introduction

This chapter reflects on the process of designing and developing the Practice-Based Coaching Toolkit for Lead Teachers, a professional resource created to support the implementation of Pyramid Model-aligned social-emotional learning practices within Oregon State University Family Resource Center early care and education programs. The purpose of this project was to address the identified problem of practice presented in Chapter 1: while there is increasing recognition of the importance of social-emotional learning, inclusion, and relationship-based practices in early childhood education, lead teachers often need practical coaching structures, reflective tools, and ongoing professional supports to implement these practices consistently and sustainably.

This chapter provides a reflective analysis of the project development process, including progress toward the original goals of the project, connections to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and personal and professional growth that emerged throughout the process. Additionally, this chapter discusses alignment with professional standards, limitations and challenges encountered during the project, and potential future directions for continued implementation and refinement of the toolkit.

Progress Toward Original Goals

The original goal of this professional project was to develop a practical, research-informed resource that would support lead teachers in strengthening their ability to coach educators in implementing Pyramid Model-aligned social-emotional learning practices. Initially, my vision for this project was much broader and focused on creating a large-scale implementation plan for Pyramid Model practices across multiple centers within the OSU Family

Resource Center early care and education programs. As the project progressed, however, I realized that the scope was too broad for the timeframe and structure of this professional project.

Through engagement with the research and ongoing reflection, the project evolved into a more focused and feasible resource: a Practice-Based Coaching Toolkit designed specifically for lead teachers serving in coaching roles. This shift represented significant intellectual and professional growth. Rather than attempting to address every aspect of implementation at once, I came to understand the importance of beginning with the coaches themselves, as they are the “vehicle” through which sustainable Pyramid Model implementation can occur across programs over time.

I believe the final project successfully met the primary goals established for the toolkit. The completed resource includes practical coaching tools, reflective prompts, coaching language supports, Practice-Based Coaching planning templates, and adult SEL reflection tools designed to support educators through reflective, relationship-based coaching practices. The toolkit also intentionally supports Communities of Practice Coaching Cohorts and ongoing professional learning structures, which were key priorities identified throughout the research process.

Another important goal of this project was to bridge research and practice by translating research findings into usable professional tools. I believe this goal was met through the intentional design of the artifacts included within the toolkit. Each artifact was directly connected to themes identified within the literature review, including reflective practice, adult social-emotional competence, psychologically safe coaching relationships, implementation fidelity, and sustained professional growth.

Connection to the Literature Review

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 profoundly shaped both my thinking and the final design of this project. One of the most influential findings throughout the research process was the importance of Practice-Based Coaching as an ongoing, cyclical, relationship-based process rather than a one-time professional development event. Snyder et al. (2015) and Hemmeter et al. (2016) reinforced the idea that sustained coaching, reflective dialogue, and collaborative goal setting are essential components of effective professional learning systems in early childhood education. This research directly informed the structure of the toolkit and the development of artifacts focused on reflective coaching conversations, coaching cycles, and collaborative planning tools.

Another major influence was the research surrounding adult social-emotional competence and educator wellbeing. Prior to conducting this literature review, I had primarily focused on social-emotional learning in relation to children. However, the research highlighted that adult SEL and educator emotional regulation are foundational to the implementation of responsive, relationship-based practices with children (Jeon et al., 2018; Denham et al., 2012). This shifted my thinking significantly and led to the inclusion of an entire section within the toolkit focused on adult SEL, reflective practice, emotional awareness, and coaching self-assessment.

Implementation Science research also strongly influenced the design of this project. Fixsen et al. (2005) emphasized that sustainable implementation requires intentional systems, ongoing support structures, and attention to implementation fidelity over time. This research reinforced my understanding that meaningful systems change cannot happen through isolated training events or one-time initiatives. Instead, sustainable growth requires ongoing reflective

coaching structures, Communities of Practice, and relationship-based professional learning systems.

The literature review also challenged some of my assumptions. Initially, I believed that implementation success depended primarily on training educators in specific Pyramid Model practices. Through the research process, however, I came to a deeper understanding that educator readiness, emotional safety, reflective capacity, and coaching relationships are equally important components of successful implementation. This realization significantly shaped the direction of the project and reinforced the importance of beginning with a focus on reflective coaching structures and adult learning systems.

Personal and Professional Growth

This project resulted in significant professional and personal growth. One of the greatest areas of growth was a deeper understanding of leadership and coaching. Throughout this process, I began to see coaching not as providing answers or directing practice, but as creating conditions for reflection, collaboration, and professional growth. This represented an important shift in my own mindset and leadership philosophy.

Prior to this project, I often approached leadership from the perspective of problem-solving, guidance, and helping educators find immediate solutions. Through the research and development process, however, I came to a deeper understanding that sustainable growth occurs when educators are given opportunities to reflect, engage in dialogue, and develop their own capacity for critical thinking and decision-making. This shifted my understanding of effective leadership from being directive to becoming more facilitative, reflective, and relationship centered.

The project also deepened my understanding of the emotional and relational aspects of coaching. I became increasingly aware that psychologically safe relationships, trust, empathy, and reflective dialogue are essential components of meaningful professional growth. This realization strengthened my commitment to creating professional learning environments where educators feel supported, valued, and emotionally safe to reflect on challenges, take risks, and grow in their practice.

Additionally, this process strengthened my confidence as an instructional leader and reflective practitioner. Developing the toolkit required me to synthesize research, connect theory to practice, and intentionally design resources that would be meaningful and practical within real early childhood settings. This work challenged me to think more deeply about systems change, adult learning, implementation science, and the role of Communities of Practice in sustaining professional growth over time. Professionally, the project strengthened my skills in research synthesis, curriculum and resource development, project organization, and academic writing. As a result, I now approach professional development with greater emphasis on coaching, collaboration, reflective practice, and relationship-based leadership as essential foundations for sustainable change within early childhood education programs.

The process also strengthened my understanding of reflective practice and implementation science. I became increasingly aware that meaningful systems change requires patience, intentionality, and ongoing support structures. This has influenced how I think about professional development within the early childhood field more broadly. I also came to more deeply recognize the importance of building sustainable leadership structures within early childhood programs, particularly within the realities of the current workforce crisis. This project reinforced my belief that developing lead teachers as reflective coaches not only strengthens

implementation of social-emotional learning practices but also creates meaningful professional growth pathways that can support educator retention, leadership development, and long-term program sustainability.

Rather than focusing solely on training events or compliance-based systems, I now place greater emphasis on relationships, reflection, coaching, and emotionally supportive professional learning environments.

This experience also strengthened my commitment to relationship-based practices in early childhood education. Through both the research and the project development process, I became even more convinced that relationships are foundational to all learning—not only for children, but also for educators and coaching relationships.

Alignment with Professional Standards

This project aligns strongly with the NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators, particularly Standard 4: Developmentally, Culturally, and Linguistically Appropriate Teaching Practices and Standard 6: Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator. The toolkit emphasizes reflective practice, collaborative learning, strengths-based communication, and relationship-centered coaching practices that support educator growth and professional learning.

The project also aligns with Standard 1: Child Development and Learning in Context through its emphasis on Pyramid Model-aligned social-emotional learning practices and responsive caregiving. Standard 2: Family–Teacher Partnerships and Community Connections is reflected through the toolkit’s focus on relationship-building, collaboration, and emotionally supportive environments. Additionally, Standard 3: Observation, Documentation, and

Assessment is embedded within the Practice-Based Coaching cycle tools and reflective observation templates included throughout the project.

Beyond the standards themselves, this project strengthened my own growth relative to these competencies. The process deepened my understanding of reflective leadership, professional collaboration, implementation systems, and the importance of ongoing professional learning within early childhood education.

Limitations and Challenges

One limitation of this project is that the toolkit was not fully implemented or piloted within classrooms during the timeframe of this professional project. While the tools are grounded in research and professional experience, the project remains primarily a design and development project rather than an implementation study. Future implementation and feedback from educators using the toolkit would strengthen understanding of its effectiveness and usability in practice.

Another limitation was the scope of the project itself. Early in the process, I struggled with wanting to address every aspect of Pyramid Model implementation across multiple centers. Narrowing the project focus was challenging but necessary. While the final toolkit provides strong foundational coaching guidance, there are many additional areas that could be expanded in future work, including family engagement tools, classroom implementation resources, and Pyramid Model-specific practice resources.

Time management and balancing graduate work alongside professional responsibilities were also significant challenges throughout the process. Managing full-time leadership responsibilities within multiple early childhood programs while simultaneously completing graduate coursework required ongoing organization, flexibility, and perseverance.

Additionally, locating research specifically focused on adult SEL, Practice-Based Coaching, and implementation science within early childhood settings sometimes proved difficult, requiring me to synthesize literature across multiple related disciplines. However, this challenge ultimately strengthened the interdisciplinary nature of the project.

Improvements and Future Directions

If I were to continue developing this project, I would expand the toolkit to include additional Pyramid Model-focused resources, implementation fidelity supports, and family engagement tools. I would also like to develop more structured Community of Practice facilitation guides and implementation roadmaps for center leadership teams. A future goal is to formally implement the toolkit within the OSU Family Resource Center early care and education programs and gather feedback from lead teachers and coaching cohorts regarding usability, effectiveness, and areas for refinement. This would allow the project to continue evolving in response to real coaching experience and educator's needs.

I also plan to continue developing professional learning opportunities connected to this work, including coaching cohorts, professional development sessions, and collaborative Communities of Practice focused on Pyramid Model implementation and reflective coaching. As Oregon continues implementing policies related to inclusion, social-emotional learning, and prevention of exclusionary practices, I believe this type of coaching support system will become increasingly important within early childhood education settings.

Finally, I view this toolkit as a living document rather than a finished product. I anticipate continuing to revise, expand, and adapt the toolkit over time as I continue learning, coaching, and engaging in implementation work alongside educators.

Conclusion

The development of the Practice-Based Coaching Toolkit represents both a culmination of graduate learning and an important step in my ongoing professional journey as an early childhood leader and educator. This project reflects my commitment to relationship-based practice, reflective professional learning, and the belief that meaningful systems change begins with supporting educators through trust, reflection, and collaboration.

Throughout this process, I gained a deeper understanding of the importance of Practice-Based Coaching, adult social-emotional competence, implementation science, and reflective leadership within early childhood education. Most importantly, this work reinforced my belief that sustainable change happens through relationships, emotionally supportive professional learning systems, and ongoing opportunities for reflection and growth.

As I continue my work within early childhood education, I hope this toolkit will serve as both a practical resource and a starting point for continued conversations about coaching, social-emotional learning, and relationship-centered leadership practices. I remain committed to supporting educators, strengthening reflective coaching systems, and continuing to learn alongside the professionals and children I serve.

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