



RESEARCH BRIEF

Summary of Findings: Improving the Quality of Preschools with Coaching

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LAUP's coaching model is a cornerstone of its program. By definition, coaching at LAUP is a collaboration between coaches and providers that is designed to help providers reach their potential by establishing relationships, sharing a wealth of comprehensive services and resources, and making a commitment to high-quality early education.

What is most important to know about the LAUP coaching model is that:

- It is modeled after Appreciative Inquiry, Process Consultation, and Servant Leadership approaches to building capacity that are collaborative, personalized and proactive. The use of these three approaches varies according to the individual coach, however, each one is evident, in varying degrees.
- All providers in the LAUP network are assigned three different types of coaches: a Program Support Coach, a Fiscal Support Coach and a Quality Support Coach. Per LAUP Operating Guidelines, site supervisors and teaching staff are expected to fully participate in coaches' support efforts.
- Each type of coach targets a specific area of support. Program Support Coaches help providers through a provisional contract to earn at least a 3-star rating in order to transition into a full contract. Fiscal Coaches give financial guidance and oversight to develop and enhance financial skills necessary for best business practices. Quality Support Coaches help providers to maintain a 3-star rating or move up to a 4- or 5-star rating by improving the quality of their preschool program, including the preschool environment, classroom instruction and interactions.
- The work of all coaches is to improve providers' quality. Although each type of coach serves a different purpose, the common thread and underlying purpose of all LAUP coaches is to help providers improve their program quality.

Overview

LAUP is committed to providing a high quality preschool experience to children throughout Los Angeles County. To do this, LAUP coaches preschool providers (primarily preschool teachers but also preschool directors and FCC owners) to improve the quality of their program. This report will provide a clear definition of coaching in LAUP and a description of each of the three types of coaches provided to administrators and teaching staff in the LAUP network: Program, Fiscal, and Quality Support. It is important to point out that although the three types of coaches have a different purpose, the ultimate goal of all three is to help providers improve their program quality.

Coaching is defined as "an adult learning strategy in which the coach promotes the learner's ability to reflect on his or her actions as a means to determine the effectiveness of an action or practice and develop a plan for refinement and use of the action in immediate and future situations" (Rush & Shelden, 2011). In early childhood interventions, coaching is providing support and building capacity among people to develop new skills and utilize existing abilities to achieve desired child and family outcomes.

There are two major types of coaching -- "expert coaching" and "peer coaching". The main difference between these two types of coaching is that in expert coaching a person with more power, experience, or both, is responsible for facilitating the coaching process whereas peer coaching is less directive and more collaborative. The coaching model in LAUP follows a peer coaching approach as is evident in the three underlying theories on which the model is built: Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005), Process Consultation (Schein, 1998), and Servant Leadership (Atruy, 2001).

Theories Underlying the LAUP Coaching Model

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an organizational development method which focuses on increasing what an organization does well, rather than on eliminating what it does badly. AI involves the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. AI involves asking positive questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to heighten positive potential. AI assumes that every organization and community has many strengths and builds on these, rather than focusing on faults and weaknesses.

AI can be broken down into four steps:

1. Discovery - Interviewing and having deep dialogue about strengths, resources, and capabilities with all members of an organization.
2. Dream - Envisioning a better future.
3. Design - Crafting ways towards that better future.
4. Destiny - Forming teams to carry out what is needed.

Process Consultation (PC) is about building a helping relationship. By definition PC “is the creation of a relationship with the client that permits the client to perceive, understand and act on the process events that occur in the client’s internal and external environment in order to improve the situation as defined by the client” (Schein, 1998 p. 20). PC does not bring standard answers or canned solutions but attempts to involve the client in deciding what will work best to move things forward. The ultimate goal of PC is to pass along the skills so that clients are more able to continue on their own towards improvement. The saying “instead of giving people fish, teach them how to fish” fits this model well.

Servant Leadership (SL) is the idea that managing with respect, honesty and spirituality empowers employees to be the best they can be. Servant Leadership recognizes that at the heart of every business, the psychological, emotional and financial well-being of employees is dependent on leaders and on how well leaders create the circumstances and the environment in which they can do their jobs.

Autry (2001) identifies five ways to be a Servant Leader:

1. Be authentic.
2. Be vulnerable.
3. Be accepting.
4. Be present.
5. Be useful.

The Servant Leader understands that nothing positive can be accomplished in an organization without the support of those who are to do the hard work (p. 116).

The LAUP Coaching Model		
Appreciative Inquiry	Process Consultation	Servant Leadership
Increase what an organization does well rather than eliminate what it does badly.	Instead of giving people fish, teach them how to fish.	Be authentic, be vulnerable, be accepting, be present, be useful.

Every provider in LAUP is assigned coaches serving different purposes towards the goal of improving the preschool’s quality.

Every provider in LAUP is assigned three coaches: a Program Support Coach, Fiscal Support Coach and Quality Support Coach. Every coach serves a different purpose and every coach utilizes the coaching theories differently, based on various factors, including the provider with whom they are working and the task at hand. Although each type of coach serves a different purpose, the ultimate goal of all three coaches is to help providers improve their preschool’s quality. A description of the three types of coaching at LAUP follows (see Appendix for a detailed overview of each).

Program Support

After passing due diligence requirements, the provider is given a provisional contract for up to ten months. At this point, the provider is assigned a Program Support Coach. The main task of a Program Support Coach is to ensure that the provider meets the 3-star minimum to transition into their full operational LAUP contract. To do this, the Program Support Coach visits each provider on a weekly basis, working one-on-one with preschool teachers and administrators to observe, model, debrief and co-create goals with the provider, as well as offer hands-on assistance, such as classroom set-up. The Program Support Coach will also provide professional development for teaching staff on tools such as the Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS-R or FCCERS-R) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). There are five Program Support Coaches in LAUP and each has a caseload of about eight provisional providers each year.

Fiscal Coaching

Just as the provider works with the Program Support Coach to ensure the quality of her instructional program, she is assigned a Fiscal Coach to provide fiscal support. Fiscal Coaches give financial guidance and oversight to develop and enhance financial skills necessary for best business practices and sustainability. Another area of support for Fiscal Coaches is to help ensure provider fiscal compliance with the LAUP Operating Guidelines. Whereas Program Support Coaches work with classroom teachers, Fiscal Coaches tend to work with different point persons (accountants, financial analysts, FCC owners, etc.), depending on the type of provider. Fiscal reporting for an LAUP provider is cyclical and occurs four times a year, in addition to an annual budget submission. Fiscal Coaches review and analyze the quarterly report and budget submissions to determine opportunities for coaching. They then co-create quality improvement plan goals with the provider and measure progress towards completing them. Communication between Fiscal Coaches and providers occurs on-site, over the phone and/or via email. Fiscal Coaches are also available to assist providers who are subject to an Educational Support Review (a review of financial supporting documentation conducted by a contracted agency) to help prepare the necessary documentation for the review. There are six Fiscal Coaches at LAUP and each has a caseload of anywhere between 50-70 providers.

Quality Support Coaching

Once a provider earns a 3-star rating and transitions into a full contract, they are considered part of the LAUP network. At this point, the work of a Quality Support Coach begins. Several steps are taken to ensure a smooth transition from the Program Support Coach to the Quality Support Coach; steps include a meeting between the two coaches where pertinent information about the site is discussed, and a transition meeting for the provider where the Program Support Coach introduces the Quality Support Coach and gives a brief overview of quality support coaching.

The main task of a Quality Support Coach is to ensure that providers stay at a 3-star quality rating or improve to a 4- or 5-star rating by building teachers' capacity to improve existing abilities, develop new skills and gain a deeper understanding of practices for use in the classroom. To do this, the Quality Support Coach conducts monthly on-site observations with teachers, after which they typically debrief and co-create goals for quality improvement. The Quality Support Coach will provide additional on-site visits and resources as needed. Quality support coaching is a service given to all providers for as long as they are part of the LAUP network. There are 19 Quality Support Coaches and each has a caseload of about 19 providers.

Coach supervisors know that quality coaching is based on a sound relationship and try not to disrupt a coach/provider match. Changes are made as supervisors see fit and as providers join the network. For example, supervisors attempt to even out the coaching assignments (in terms of the number and the type of provider (center-based, or FCC)). Typically, Fiscal and Quality Support Coaches remain with their provider for multiple years. In 2011-12, 44% of LAUP providers reported they had the same Quality Support Coach for more than two years and 19.5% of them had the same Quality Support Coach for more than three years (Winston et al., 2012). Changes in coach assignments are typically done in between and not during school years to minimize disruption and allow coaches to see goals through to the year's end.

Although each of the three types of coaches serves a different purpose, they share similarities that create a common thread in order to help the providers experience them seamlessly. As previously mentioned, the ultimate goal of all three of the coaches is to help providers improve their program quality. All coaches are available to answer questions, address problems, assist with the screening and annual assessment processes,

and to provide professional development; and all coaches are responsible for carefully logging the details of their coaching sessions on LAUP Enterprise Operations (LEO)—a secured online system utilized by coach supervisors to ensure quality and purpose in the services provided.

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For more information about this evaluation please contact researchmail@laup.net.

Appendix

Coaching at LAUP

	Program Support Coaching	Fiscal Coaching	Quality Support Coaching
Who is the coaching provided to?	All providers under provisional contract with LAUP. No opt out.	All providers under provisional contract with LAUP. No opt out.	All providers under full contract with LAUP network. No opt out.
Coach: provider ratio (FY 2012-13)	1:8	1:50-70	1:19
Typical characteristics of a coach	Female, 35 years old, with strong communication skills, adaptable, flexible, non-controlling, and creative, flexible and demonstrates a passion for the field, bachelor's degree, 5-6 years of experience in teaching or directing pre-k program, knowledge of CLASS, ERS, and pre-k curriculum approved for use within the network.	Male/Female, 35 years old with a strong accounting and/or finance background, knowledge of financial statements, business and reporting processes, who communicates well with people with or without financial expertise.	Female, 45 years old, articulate, sensitive to needs, reflective, flexible and demonstrates a passion for the field, bachelor's degree, 5-6 years of experience in teaching or directing pre-k program, knowledge of CLASS, ERS, and pre-k curriculum approved for use within the network.
Underlying coaching theories	Appreciative Inquiry, Process Consultation, Servant Leadership.	Hybrid between Process Consultation and Monitoring.	Appreciative Inquiry, Process Consultation, Servant Leadership.
What is the main goal?	To ensure that providers who are new to the LAUP network meet the 3-star minimum to transition into their full contract.	To help ensure fiscal compliance with the LAUP Operating Guidelines and give financial guidance and oversight to develop and enhance financial skills necessary for best business practices.	To build teacher capacity to improve existing abilities, develop new skills and gain a deeper understanding of practices for use in the classroom.
What is the method of carrying out the main goal?	On-site observation and co-creating goals and hands-on assistance.	Document analysis of fiscal reports and budget submissions. Co-create quality improvement plan goals and measure progress in the areas of best business practices and LAUP compliance. Remote and on-site assistance to answer questions and assist providers in completing goals.	On-site observation, debriefing, co-creating goals and activity logs.
Key roles	Coaches, teachers, teacher assistants, director/other admin.	Coaches and: -account manager @ school districts -controller or CFO @ agencies -director/admin. @ small centers -owners and accountants @ FCCs	Mostly coaches, teachers and director/owner/other admin. Sometimes teacher assistants (1/3 of all cases).
What is the frequency of the main goal?	Weekly for ten months*.	As needed for as long as the provider is part of the network.	Monthly (minimum) for as long as the provider is part of the network.
Key coaching tools	ECERS-R manual, FCCERS-R manual, All About [ECERS-R], CLASS manuals, 3-Star Checklist, marketing resources, ETO manual.	QuickBooks, allocation and cost category examples, funding calculator, break-even analysis and budget versus actual tool (Excel based), fiscal report and budget examples, fundraising resource guide, business plan resource guide.	ECERS-R manual, FCCERS-R manual, CLASS manual, modeling, video demos, articles, newsletters, books, activity logs.