




My name is Holly Morris Bennet. I am the new Mentor Coach at Thrive by Five. Since I'm meeting many of you for the first or second time, I thought I'd just say a few words about my background. Before I came to Thrive, I had a private coaching practice working with individuals, solopreneurs, leaders of small organizations, and business partners from a variety of fields. As I was preparing for this talk, I remembered that one of them, one of my favorite clients was the director of a preschool. So I have seen first hand what coaching can do to improve quality in early learning environments. I am also a parent of a young child, which gives me the personal perspective on early learning.

And I want to start my talk about coaching and the QRIS from that vantage point – talking about a parent and a child.

The Point of Interaction:
An Opportunity for Continuous Quality Improvement

ThrivebyFive
WASHINGTON

- Parent/Child
- Child/Environment
- Child /Child
- Child/Teacher
- Teacher/Director
- Director/Licensor
- Director/Parent
- Parent/Child



Let's start here, with this child. Let's call him Ben. We're going to see 8 interactions involving Ben either directly or indirectly, that we, through the QRIS coaching program, might influence – eight opportunities to give him or the environment he's in, an experience of quality.

Translate from center to home For the purposes of this presentation, I am going to use a child care center run by a director, but the concepts are applicable to any early learning setting and any early learning professional who runs that setting. So if your orientation is home-based care, know that I am not ignoring your perspective, and please translate what I'm saying to meet your perspective. If it doesn't translate in your mind, just let me know at the end and I'll try to make it make sense to you.

Define ELP - Related to this is the other definition I want to spell out. When I say early learning professional, I mean all providers – teachers, staff, directors. And coaches would be working with all of them.

Let's start with Ben and his mom. They are on their way to his day care center and he asks her a question. She doesn't know the answer so she puts him off saying, "Sweetie, I'm in a big hurry today. Love you, bye-bye." This is the first interaction we, through the QRIS system might be able to influence.

Interaction #2 - They open the gate to the center and Ben interacts with his environment by tripping on a paving stone and skinning his knee.

Interaction #3 – Child/Child. When he walks into the center he says hello to his friend. They get into a squabble about who gets to use the sink to wash hands first. The squabble ends with one of the children shoving the other aside.

Interaction #4 - Child /Teacher The teacher sees the shove and yells from across the room, "Cut that out you two!" She is busy with another child.

Interaction #5 - At snack time, the class goes outside and the director comes out to join them. She observes the kids and the teacher and silently wishes her teacher would do more with the conflict resolution curriculum they adopted last month, but she is distracted by a myriad of things on her desk, so she overlooks it for the third time because she doesn't quite know what to say. That's actually a missed opportunity for interaction.

Interaction #6 - The director goes back to her office and calls the licensor about their appointment on Tuesday. The conversation is tense. There is a problem with one of the windows and the licensor isn't listening to her. Although its not directly involving this child, you can see how this interaction affects the quality of his environment.

Interaction #7 And so it goes until the end of the day when the mother comes back to get Ben. She complains to the director as she is waiting that he just isn't listening to her at home and that he's ignoring her when she tells him to do things like pick up his toys. She would prefer to talk with the teacher, but she doesn't have a good connection to Ben's teacher.

Interaction #8. Ben sees his mother and waves then runs outside. She calls after him but he doesn't stop. "See?" she says to the director, "he's just not listening!" She is frustrated. The director sees her talking harshly to Ben when she catches up to him at the end of the street.

Each one of these points of interaction presents an opportunity to create an experience of quality. The one person in a position to really influence how that opportunity is handled either directly or indirectly is the ELP who runs this environment. At the end of this talk we'll give Ben's director a coach and see what a difference it makes.

Overview



Coaching is a vehicle to develop the human capital in the field and raise quality in all aspects of early learning environments for children. This will help close the gap on school readiness and make continuous quality improvement the norm in our state.

- **Development of the Coaching Framework**
- **Coaching in the Context of QRIS**
 - What is a coach?*
 - What do coaches and clients do together?*
 - What is consultative coaching?*
- **Coaching at the Point of Interaction with the Highest Impact: Focus on the Early Learning Professional**

Let's turn our attention now to the coaching framework that Thrive and its local partners, Child Care Resources in Seattle and ESD 105 /Ready by Five in Yakima, designed together. Then we'll connect it back to Ben.

Agenda

We – Thrive and its partners -- see coaching as a vehicle to develop the human capital in the field and raise quality in all aspects of early learning environments. This, in turn, will help close the gap on school readiness for kids and make continuous quality improvement the norm in our state.

In the next 30 minutes we'll talk about

- the development of the coaching framework
- what coaching looks like in the context of the QRIS and we'll answer some questions like what is a coach, what do coaches and clients do together, what is consultative coaching and finally
- We'll come back to Ben and by adding coaching focused on the ELP allows us to influence the point of interaction with the highest impact.

Transition

"So without further ado, let's go."

Development of the Coaching Framework



Thrive's approach to its work: central guidance with local implementation.

The principles Thrive/CCR/ESD 105/RB5 committed to and built into the coaching framework include:

- **building the field's human capital by focusing on the early learning professional;**
- **using consultative process and reflective practice; and**
- **seeking continuous quality improvement.**

One of the guiding principles behind Thrive's work – all its work, not just this project – is central guidance with local implementation. So you'll see that working with our partners, we've made certain commitments that guide the overall efforts that the local partners then use as they make the day to day implementation decisions.

This framework I am presenting today is the product of an effort toward continuous quality improvement. Thrive did not invent coaching. Our partners, CCR and ESD 105 in East Yakima have been doing their own form of coaching in the field for several years. When we came together we consulted and reflected on their experience. Then we envisioned something more for those programs – the inclusion of a transformational mission, in addition to the transactional mission they were so accomplished at and that resulted in the framework you're seeing.

So, for the coaching program, we committed to three key principles for ourselves and our coaches:

- building the field's human capital by focusing on the early learning professional as a whole
- using consultative process and reflective practice and
- continuously seeking quality improvement of our process and the clients' programs

Coaching in the Context of QRIS: *What is a Coach?*



A coach is a trusted, neutral peer who:

- **maintains confidentiality within program boundaries;**
- **operates independent of any regulatory agency or grant-making entity; and**
- **maintains focus on one agenda – the client’s success as she has defined it within the QRIS parameters.**

We’ve all met Ben’s center director. In fact we’ve all been in her shoes in one way or another – we’ve all been in situations where we were overwhelmed, stuck in ruts and didn’t have five minutes to figure out what to do next. Multiply that by a factor of 5, 10, 20 or 50 and you’ll start to feel the enormity of the task that is on the shoulders of so many early learning professionals.

Coach is a word very much in vogue at the moment and it has several definitions. From our perspective, a coach is a trusted neutral peer who:

Maintains confidentiality within program boundaries. Confidentiality means that the coach does not discuss her client’s process or plans with other participants. The coach does share the client’s experience anonymously with other coaches only for the purposes of leveraged learning. And she does share with the program to enhance its capability in implementing the coaching program. And she explains all of this to the client up front so that they are building trust from their first interaction.

You’ll notice that I am using the word client when I refer to the early learning professional who is receiving coaching. And this intentional – because it underscores how we feel coaches should operate – professionally, within certain boundaries and always from a place of offering service.

In our definition, coaches are also independent of any regulatory or grant making entity. This is crucial to developing and maintaining trust. If you think your coach is going to tell on you to the licensor, or push the agenda of the grant-maker, then you’re not as likely to be open with your mistakes or concerns and the quality of the coach/client interaction is compromised.

Finally, a coach maintains focus on one agenda – the client’s success as she has defined it within the QRIS parameters. Detachment from the agenda or the choices her client makes with respect to that agenda also builds trust and reinforces the notion that the coach is not there as a content expert. We anticipate that the coaches in the QRIS system will have a lot of expertise and it is entirely appropriate for a coach to offer that expertise, so long as she does not take She may offer control of her client’s agenda.

Coaching in the Context of QRIS: *What do Coaches and Clients do Together?*



- Engage the client to articulate a compelling vision of what quality would look like in her own setting
- Help the client look at the proxies for quality objectively, develop a quality improvement plan that links the proxies and her vision, and set SMART goals
- Provide accountability around goals
- Connect the client to resources and information
- Coach and mentor teachers and staff in the same consultative way
- Meet with other coaches to consult with each other, anonymously share client learning, and share effective strategies for engaging clients
- Meet with a Mentor Coach to plan for her own professional development as a coach to model and benefit from continuous quality improvement

What do Coaches and Clients do Together?

A coach will [read slide]

- engage the client to articulate a compelling vision of what quality would look like in her own setting. Each home or center is unique and while quality has some common components, how is expressed in each environment is unique.
- help the client look at the proxies for quality objectively, develop a quality improvement plan that links the proxies and her vision and set SMART goals. SMART means specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. SMART goals are not small goals; bold vision is necessary, and it can be overwhelming, so it is important to be realistic – that is mindful of what the client is willing and able to do given her resources.
- provide accountability around goals – accountability that inspires growth and learning, rather than fear or worry. In a consultative process, accountability becomes a question not a demand – it's what are you going to do, when are you going to do it and how will I know? And if it doesn't happen, there's not a lecture, there's another question – what got in the way? What do part of this do we need to change?
- connect the client to resources and information
- work with teachers and staff in the same consultative way, so that the benefits of coaching reach directly into interactions between children and adults
- coaches meet with other coaches to engage in consultation with each other, anonymously share client learning, and share effective strategies for engaging clients
- coaches meet with a Mentor Coach like myself to plan for their own professional development as a coach to and to model and benefit from continuous quality improvement themselves.

One of the nice things about this approach is that it works with any curriculum leaving the early learning professional free to choose what works best for her setting.

Coaching in the Context of QRIS: *What is consultative coaching?*



Consultative coaching is characterized by open-ended questions to build a guiding vision, promote critical thinking, spark insights and outline action. Here's an example:

"If your program was at its best, what would that look like?"

"What if it was more than that?"

"What is your deepest wish for this center?"

"How do the proxies for quality align with your vision?"

"What needs to happen to get you from where you are now to where you want to be?"

Coach and Client outline the steps to co-create the Quality Improvement Plan.

You've heard me say consultation and consultative process several times now – let me explain what that means, specifically with the coaching context.

[Read slide]

Add on # two – I always add this one because most people think very small – they think about what is probable, but to really raise quality in this field, we all know that they need to think much bigger, much bolder – a coach can help them do that.

Think back to all the places you've worked in your life and just imagine what might have been different if someone had asked you or your supervisor these questions? Imagine what it would have been like if a neutral, trusted, confidentially bound person had been available to help you live out those answers. Some of you may have gone to a stopped place in your mind just now – like we could never have done X or I have no idea what my deepest wish would have been. So imagine what it would be like to have someone to talk to who could facilitate your thinking enough to lift you above that stuck place. That is consultative coaching.

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Let's go back to Ben. This time let's give the director at Ben's day care a coach and see how it would change the quality of Ben's environment.

Interaction #1 - Ben and his mom are walking to school. He asks her a question that she doesn't know the answer to – where do stars come from. This time his mom employs a strategy that she learned at a child development talk the director arranged. This came about from her sitting down with her coach, looking at the proxies for quality and consciously designing something to address a deficit in the program around parent involvement. This is now part of the QIP. The mom tells him what she knows and tells him what she doesn't know and promises they will go to the library to find out on the weekend.

Interaction #2 - They open the gate. This time Ben doesn't trip on the paving stone. The coach and director noticed this on the on-site visit and the coach asked a simple question – "Who could help you?" When she started engaging the parents around this question, the director realized two of the dads were in construction. That sparked an idea and led to her combine the center's repair needs with a parent involvement plan and resulted in a potluck and work party. Everyone loved it and they are going to make it an bi-annual event in the fall and the spring.

Interaction #3 & 4. Ben walks in and meets his friend. They get into a squabble about who gets to use the sink to wash hands first. At another on-site visit, the coach spent part of her time working with the teacher, gently pointing out moments during the day when the conflict resolution curriculum could be incorporated. Once the teacher saw it as more applicable to her every day life, she was happy to use it. This time she takes the other child over to the sink so all of them can work using words and other conflict resolution skills she is teaching the kids.

Interaction #5 - At snack time, the class goes outside and the director comes out to join them. She interacts with the kids and then with the teacher. Once she saw that the teacher's resistance to the conflict resolution curriculum was melting, she tackled the problem of how the teacher was coming off to the parents. The director and her coach role played giving honest feedback and then she tried it out with the teacher. The teacher, who really is just shy, could listen to it and they made a plan for her try and initiate engagement with at least three parents, including Ben's mom. The teacher and the coach did some role play together, so the teacher could try out her new skills.

Interaction #6 - The director goes back to her office and calls the licensor about their appointment on Tuesday. After reflecting on it with her coach, she has realized that there are better ways to approach the licensor and through the parent involvement night they have gotten the window fixed. And so it goes until the end of the day when Ben's mom comes to get him.

Interaction #7 - The teacher plucks up her courage and takes the initiative to talk to Ben's mom about the possibility that Ben's hearing needs to be checked. The mother is relieved to have his behavior put in a different perspective. She hadn't thought of this possibility. She tells the teacher Ben hates doctors and wonders how she can keep him calm through an ear exam. The teacher offers some ideas. The mom feels much better about his teacher and tells the director she's noticed a change.

Interaction #8 Ben comes barreling through the door. This time his mom is not frustrated. She takes his hand to make sure he is within hearing distance and as they walk out the door, she starts talking to him as the teacher suggested. The teacher hears them making plans to look for books about ears and hearing in the library when they go to find out about stars.

Same scenario, with one added point of interaction, the coach and the ELP. By using this point of interaction we directly or indirectly impacted the quality of all the other interactions and the quality of Ben's experience at day care.

Conclusion



Coaching is a vehicle to develop the human capital in the field and raise quality in all aspects of early learning environments for children.

- **It reaches all aspects of the early learning environment and builds the professional capacity of all adults engaged with children and their families.**
- **By doing so it allows us to develop a sustainable, high quality early learning system that is designed to seek and deliver continuous quality improvement.**
- **The result is measurable strides toward closing the school-readiness gap and more kids succeeding in school and thriving in life.**

So now we too have come full circle – and we can see how this approach to coaching – using it as a vehicle to develop the human capital in the field allows us to

- reach all aspects of the early learning environment and build the professional capacity of all adults engaged with children and their families.
- by doing this we can develop a sustainable, high quality early learning system that is designed to seek and deliver continuous quality improvement

And that brings us to the result we all want ---- closing the gap on school-readiness so that more kids are succeeding in school and thriving in life.

That's all for this presentation – but before we start the Q & A, I just want to tell you a little more about what is inside the packet we've passed out. You'll find a copy of these slides as well as other documents that describe the coaching program in more detail, including an ideal candidate description,

So have a look at those and let's take questions.