

The Early Educator Support, Licensure, and
Professional Development (EESLPD) Office Conceptual Framework:
A Narrative Describing Supporting Early Childhood Educators
as Part of the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process

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Conceptual Framework for the Early Educator Support, Licensure, and Professional Development Office (EESLPD)

The components included in this conceptual framework describe the types of supports and resources provided by the EESLPD Office to guide North Carolina (NC) Birth through Kindergarten (B – K) Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) who work in public and nonpublic school settings and have initial (formerly SP I) and/or continuing (formerly SP II) licensure status. The guidance provided by EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators supports ECEs through the licensure process and may positively influence teaching practices used in Pre-K classrooms to promote optimal child growth and development. The cycle of coaching used by mentors and evaluators to support ECEs during the Beginning Teacher Support Process (BTSP) is heavily rooted in forming relationships by using a strengths-based approach that is both individualized and holistic. See the EESLPD Office Conceptual Framework illustrated in Figure 1.

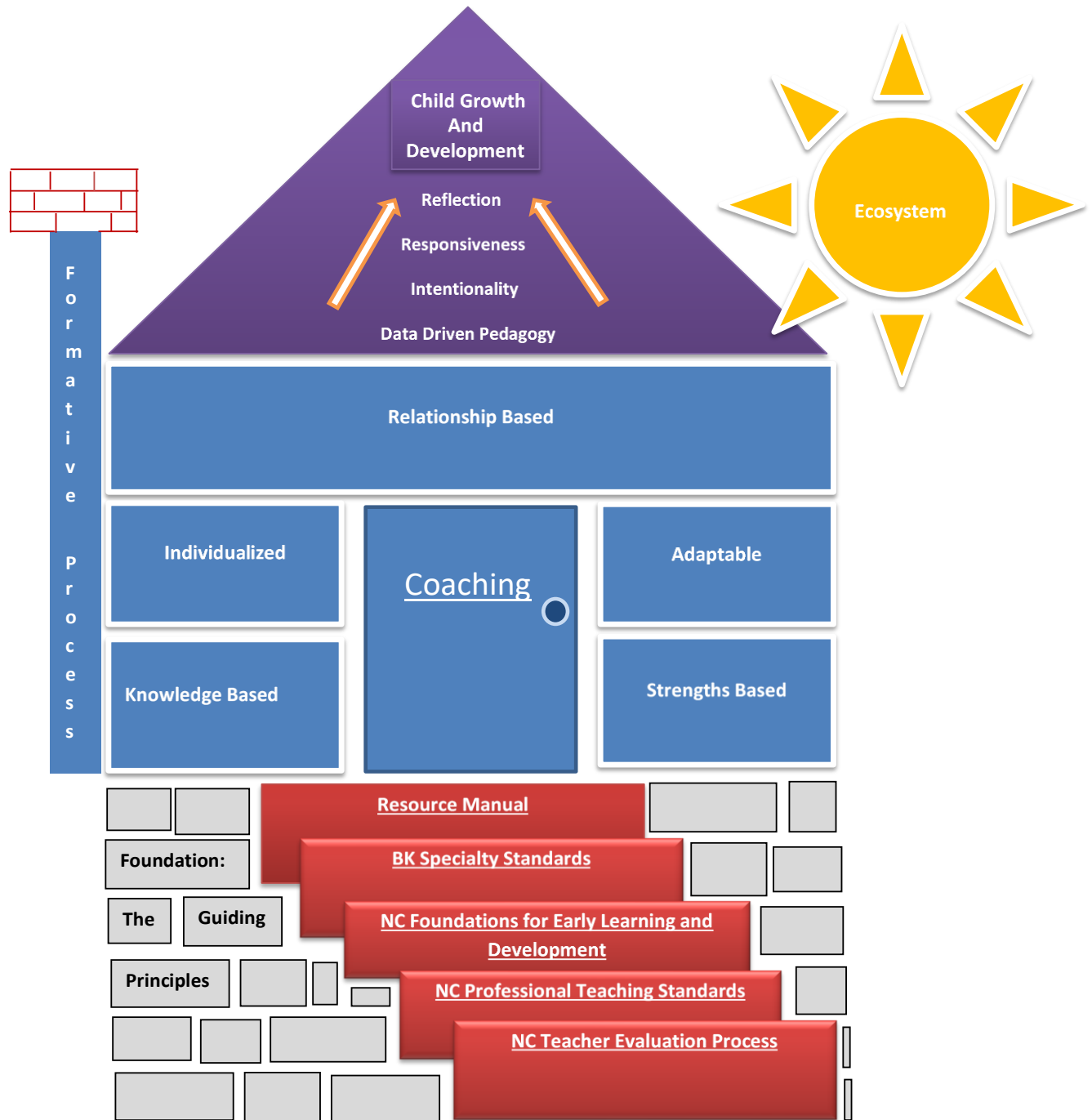


Figure 1: EESLPD Conceptual Framework (Taylor, Vestal, Saperstein, Stafford, & Lambert, 2017) Manuscript in progress.

Narrative Description of the EESLPD Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is built as a home to emphasize the need for all members of the EESLPD Office team (e.g., ECE, mentor, evaluator, child and family, site administrator) to work together for best practices to occur. Just as supportive relationships are central to a strong family unit, building rapport and trust with ECEs is a major component of the EESLPD Office mentor/evaluator process when coaching and guiding teachers. Building trust and rapport with the ECEs we serve helps us form relationships and identify individual needs. Once needs are identified, EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators are able to individualize support for ECEs to improve classroom practices, leading to optimal child growth and family development.

The EESLPD Office incorporates a network of continuous and simultaneous mentor and evaluator support for ECEs in a coaching style that focuses on interactive modeling. The EESLPD definition of interactive modeling has two components including (a) implicit modeling (e.g., actions mentors and evaluators use to support and respect individual ECEs and (b) explicit modeling (e.g., actions mentors and evaluators use to model best practice in the Pre-K classroom for ECEs). The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators implements interactive modeling by alternating strategies, depending on the needs of an individual teacher. A goal of the “model as coach/coach as model” approach is to guide ECEs to a place of self-awareness that is the hallmark of a reflective practitioner. Once teacher reflection emerges, our hope is that support we offer through the EESLPD Office will positively influence the use of high-quality practices in early childhood education settings and ultimately improve interactions between ECEs, young children, and families. An abundance of research indicates that reflective practitioners often make the largest impact on child outcomes (Hsieh, Hemmeter, McCollum, & Ostrosky, 2009; Silsbee, 2010). Just as a child’s self-confidence and resilience is often reflected by the nurturance and encouragement shown at home, the ECEs we serve need a consistent means of support to meet their professional potential. Previous research indicates a correlation between a lower rate of child achievement when teachers provide instruction using inconsistent methods (Furtak et al., 2008; Kovaleski, Gickling, Morrow, & Swank, 1999). Early childhood educators supported by the EESLPD Office experience a consistent system of Professional Development (PD) that provides education and topic-specific training. Prior research suggests that PD plays an important role in minimizing the research-to-practice gap. Links exist between teacher confidence and competence with the implementation of evidence-based practices when a strong system of PD is provided (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015; Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010; Kretlow, Wood, & Cooke, 2009; Snyder, Hemmeter, Fox, 2015; Snyder, et al., 2012; Snyder, Hemmeter, & McLaughlin, 2011). This seamless system of PD used by the EESLPD Office is reflected in the conceptual framework and each component is described below.

I. Foundation:

A strong foundation of a home is important to the overall structure by preventing sinking in the soil, leaning of the building, and cracks. When the foundation of a home is not a strong one, inevitably the home may collapse or cost an abundance of money to repair. The foundation of the EESLPD Office conceptual framework, much like that of a home, anchors the different constructs that keep the integrity of the building intact. The EESLPD Office supports ECEs by using a set of guiding principles to ground its work. These guiding principles are the driving forces for why we do what we do and therefore represent the foundational components of our work with ECEs. The EESLPD Office reliability committee has endorsed the listed guiding principles below.

The Guiding Principles:

1. Early childhood educators must be respected as adult learners.
 - a. Adult learners are self-directed
 - b. Adult learners bring knowledge and experience
 - c. Adult learners are goal-oriented
 - d. Adult learners value relevancy and practicality
2. Early childhood educators progress through developmental stages in their professional growth.
 - a. Our support and professional development opportunities should match their needs at each stage of their career
 - b. Other factors can affect teacher development or cause them to regress to an earlier stage
3. Individualized strengths-based coaching supports professional growth and encourages the use of effective high-quality practices.
4. Trusting relationships are fundamental to building an effective team (teacher, site administrator, mentor, evaluator).
5. Fostering reflective practice is essential to effective teaching.
6. Research indicates that the teacher is the most crucial factor in the classroom for predicting child success. Therefore, in order to increase child learning we must improve teacher effectiveness.

II. Stairs:

The stairs of the EESLPD Conceptual Framework represent the various resources and tools that are integrated into the PD process used for mentors and evaluators. An on-going, consistent system of training mentors and evaluators is necessary to guide teachers through a process of identifying and utilizing their potential. Prior research suggests that PD including both in-service training and follow-up support are beneficial strategies when promoting changes in teaching behaviors (Knight & Wiseman, 2005). Findings from a study by Kretlow and Bartholomew (2010) suggest that in-service training may lead to positive changes in teaching practices when educators are provided with individualized coaching support. The EESLPD Office uses a PD process that includes both in-service training and field-based coaching through mentor/evaluator support. This process of delivering PD is essential in providing ECE supports needed to (a) meet professional potential, (b) improve strategies used in the early childhood classroom, and (c) positively influence the growth and development of children and families.

a. North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process (NC TEP)

In public and nonpublic school settings, ECEs are supported during the performance evaluation process (e.g., self-assessment, developing a professional development plan, mentoring, observation, evaluation) by Local Education Agencies (LEAs). The basic components of the NC TEP are defined by the NC State Board of Education (NCSBE) and include services to support professional growth – from the initial licensure stage to a continuing licensure level with the goal of positively influencing child development and learning.

The North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten (NC Pre-K) Program is operated by the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE). Developmental Day programs are governed by the NC DCDEE and the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), Exceptional Children's Division. The NC Pre-Kindergarten Program, operated under the NC Division of Child Development and Early Learning (DCDEE) requires NC Pre-K teachers in public and nonpublic classrooms to hold (or be working toward) a Birth through Kindergarten (B-K) continuing license (formerly the Standard Professional II License). The NC DCDEE's Early Educator Support, Licensure, and Professional Development (EESLPD) Unit functions as LEA for all ECEs within nonpublic settings. The EESLPD Offices at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte) and East Carolina University (ECU) manage and provide field-based services to eligible teachers. These field-based services are implemented by EESLPD Office practitioners who have specific knowledge, expertise

and extensive experience in early education settings to mentor and evaluate teachers using the NC TEP. The five standards included in the NC TEP are listed below.

North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards:

- Standard I: Teachers Demonstrate Leadership
- Standard II: Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Children
- Standard III: Teachers Know the Content they Teach
- Standard IV: Teachers Facilitate Learning for their Children
- Standard V: Teachers Reflect on their Practices

- b. North Carolina B-K Teaching Standards (Teaching Specialty) (2009)
http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/pdf_forms/NCPrek-K_BK_Speciality_Standards.pdf
- NC B-K Teaching Standards include the teaching specialty coursework for an initial license.
 - NC B-K Teaching Standards encompass the foundational knowledge expected of ECEs (included in Standard III of the NC TEP).
- c. North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development
http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/PDF_forms/NC_Foundations.pdf
- *Foundations* is the Standard Course of Study for ECEs in NC. The NC Early Childhood Advisory Committee, Division of Child Development and Early Education, and Department of Public Instruction Office of Early Learning worked together to develop Foundations as a resource for all programs in the state.
 - *Foundations* describes goals for all children’s development and learning, regardless of the program in which they are served, their language, their family circumstances, or their ability level.
 - *Foundations* goals and objectives are interwoven throughout the five standards included in the rubric as part of the NC TEP. The *Resource Manual for Administrators and Principals Supervising and Evaluating Teachers of Young Children* (de Kort-Young, Lambert, Rowland, Vestal, & Ward, 2016) was developed to inform evaluators and administrators about the NC TEP. This manual can be used to promote the development

and growth of professionals who work with the early childhood population.

III. Door: Coaching

Research indicates that there is a relationship between the support teachers' perceive having in their first year of teaching and their decision to continue in the profession or leave (Whitaker, 2000). Previous research findings show that coaching is a recommended practice to use to help teachers reach their professional goals and improve the use of evidence-based practices in the classroom (Hsieh et al., 2009; Wood, Goodnight, Bethune, Preston & Cleaver, 2016). Individuals who coach teachers (e.g., university/faculty, supervisor) may offer individualized support to teachers after completion of required training (Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010). The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators provide individualized support to ECEs to promote (a) effective classroom practices, (b) long-term professional growth, and (c) ultimately enhance child growth and development. The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators provide support that is unique, in that they all have early childhood degrees and prior work experience with young children and their families.

a. Coaching Strategies

EESLPD Mentors and Evaluators use the three steps below that are included in *NAEYC's Coaching with Powerful Interactions* (Jablon, Dombro, & Johnson, 2016) to guide their coaching with teachers:

1. They are present and intentional when thinking and making decisions.

- a. They use mindfulness as a strategy to remain in the present moment. Being present allows the setting aside of one's own agenda and needs in order to better provide what the teacher truly needs. This practice allows mentors/evaluators to focus on creating a positive mindset when working with teachers.
- b. They identify and utilize their own strengths to best support ECE teachers.

2. They personally connect to the teachers they support.

- a. They build rapport with teachers to deepen their relationship and establish trust.
- b. Once trust is established, teachers may become more comfortable trying new strategies in the classroom and become more effective educators.

3. They coach to extend a teacher's learning.

- a. They make intentional and responsive decisions in the moment to assist teachers in moving forward with their practice.
- b. They help teachers articulate, formulate and break down achievable goals (e.g., PDP).

b. Characteristics of Coaching

EESLPD Mentors and Evaluators follow the five characteristics below (adapted for use by EESLPD Office staff) that are included in *The Early Childhood Coaching Handbook* (Rush & Shelden, 2011) to guide their supportive work with ECEs:

1. EESLPD Mentors and Evaluators jointly plan with ECEs they support.
2. EESLPD Mentors and Evaluators use both informal and formal observation methods with ECEs.
3. EESLPD Mentors and Evaluators guide ECEs through new opportunities so they can apply actions and strategies learned to implement with young children and families.
4. EESLPD Office Mentors and Evaluators consistently encourage reflection as part of their work to support ECEs.
5. EESLPD Office Mentors and Evaluators provide feedback to ECEs in the effort to improve understanding and the implementation of evidence-based practices in the early childhood classroom.

c. Dispositions

A crucial component of competencies for mentors and evaluators are their individual dispositions. Sibley, Lawrence, and Lambert (2010) suggest that the dispositions of mentors who work with teachers is often neglected and possibly underestimated. It is important for EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators to support ECEs consistently and their dispositions should reflect *how* they work to provide this support. Disposition has been defined in previous literature not as an emotional state, but rather as the demonstration of specific actions (e.g., consistency, intentionality) (Katz, 1993). While the dispositions of support personnel are an integral component of the EESLPD Office coaching framework, mentors and evaluators also need resources and internal supports to best serve ECEs. The EESLPD Office hires mentors and evaluators that carry out specific actions to best support the individual needs of ECEs. The EESLPD Office mentor and evaluator standards include the dispositions listed below, taken from the revised Teacher Leader Rubric within the Department of Public Instruction's Teacher Leader Staff Evaluation process:

1. *EESLPD Office Mentors and Evaluators demonstrate leadership.*

- Element a. They lead in their regions and within the EESLPD Office. They facilitate teamwork and leadership.
- Element b. They collaborate with colleagues at the regional and EESLPD Office level. They partner with other educators to facilitate professional learning.
- Element c. They advocate for students, educators, schools and sound educational programs.
- Element d. They demonstrate high ethical standards.

2. *EESLPD Office Mentors and Evaluators support an environment that is respectful of a diverse population of educators.*

- Element a. They model respectful communication strategies.
- Element b. They differentiate professional learning and coaching to meet the diverse learning needs in the school/district.

3. *EESLPD Office Mentors and Evaluators incorporate adult learning strategies and effective teaching and learning practices as they implement change.*

- Element a. They align support for educators with the NC Professional Teaching Standards.
- Element b. They use their knowledge of the structure and content of the NC Standard Course of Study (North Carolina Foundations of Early Learning and Development - Foundations) to support educators.
- Element c. They apply their understanding of the dynamic nature of teaching and learning.
- Element d. They engage educators in challenging conversations about data to develop appropriate solutions and increase student learning.
- Element e. They plan and deliver professional support. They use effective adult-learning strategies. They support stages of change and innovation for educators.

4. *EESLPD Office Mentors and Evaluators facilitate the growth and development of educators.*

- Element a. They deliver a continuum of support strategies to maximize educator effectiveness.
- Element b. They employ a variety of resources to help educators improve their effectiveness.
- Element c. They effectively employ appropriate and available technology as they support educators.
- Element d. They incorporate the Framework for 21st Century Learning to enhance educators' instructional planning and assessment.

5. *EESLPD Office Mentors and Evaluators engage in and facilitate reflective practice.*

- Element a. They assess the effectiveness of the support they provide and revise their practices based on findings.
- Element b. They assess their own professional development activities.
- Element c. They facilitate reflective practice in others.

Furthermore, prior research on dispositions in early childhood education settings suggests that children do not acquire dispositions through instructional processes, but dispositions are modeled for them as they experience people who exhibit them (Katz, 1993). Jablon, Dombro, and Johnsen (2016) suggest that adult modeling in early childhood education settings influence child outcomes, and coaches should model behaviors that positively guide the interactions between teachers, children, and families. The individualized, strengths-based coaching style used by EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators is needed to inspire ECEs to evolve to a level of professionalism that requires independent reflection and a reliance on the support and expertise of colleagues. The disposition of mindfulness can be described as a way to collect and alertly process information by incorporating flexibility (Langer, 1993). The EESLPD Office coaching style uses mindfulness as a strategy to remain present with ECEs and to intentionally think and make decisions to best support them. Listed below are some of the established minimum criteria for EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators, created by the EESLPD Unit, Education and Quality Section:

- Desire to become a mentor/evaluator
- Knowledge of developmentally appropriate early childhood practice
- Knowledge about child development and learning
- Desire, ability and capacity to lead
- Positive/professional communication skills (oral and written)
- Knowledge about the changing behavior and skill of adult learners

- Ability to nurture, listen, guide, coach, & support adults
- Ability to build on strengths of the ECE teacher
- Evidence of innovation as an early childhood educator/professional
- Practices mindfulness to remain present when working with teachers

d. Independence/Interdependence

A main goal of the coaching style implemented by EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators is to guide and promote ECEs through a process of acquiring independence and interdependence. Going through the NC TEP is a crucial transition period in the career of an ECE. The process is important in the development of independent ECEs who become life-long learners who are reflective. Self-generation is defined as a person who develops independence from his/her coach and ultimately takes responsibility for enhancing one's capabilities (Flaherty, 1999). Mentors and evaluators guide ECEs through a process of self-actualization through reflective activities and provide them with specific feedback in a time-sensitive manner. Post-conferences that take place within 10 days of an ECE's formal observation as part of the NC TEP is an example of this. Early childhood educators use the feedback and supportive strategies received from mentors and evaluators to make active, positive change in the classroom and to prepare for their next observation. Post-conference meetings are not the only point of contact between ECEs and the EESLPD Office support staff however. In between observations and meetings, ECEs are supported by their mentors and evaluators through informal and formal means (e.g., face-to-face meetings, phone calls, emails, texting). Individualizing the communication needs of ECEs is beneficial to mentors and evaluators so that communicating is productive and simple. Coaching that occurs between mentors/evaluators occurs by using various methods and is not only constricted to the classroom environment. The nature of work, not the schedule or setting is what establishes whether coaching is taking place (Silsbee, 2010). The dedication of our mentors and evaluators in forming relationships with ECEs results in self-reflection, leading to improvement in the implementation of classroom practices that influence child growth and development.

As professionals in the field early childhood education, ECEs must evolve to a place of interdependence with fellow leaders and colleagues. Independent, reflective ECEs should be able to seek out practices that are rooted in research-based standards of excellence developed by fellow practitioners. Prior research indicates that there is a need to create a professional community that works to improve teaching practices through reflective discussions (Dantonio, 2001). Early childhood educators need opportunities to collaborate and work together. The NC TEP includes criteria in the rubric regarding teachers' participation in a Professional Learning Community (PLC). A well-functioning PLC is a good example of how ECEs can utilize interdependence

by forming learning groups to work together and establish best practices. The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators support and guide ECEs as they develop successful PLCs. Members of PLCs may be highly diverse in that they may have different levels of education and different amounts of experience working in early childhood settings. The importance of creating a community of learners, regardless of background and experience, can be a great catalyst to learn, grow, and implement best practice. Educators make connections through forming a community of learners by sharing their current knowledge and experiences as well as extending opportunities to learn among themselves (Wlodkowski, 2008). The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators have unique perspectives to share with the ECEs they support because of their experiences working in and observing many diverse early childhood settings. The unique perspectives of EESLPD mentors and evaluators, in combination with ECEs' understandings of the children and families they work with, allow for the extension of research-based classroom practices.

IV. Rooms with Windows

Support provided to ECEs by EESLPD mentors and evaluators uses an interchangeable and simultaneous style of coaching, mentor as coach/coach as mentor approach. Strategies suggested in prior research to best facilitate mentor services may include provisions such as (a) emotional support that enhances reflective practices, (b) the organization and well-planned mentoring programs, and (c) sharing information related to improving classroom practices via consultation, observation, interaction, and discussion (Dempsey, Arthur-Kelly, & Carty, 2009). Although the roles of EESLPD mentors (inclusively guides ECEs through the licensure process) and evaluators (uses NC TEP to mark growth of ECEs on the rubric as part of the NC TEP) are different, both encompass many of the same methods/strategies (e.g., the “windows” in the EESLPD Office conceptual framework) to promote the professional growth of ECEs.

a. Knowledge-Based

i. *Specialized Knowledge*

The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators have ECE backgrounds and must use specialized knowledge, skills, and abilities to best support the teachers they serve.

- Professional knowledge of the following:
 - Child development and application of theory
 - Adult learning theory and evidence-based practices in designing and delivering effective professional development

- NC Professional Teaching Standards; NC Department of Public Instruction's Educator Effectiveness System
 - NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development
 - NC Pre-K and Developmental Day Program Requirements
 - NC State Board of Education Teacher Licensure Policy: Beginning Teacher Support Program
 - NC Department of Public Instruction's Mentor Standards (n.d.) and knowledge about NC educator licensure requirements
 - Knowledge of the EESLPD Framework (procedures, guidelines and implementation)
- Technical knowledge of the following:
 - Use of the NC Department of Public Instruction's Home Base/NC Educator Effectiveness System, database spreadsheets, power point presentations and blogs
 - Skills for using technology and computer in daily work with teachers and colleagues
 - Strong oral and written communication skills
 - Ability to nurture, listen, guide, coach, support adults and build on strengths
 - Exceptional interpersonal skills – Ability to actively participate as a team member of a mentor-teacher-evaluator team and a regional structure to meet program goals
 - Building collaborative partnerships – with site administrators and technical assistance professionals across sectors to support coordination of effective mentoring, coaching and evaluation of teachers being served
 - Ability to facilitate Professional Learning Communities – effectively support evidence-based teaching practices resulting in positive outcomes for children

The following teacher competencies (NAEYC, 2006) are also expectations of EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators:

- Knowledge of the range of influences on child development (cultural contexts, health status, social interactions, assessment, economic conditions)
- Respectful relationships with all families (regardless of language, ethnicity, or child's abilities)
- Use of effective assessment strategies (used to guide instruction)
- Use of content knowledge in all learning areas (provide expansive opportunities for children)
- Demonstration of self-motivated, ongoing learning, collaboration, and reflective, critical thinking (practices of all early childhood professionals)

ii. Professional Judgement

Sibley et al., (2010) discuss three main elements of professional development that guide the professional judgment of teachers including (a) the establishment of qualifications, (b) the assignment of roles and responsibilities, and (c) the creation of a system of self-regulation among professionals in the field (e.g., service delivery, ethical standards, principles to acquire high-quality practice). EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators encompass all three of the elements listed above to exhibit professional judgment.

iii. Application of High-Quality Learning Standards

The concept of high-quality early learning programs is based on a long standing and strong research base (Peisner-Feinberg, Schaaf, Hildebrandt, Pan, & Warnaar, 2015). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) suggest that high-quality early learning programs should be developmentally appropriate in two areas including (a) age appropriateness and (b) individual appropriateness (DEC & NAEYC, 2009). These two areas emphasize that while there may be predictable growth sequences that happen in early childhood development, each child has his/her own individual growth pattern than may differ from the predictable sequence of others. Berry Brazelton's *Touchpoints* (2008) emphasizes that individual children follow a linear pattern of growth and development that may include periods of alternating regressions and progressions. There is agreement among early childhood theorists and

practitioners that developmentally appropriate, high-quality early learning programs have specific, essential components including:

- Teachers and staff have a comprehensive knowledge of typical as well as atypical patterns of child growth and development.
- Teachers create environments that are stimulating and designed to reflect how young children think and learn.
- Teachers have strong family and community connections and provide continuity as programs complement and support families in their child-rearing roles.
- Teachers have ongoing supervision and professional development opportunities.
- Teachers use curriculum that is whole-child focused and designed to meet the developmental needs of young children (programs include play, hands-on learning, and intentional, functional teaching strategies).
- Teachers implement consistent, formative ongoing assessment.
- Teachers provide authentic learning experiences for young children.
- Teachers provide opportunities for young children to build on the prior knowledge of young children.
- Teachers develop activities derived from children's interests.
- Teachers utilize a range of instructional modalities to work with young children.

North Carolina Pre-K teachers have children in their classrooms with a wide range of ability levels. Many teachers of NC Pre-K programs are responsible for working with children who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in inclusive classroom settings. In a joint position statement by the DEC and NAEYC (2009) it is stated that main components of high-quality early childhood inclusion should provide children with (a) access to a wide variety of learning opportunities, activities, and environments, (b) participation, through the use of needed adaptations and accommodations for full participation in learning programs, and (c) systems-level supports for programs that provide inclusive services to children and families.

The DEC and NAEYC (2009) joint position statement on inclusion suggests the listed components for teachers to improve practices for high-quality, inclusive early learning programs. The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators support teachers to meet the individual needs of children in their classrooms.

- Create high expectations for every child to reach his or her full potential.
- Develop a program philosophy on inclusion

- Establish a system of services and supports.
- Revise program and professional standards.
- Achieve an integrated professional development system.
Influence federal and state accountability systems.

iv. *Wisdom*

Wisdom is said to have no one definition that encompasses all attributes encompassing the term (Jeste et al., 2010). However, wisdom is generally known to be the application of knowledge. The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators consistently provide support to teachers by applying and implementing their knowledge of coaching identified in NAEYC's *Coaching with Powerful Interactions* (Jablon et al., 2016). These principles have been modified for the purposes of addressing how EESLPD mentors and evaluators provide support to teachers:

- Mentors and evaluators have knowledge of what a strengths-based perspective is and apply this approach when working with teachers.
- Mentors and evaluators take the time to develop a relationship with the teachers they serve in order to develop best questions to ask teachers to elicit the information needed for deep, reflective practice.
- Mentors and evaluators share and describe information about observations with teachers and explain why the information is important. This coaching strategy helps teachers to intentionally plan instruction based on observation feedback, ultimately improving their practice.
- Mentors and evaluators apply what they know about individual teachers to guide their support and hold teachers accountable for creating goals and improving practice.
- Mentors and evaluators apply their knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice to support teacher implementation of best practice in the classroom.
- Mentors and evaluators are committed to being life-long learners and share this responsibility with teachers.
- Mentors and evaluators know that modeling of behaviors influences outcomes when working with teachers. These outcomes ultimately impact the interactions teachers have with young children and families.
- Mentors and evaluators know how to intrinsically motivate teachers so they will be more likely to commit to long-term change and improvement of their teaching practices.

v. *Reflective Practitioner*

A professional can be defined as a reflective practitioner who works independently, applies specialized knowledge, uses professional judgment, and is accountable for his/her conduct and professional growth (Harvey, 2003). The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators must use professional judgment daily in their work with individual teachers. Adult learners participate in learning new information when the information is related to current experiences and the learner is able to actively engage in the learning process (Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010). Based on the many diverse needs of teachers and the children they serve in their classrooms, mentors and evaluators must meet teachers “where they are,” much as teachers do with the young children and families they support. EESLPD Office mentors/evaluators are active participants in guiding ECEs through the feedback loop illustrated below:

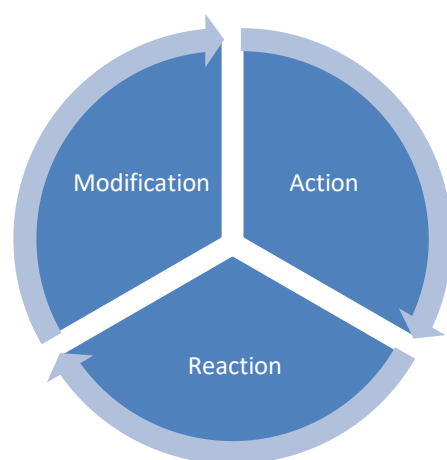


Figure 2. This figure depicts the feedback loop that occurs between EESLPD mentors and evaluators when working with ECEs.

b. Individualized Support

Early childhood educators enrolled with the EESLPD Office may need different levels of support to meet the diverse needs of young children. Early childhood educators at the EESLPD Office need holistic support from mentors and evaluators that are mindful of all the factors that encompass the teacher, child, and classroom environment. It is important that mentors and evaluators are able to name their coaching habits (e.g., self-judgment, social identity, projections, philosophical positions, emotional triggers, routines, distractions, expert mind) in order to best support individual teachers (Silsbee, 2010). When mentors and

evaluators are aware of their coaching habits they are better able to support teachers individually, rather than generalizing information and strategies for all. Once coaching habits are identified, mentors and evaluators are better able to model how to provide individualized support, in the hopes that this modeling will influence future interactions with children and families. Prior research suggests that professionals who work with very young children and their families should provide individualized and responsive interventions (Dunst & Trivette, 1996; Dunst & Trivette, 2005; Dunst et al., 1988; Epley, Summers & Turnbull, 2011; James & Chard, 2010; McWilliam & Scott, 2001; McWilliam et al., 1998). Early childhood professionals who provide individualized and responsive supports may promote the family's ability to identify their own priorities, strengths, and needs. Individualized support provided by the EESLPD Office may elicit a teacher's desire and ability to identify professional goals, strengths, and areas of need.

It takes time for EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators to get to know teachers, just as it takes focus and attention for teachers to get to know the children in their classrooms. Individualizing support by using NAEYC's *Coaching with Powerful Interactions* approach means finding the "right fit" (Jablon, Dombro, & Johnson, 2016). Coaches need to communicate with teachers in the manner that best suits the needs of the individual teacher (Dantonio, 2001). The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators exhibits their own personal stance when working to support teachers. The *Coaching with Powerful Interactions* approach includes the following questions to help coaches in the ECE field to identify their own personal stance when supporting teachers:

- Do you communicate with teachers about what is going well in the classroom and explain why the positive teaching behaviors support children's growth and development OR are you more likely to directly tell a teacher what to do or change?
- Do you have interactions with teachers based on their individual learning style, strengths, and interests OR do you have a more prescriptive way that you carry out your mentoring/evaluating work?
- Are you a learning partner with teachers OR do you consider yourself an expert who already knows what's happening in the classroom and what needs to happen next?
- Do you model effective practice with teachers OR would you rather tell teachers how to be and then guide their teaching practices?

Individualizing support assists EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators to guide teachers through a process of viewing themselves as whole beings, having both

internal and external factors that make-up who they are as educators. Through this process, teachers may be able to better identify their own priorities that will benefit their professional practice to enhance children's growth and development.

Previous research suggests that coaches are successful in supporting teachers when they are also provided with information (e.g., resources and curricula) to address feedback provided to them (Crawford, Zucker, Van Horne, and Landry, 2017). The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators are provided with a seamless system of PD to prepare them to support teachers. This PD includes information pertaining to practices of mindfulness and exploring the whole person, rather than a prescriptive method of analysis regarding teacher behaviors or classroom conditions. The work of the EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators is unique because of the interchangeable, simultaneous means of providing coaching and mentoring. Although roles of mentors and evaluators differ, both roles inclusively and holistically guide teachers through the licensure process by working with the whole person, his/her strengths, skills, needs for improvement and opportunities for growth in the early childhood profession.

c. Relationship-Based

The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators work in partnership with teachers. Mentors and evaluators work closely and communicate frequently about teacher progress and needs. Both mentors and evaluators form authentic relationships with teachers by building rapport and taking the time to get to know the teachers they support. The authentic relationships formed by mentors and evaluators with the teachers they support enable the effective use of clear and effective language. The *Coaching with Powerful Interactions* approach uses observations and thoughts to put educational practice into words, allowing both the coach and mentor to reflect and communicate (Jablon et al., 2016). The time and intensity spent with teachers may vary among mentors and evaluators, but nonetheless, relationship-building is at the forefront of this supportive partnership. There have been differences noted between the role of coach and that of mentor in previous research. Mentors have been described in previous literature as a guide or tutor who helps his/her protégé extend teaching strategies while a coach assists in developing specific job-related skills by providing technical support (Sibley, Lawrence, & Lambert, 2010). The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators gain information from teachers and follow through with guidance they provide throughout the entire time the teacher is served. Prior research indicates that five periods emerge during the mentor-protégé relationship including (a) relationship building, (b) agenda building, (c) information exchange, (d) groundwork for change, and (e) moving to transformation (Martin and Trueax, 1997). This literature suggests that a true partnership cannot form unless the mentor's protégé reciprocates participation in the relationship and transformation process. While

the EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators may provide support that is relevant and individualized based on a teacher's needs, the educator needs to take an active role in implementing the agreed upon change in order to grow professionally and create opportunities for optimal child growth and development.

d. Adaptable

Coaches who work with ECEs must be adaptable for many reasons with one of which being the high turnover rate that occurs in early childhood settings (Odom et al., 2000; Rush & Shelden, 2011). Prior research on dispositions in early childhood settings suggests that children do not acquire dispositions through instructional processes, but dispositions are modeled for them as they experience people who exhibit them (Katz, 1993). Jablon et al. (2016) suggests that modeling in ECE settings influences child outcomes, and coaches should model behaviors that positively influence the interactions between teachers, children, and families. The individualized, strength-based coaching style used by EESLPD office mentors and evaluators is needed to inspire teachers to evolve to a level of professionalism that requires independent reflection and a reliance on the support and expertise of colleagues. Mindfulness has been described as a disposition because it can be described as a way to gather and process information in a flexible, yet alert way (Langer, 1993). The EESLPD office coaching style uses mindfulness as a strategy to remain present with teachers and to intentionally think and make decisions to best support them.

e. Strengths-Based Practices

The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators focus on validating what's going well in the classroom before providing suggestions to improve practice. Peterson and Valk (2010) indicate that in their practice with teachers, focusing on teacher strengths is one way to build trusting relationships. The *Coaching with Powerful Interactions* approach uses a strengths-based perspective by identifying what teachers do well and coaches use this as the basis for future learning (Jablon, Dombro, Johnsen, 2016). Early childhood educators want their efforts validated and by having the proper support from mentors and evaluators that emphasize strengths and capacity-building, the self-confidence of teachers served may be positively impacted. Just as teachers need support from coaches who use a strengths-based approach, children need their strengths acknowledged by teachers who use their capacities as a foundation to develop future learning goals. Circumstances that occur both within and outside the family unit may greatly influence child and family strengths. Prior research encourages practitioners to

use an ecological framework and family systems theory, to work with very young children with special needs and their families to benefit the developmental potential of young children (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988). As EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators work to support teachers, it is important to keep these previous findings in mind. The powerful impact coaching and interactive modeling may have on a teacher's desire to change and grow professionally should not be underestimated. When mentors use a strengths-based perspective to support teachers, findings suggest that they become more committed to using strengths and positivity to inform their teaching practices (Gardner & Toope, 2011).

V. Roof (The Peak – Child Growth and Development)

a. Optimal Child Development:

The ultimate goal of support and guidance provided by the EESLPD Office is to guide teachers through the licensure process in ways that promote independent, life-long learning as well as positively impact the lives of families they serve and the developmental outcomes of young children. The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators achieves goals with teachers through reflection, responsiveness, and intentionality.

i. Reflection

The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators use a process of holistic, active reflection or reflection-in-action, metacognition, and cognitive coaching when working with teachers. Reflection-in-action refers to teachers who are their own problem solvers who share what they do and why they do it (Dahlin, 1994). Mentors and evaluators have teachers investigate the thinking they use behind their practices. This process involves asking very targeted pre- and post-observation questions based on the individual teacher's needs. Early childhood educators are also asked to complete a self-assessment using the NC TEP rubric. Soon after this reflective self-assessment is completed, teachers develop their own Professional Development Plan (PDP) based on needs and priorities identified in their self-assessment. The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators use steps included in the PBC framework when working with teachers to guide individual PDP development (i.e., needs assessment, goal setting, action planning steps) (Snyder, Hemmeter, and Fox, 2015). Teachers develop Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timebound (SMART) goals to develop their PDP. The SMART goals are highly individualized to encompass a teacher's strengths, needs, and preferences, which is important

when coaching is used to change behaviors of the coachee (Frantes, Moore, Lopez, & McMahon, 2011). While it is the responsibility of the teacher to identify and create PDP goals, mentors and evaluators support and guide this process. The act of the teacher completing the self-assessment and subsequently creating a PDP gives teachers the opportunity to share their thinking both verbally and in written form, thus their choices regarding classroom practices become clearer and their awareness may increase. This process of active reflection that EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators use can be reflected and supported by Costa & Garmston's (1985) Cognitive Coaching Framework:

1. Encourages reflection through questioning
2. Reciprocal learning
3. Non-judgmental approach to guide a person to self-directed and independent learning
4. Focus on ECE teacher's thinking, beliefs, perceptions, and assumptions
5. Observation is an opportunity to collect data

Reflection can be viewed as part of the EESLPD Office process of becoming an independent, self-generated teacher. Sibley, Lawrence and Lambert (2010) developed a model of professional development that begins with a macro-level profession-wide process, and ends with a micro-level ECE teacher-specific process. The figure below shows the interconnectedness between research-based standards to teacher self-directed learning. This self-directed learning can be attributed to the process of independent autonomy that is the self-generalized teacher the EESLPD Office supports.

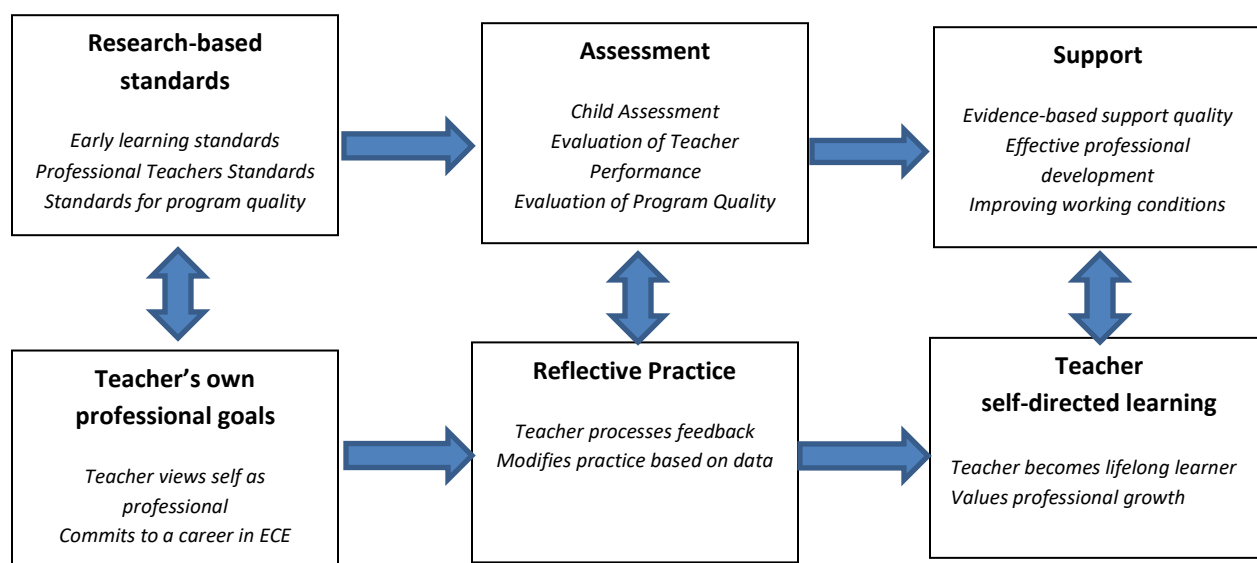


Figure 3. This figure depicts a cycle of practices used to support and evaluate teacher performance and program quality as well as to assess children in early childhood settings (Sibley, Lawrence, & Lambert, 2010).

ii. Responsiveness

Our EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators provide support that is responsive. The responsive nature we use with ECEs we support provides a proposed structure for how we intend for teachers to work with children and families. A major finding of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2019) reports that young children need positive relationships, rich learning opportunities, and safe, nurturing environments to increase growth-promoting experiences. These experiences help create a strong foundation for later school achievement, economic productivity, and responsible citizenship. Early childhood teachers also need to have a relationship based on trust with their EESLPD Office mentor and evaluator to begin to improve practice and expand learning opportunities for children. Successful coaching provided by EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators is relationship-based and responsive. Coaching provides teachers with reflective strategies to help them feel safe experimenting with new practices, failing, revising, and trying again (Raney & Robbins, 1989). EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators must be responsive to teachers who are in the process of changing classroom practices. The Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982) has six characteristics that may encompass the behavioral stages ECE teachers go through when changing their practice:

- (1) Precontemplation – EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators must know how to be responsive with teachers who are not yet aware that changes need to take place to improve their practice

- (2) Contemplation - EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators must know how to be responsive to teachers who may feel ambivalent about making changes in their practice
- (3) Preparation – EESLPD mentors and evaluators need to know how to be responsive to teachers who are cautiously trying new strategies before committing to change.
- (4) Action - EESLPD mentors and evaluators need to know how to be responsive to teachers who have embraced change and are practicing new strategies in the classroom.
- (5) Maintenance - EESLPD mentors and evaluators need to know how to be responsive to teachers who have modified their classroom practices and are continually adding new learning experiences for children into daily routines.
- (6) Relapse - EESLPD mentors and evaluators need to know how to be responsive to teachers who have abandoned new strategies and reverted to old habits and “more comfortable” strategies used in the past.

In addition, the following developmental stages have also been identified to describe ECEs in a sequence of change (Katz & Weir, 1969):

- Stage One: Survival

This developmental stage pertains to teachers who may be new to the profession or who may be in a new situation. During this stage ECEs need support, encouragement, guidance, and reassurance to take place in the classroom setting. Early childhood education teachers may need direct assistance with specific skills. They may need insight and explanations as to the cause of behaviors exhibited in the classroom setting.

- Stage Two: Consolidation

As the teacher gains more experience in the classroom, training that continues on-site should be made available to the teacher. A coach may engage in exploration of a problem and seek a solution in partnership with the teacher. A need for information about specific children or a need for a wider range of resources may be helpful for teachers at this stage.

- Stage Three: Renewal

Teachers who have acquired more experience and confidence in the classroom may want to meet colleagues from different programs, both formally and informally. Teachers in this stage are open to various experiences in local, regional, and national conferences and workshops. They may want to become members of professional organizations that impact the early childhood population and participate in their meetings. Teachers may be expanding their knowledge by reading early childhood education literature, journals, and web-based educational sites. They are typically looking for fresh ideas at this stage and may even video tape their own classroom to gain a different perspective.

- Stage Four: Maturity

As ECEs mature in their profession, they will benefit from participation in seminars/conferences. They may choose to seek out advanced degree opportunities. Mature ECEs may want opportunities to solve problems and collaborate/network with other professionals.

iii. Intentionality

Reflection is a cornerstone of being able to truly plan intentionally. Early childhood educators are the ultimate decision makers in the classroom—deciding what to teach, how to teach and gauging what children are learning. Early childhood educators observe, evaluate, adapt, and consistently make choices that will enhance children’s knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The choices they make take into account what they know about individual children, groups of children, teacher methods, developmental expectations, and program content. The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators help ECEs to learn how to intentionally plan by having them complete independent activities to promote professional growth, ongoing self-reflection, and assessment (e.g., ECEs complete self-assessment using the rubric, pre- and post-observation conferences, formal/informal observations, PDP development).

The EESLPD Office guides ECEs through the licensure process by helping them to identify and optimize their professional potentials by using practices of self-reflection and self-actualization. Inherently through this cognitive coaching process, EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators also become more reflective practitioners through a consistent, systematic process of professional development. Professional development practices

used to hire and develop EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators allow them to best support the teaching practices of teachers. Through cognitive coaching and interactive modeling, EESLPD mentors and evaluators are able to best support teachers to create learning environments that are nurturing, inclusive, intentional, responsive, and have high learning standards for children. The ultimate goal of the coaching model is to provide rich environments with expansive learning opportunities to positively impact child growth and development and the lives of families.

Table 1

The supportive work of mentors and evaluators with ECEs, the ECEs working with children, and the possible outcomes for children and families.

| Mentors and Evaluators Working with ECEs | ECEs Working with Children | Possible Outcomes for Children and Families (preparing to transition to school age environment) |
|---|---|---|
| Model positive behaviors | Model positive behaviors | Family may learn from child behaviors. Reciprocal learning, growing and changing (transforming) |
| Routinely assess for understanding and implementation of new ideas as part of NCTEP | Authentic Assessment in the natural environment | Family becomes aware of the continual developmental progress their child is making in school. |
| Provide prompt feedback following both formal and informal observations using the rubric as part of the NCTEP | Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development Scaffold by providing differentiated, new learning experiences | Early Childhood Educators will parent with families to identify activities at home that will align with individualized, differentiated goals at home. |
| Engage ECE teachers in active learning (PDP development, PD opportunities and trainings, Foundations, and use the | Guide children through their own learning process. Children will engage as leaders in their own learning process by choosing and planning their | Children will take part in active planning of routines and responsibilities at home with their families. |

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Resource Manual for support) | own learning opportunities to explore. | |
| Self-generation – life-long learner | Independence – life-long learner | Child can help family with daily chores and routines (e.g., getting ready for school). This may be especially helpful as child transitions to kindergarten. |

VI. Chimney

a. Formative Process

The EESLPD Office uses an ongoing formative process to model, assess, and provide feedback to teachers to plan and implement professional goals. This process includes using the NC TEP to formally evaluate teachers to make changes in the classroom that will positively impact child developmental outcomes. The NC TEP has five standards that include criteria young children need to learn in early childhood classrooms and has learning content that is meaningful and relevant to them. Teacher competencies for implementing the five learning standards in the classroom, needs for improvement, and goals/objectives may evolve, but the process remains consistent.

Authentic assessment is the preferred method of identifying child learning competencies in the classrooms of teachers supported by EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators. Authentic assessments must be meaningful and relevant to the children by connecting with the real world around them. Authentic assessments are said to produce genuine achievement and educational environments for young children should ensure the development of teaching processes that foster understanding of rich concepts and encourage engagement with the world around them (Wortham, 2013). Furthermore, learning should be meaningful for children and include intellectual accomplishments that are comparable to those undertaken by adults including tasks that engage the mind (Checkley, 1997). The assessment process ECEs use to support children’s learning in the classroom is a similar cycle EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators use when supporting teachers’ professional growth. This formative process is a cycle that evolves and builds on pre-determined goals and is repetitive in nature.

In order to strongly support the care of education of children, the National Research Council (2008) of the National Academies Committee on Developmental Outcomes and Assessments for Young Children has identified *eight infrastructure components* needed to establish an effective early childhood assessment system: that supports early childhood education and care:

- a. *Standards*: A comprehensive set of standards for both program quality and children's learning. Standards define the constructs of interest as well as child outcomes that demonstrate that the learning described in the standard has occurred.
- b. *Assessments*: Multiple approaches to documenting child development and learning and reviewing program quality that are of high quality and connect to one another in well-defined ways, from which strategic selection can be made depending on specific purposes.
- c. *Reporting*: Maintenance of an integrated database of assessment instruments and results (with appropriate safeguards of confidentiality) that is accessible to potential users, that provides information about how the instruments and scores relate to standards, and that can generate reports for varied audiences and purposes.
- d. *Professional development*: Ongoing opportunities provided to those at all levels (policy makers, program directors, assessors, administrators, practitioners) to understand the standards and assessment information in order to use the data and data reports with integrity for their own purposes.
- e. *Opportunity to learn*: Procedures to assess whether the environments in which children are spending time offer high-quality support for development and learning, as well as safety, enjoyment, and positive relationships, and to direct support to those that fall short.
- f. *Inclusion*: Methods and procedures for ensuring that all children served by the program will be assessed fairly, regardless of their language, culture, or disabilities, and with tools that provide useful information for fostering their development and learning.
- g. *Resources*: The assurance that the financial resources needed to ensure the development and implementation of the system components will be available.
- h. *Monitoring and evaluation*: Continuous monitoring of the system itself to ensure that it is operating effectively and that all elements are working together to serve the interests of children. This entire infrastructure must be in place to create and sustain an assessment

subsystem within a larger system of early childhood care and education.

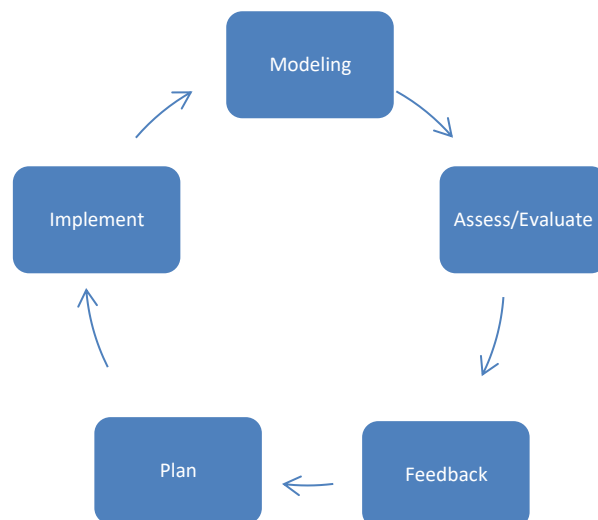


Figure 4. The figure depicts processes used during the assessment and evaluation of children and adults.

VII. Ecology

Early childhood educators must be adaptable and often work in unpredictable environments with young children and their families. The bioecological model is an extension of Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) and includes biological factors that impact a child’s development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). This model indicates that interactions between factors in the child’s life, including biological makeup, immediate family and community, and societal factors influence the development of children. Bronfenbrenner’s traditional ecological systems theory includes five components such as (a) the microsystem (e.g., layer closest to family, school, neighborhood, childcare environments) (b) the mesosystem (e.g., layer providing the connection between the structures of the child’s microsystem such as the relationship between the child’s teacher and his parents) (c) the exosystem (e.g., layer includes the larger social system in which the child may not have direct contact such as mom/dad’s work schedules and community-based family resources) (d) the macrosystem – (e.g., outermost layer in the child’s environment including laws, cultural values, customs) and (e) the chronosystem – (e.g., the environmental circumstances that surround a child’s life). These “systems” are particularly important in the development of a young child because as children get older, their reaction to

environmental changes vary and they may be able to anticipate how changes will influence them.

Early childhood educators must be resilient under conditions that are ever-changing and evolving. Broad changes that occur in both federal and state policy requiring high program standards and quality are in constant transformation in the field of early education. The preparation of teachers is of growing importance in an era of increasing immigrant populations and globalization trends in the U.S. (Yeh, Blanchard, Brehm & Faapoi, 2017). The EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators support teachers who work with young children in inclusive classroom environments. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) requires that programs for children diagnosed with or at-risk for developing Developmental Delays (DD) need to be in natural and least restrictive environments. Developing and implementing Individual Education Programs (IEPs) is often a component of being an early childhood educator in the classroom. The diverse learning needs of typically developing children as well as those who are diagnosed with DD or at-risk for developing DD should be addressed early in children's lives to have the greatest impact on developmental outcomes (Etscheidt, 2006). In a joint position statement developed by the DEC and NAEYC (2009) main components of high-quality early childhood inclusive programs for children and families should include: (a) access, (b) full participation in learning programs, and (c) systems level supports. Early childhood education teachers who work with young children must be flexible and know how to meet the needs of children with varying ability levels in inclusive settings. Families and young children who are served by ECE teachers are at times impacted by external factors, many of which may be out of the realm of their control. Because of the often dynamic yet inconsistent working conditions in which teachers function, the role of EESLPD Office mentors and evaluators must be highly adaptable to best meet the specific needs of the teachers they support.

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