

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE SUMMARY

Coaching Head Start Teachers on the Use of Teaching Pyramid Model Practices in the Classroom

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of individualized coaching and performance feedback on the implementation of *Teaching Pyramid Model* practices by three Head Start teachers. Participants were lead teachers in three preschool classrooms located in one Head Start program. During intervention, teachers received weekly individualized coaching on *Teaching Pyramid Model* practices, followed by a weekly classroom observation and emailed performance feedback. All three teachers demonstrated increased implementation of *Teaching Pyramid Model* practices after the intervention was introduced. These results suggest that individualized coaching and performance feedback may support Head Start teachers' implementation of evidence based practices that can enhance the social and emotional development of young children and address challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Keywords: Head Start; Coaching; Teaching Pyramid Model; Social Emotional Development

Young children who do not develop appropriate levels of social and emotional competence have an increased chance of experiencing negative interactions with teachers (Strain, Lambert, Kerr, Stagg, & Lenkner, 1983) and peers (Odom et al., 2006), and later failure in school (Tremblay, 2000). There is strong evidence, however, that young children who develop social-emotional competencies have an increased chance of experiencing long-term positive outcomes throughout school and life (Brown & Conroy, 2011; Denham et al., 2003; Fantuzzo et al., 2007; Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015; McClelland, Acock, & Morrison, 2006; Moffitt et al., 2011). One factor that has been found to be associated with the development of critical social and emotional skills is the quality of the relationships between a child and the important adults in his life (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2015), including the teacher-child relationship (Howes, 2000). The *Teaching Pyramid Model* (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003) provides a framework for evidence-based strategies that early childhood educators can use to

promote appropriate social-emotional development and competencies in young children through responsive relationships, supportive environments, explicit teaching of social and emotional skills, and individualized supports for children who experience challenging behaviors. However, many early childhood teachers will need access to resources and training to be able to implement such strategies in their classrooms (Branson & Demchak, 2011; Carter & Norman, 2010). Supporting teachers to implement evidence based practices that promote social-emotional competence in young children should be a priority for early childhood programs.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of individualized coaching and performance feedback on three Head Start teachers' use of *Teaching Pyramid Model* (Fox et al., 2003) practices in the classroom, and how those practices may affect social interactions within the classroom. We addressed the following research questions: (a) what is the impact of coaching and performance feedback on Head Start preschool teachers' use of *Teaching Pyramid Model* practices in the classroom? And (b) what is the impact of teacher coaching and performance feedback on social interactions in the classroom?

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODS

Participants

Participants were three Head Start preschool classroom lead teachers who volunteered to receive training related to promoting social-emotional skills and preventing challenging behaviors in the classroom. All three teachers were African-American females with years of teaching experience ranging from six to twenty. One teacher had a Bachelor's degree, and two had earned a Master's degree. Each lead teacher had a teaching assistant and 17 children, ages 4-5 years, in her respective classroom. One teacher had previously participated in a one-time professional development training session about the *Teaching Pyramid Model* (Fox et al., 2003). The other two teachers had no prior training.

Teacher Coaching and Performance Feedback

Before coaching began, each teacher was observed and scored across the 14 key practice areas of the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) for Preschool Classrooms (Hemmeter, Fox, & Snyder, 2014). Based on the TPOT scores, the researchers selected the lowest scoring key practice area as the focus for coaching for each teacher. These areas included 'transitioning between activities' for one teacher, 'teaching friendship skills' for another, and 'promoting children's engagement' for the third.

Individual coaching sessions were conducted once a week for approximately 10 minutes in a separate room in the Head Start center. Consistent with other studies that used coaching (e.g., Fox et al., 2011; Godfrey-Hurrell, Correa, & Truesdell, 2018), each session included working together to set goals for what practices to implement during the week, developing a plan for how to implement these practices, and receiving feedback from the coach about their use of *Teaching Pyramid Model* (Fox et al., 2003) practices.

Following each coaching session at the end of the same week, each teacher was observed in her classroom by a second researcher who then emailed individualized performance feedback

to each teacher. Each email focused on noting what the teacher had done well, and providing a suggestion for addressing a challenge seen in the classroom.

Research Design

We used an experimental single-subject multiple probe across participants design. Data included a pre-intervention classroom observation using the TPOT for Preschool Classrooms (Hemmeter, Fox, & Snyder, 2014), weekly classroom observations using an individualized version of the TPOT created for each teacher that included the key practice area that was the focus of coaching, and a pre-intervention and intervention observation of social interactions within each classroom.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Effects of Coaching and Performance Feedback on Teacher Practices

Data from the individualized TPOT forms indicate the three teachers increased their use of *Teaching Pyramid Model* (Fox et al., 2003) targeted practices following coaching and performance feedback. Specifically, the first teacher increased to implementing 88% of the key practices related to ‘transitioning between activities’ after three coaching sessions. The second teacher increased to 100% of the key practices related to ‘teaching friendship skills’ after five coaching sessions. The third increased to 56% of the key practices related to ‘promoting children’s engagement’ after two coaching sessions. Additionally, each teacher showed increases in the implementation of key practices related to areas on the TPOT for Preschool Classrooms (Hemmeter, Fox, & Snyder, 2014) that were not the focus of coaching and performance feedback.

Effects of Coaching and Performance Feedback on Social Interactions in the Classroom

Data from the observations of social interactions in the classrooms showed little change related to children’s antisocial behaviors following coaching and performance feedback. However, the social interaction data between the second teacher and the children in her classroom demonstrate a pattern that suggests implementation of *Teaching Pyramid Model* (Fox et al., 2003) practices may be associated with increased positive interactions between teachers and children, a practice consistent with the goal of creating responsive and supportive environments.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Evidence of the association between social-emotional competence in young children and long-term positive outcomes is clear (e.g., Brown & Conroy, 2011; Denham et al., 2003; Fantuzzo et al., 2007; Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015; McClelland, Acock, & Morrison, 2006; Moffitt et al., 2011), emphasizing the importance of teachers supporting the development of these skills within early childhood settings. Results of this study on the effects of individualized coaching and

performance feedback on three Head Start teachers' use of evidence-based strategies that can promote social-emotional competence are promising. After receiving coaching and performance feedback, all of the participating teachers increased their use of *Teaching Pyramid Model* (Fox et al., 2003) practices in their classrooms. Increases occurred immediately, with substantial increases noted in as few as three coaching sessions, and additional increases occurring in areas that were not the focus of coaching sessions.

Additionally, results related to the social interactions between the teachers and children in their classrooms suggest the level of use of evidence-based practices, such as those included in the *Teaching Pyramid Model* (Fox et al., 2003), are associated with the social climate established in the classroom. For example, when these practices are not being used, there may be lower levels of adult-child positive interactions; whereas, the use of these practices may increase responsiveness and positive adult-child interactions within the classroom environment.

Finally, data from this study demonstrating low use of practices related to the *Teaching Pyramid Model* (Fox et al., 2003) before coaching sessions began is consistent with findings in other studies that suggest many early childhood teachers may not have adequate access to training that prepares them to successfully promote social-emotional development and prevent challenging behaviors in the classroom (Branson & Demchak, 2011; Driscoll & Pianta, 2010). Although more research is needed to evaluate the effects of coaching on preschool teachers' implementation of *Teaching Pyramid Model* (Fox et al., 2003) practices in the classroom, the findings from this study, in addition to those in prior research (e.g., Fox et al., 2011; Godfrey-Hurrell, Correa & Truesdell, 2018), suggest that individualized coaching is beneficial in supporting teachers' use of evidence-based practices that promote social-emotional competence in young children. Implications of these findings related to early childhood programs are as follows:

- (1) Optimizing the effects of coaching and performance feedback may likely take longer than five sessions focused on one key practice area. The TPOT includes 14 key practice areas, and extending coaching sessions and performance feedback across the full year and across multiple practice areas should prove a more powerful approach to increasing implementation and maintaining these skills.
- (2) The *Teaching Pyramid Model* emphasizes evidence-based practices that promote the development of responsive relationships with young children and create supportive environments. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate these strategies (e.g., keeping children engaged during transitions, teaching expectations, promoting children's engagement in classroom activities, and engaging in supportive conversations with children) in their classrooms to develop safe, calm, and predictable environments for young children.
- (3) Early childhood educators should explicitly teach appropriate social and emotional skills to young children throughout daily activities. For example, teachers can include book discussions related to emotions or friendship during whole group time, model how to respond to difficult situations during group and individual activities, provide descriptive feedback about what children are doing well to increase their awareness of their own actions, facilitate friendship skills during centers and outdoor play, and encourage children to reflect on their own feelings and behavior.
- (4) Early childhood educators are encouraged to intentionally plan to increase their use of evidence-based practices that support social-emotional competence in their classrooms. The coaching process in this study involved working with teachers to identify a specific

goal (i.e., practice to implement) and then plan how to implement this practice within their own classrooms. Even if a coach is not available, on a weekly basis, teachers could plan to work on developing their skills related to a key practice and then reflect on what went well and on what they may need to continue to improve.

- (5) Early childhood administrators are encouraged to consider ways to increase professional development opportunities for teachers related to the development of social-emotional competence in young children, as well as ways to provide individualized support for teachers in their own classrooms on an ongoing basis. Coaching sessions in this study lasted for 10 minutes once a week, resulting in positive classroom changes that did not require extensive amounts of time and support.

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