

# Using the Practice Based Coaching Model for Professional Development in Head Start Programs

## *A Research to Practice Summary*

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## ABSTRACT

A mixed-methods descriptive single-case research design explored the effects of implementing the Practice-Based Coaching (PBC) model at a South Texas Early Head Start Center. Three bilingual coaches used the Practiced-Based Coaching model to provide professional development on emergent biliteracy instruction for three bilingual teachers of 2- to 3-year-olds. Coaches and teachers used reflexive journals, focus groups, pre- and post-observation checklists, and surveys to share their views and experiences with the Practice-Based Coaching model. Results showed the Practice Based Coaching model is effective teacher and coach training. The model's ripple effect fostered a coach-teacher collaboration via social learning, boosting teachers' emergent biliteracy skills and inclusive practices. Teachers changed their practices and performance because of this knowledge, leading to more engaged students. This research suggests that teacher educators employ Practice-Based Coaching in professional development to cultivate social learning and expand teachers' knowledge and skills in inclusive emergent biliteracy.

## KEYWORDS

Head Start, English Language Learners, Emergent Biliteracy, Practice-Based Coaching Model, Professional Development

America's Head Start communities showed a massive increase in cultural and linguistic diversity in the 2000s, with over 320,000 of one million children speaking a non-English language at home (McNamara, 2016). In 2025, one-quarter of school-children nationwide will be English Language Learners (ELLs) (National Education Association, 2020). More and more students in the county are learning English as a second language. Many local schools have large Hispanic and ELL populations. The insufficient professional development in emergent biliteracy instruction hinders diverse Head Start programs in

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supporting their increasingly diverse ELLs. Educators need more training, resources, and understanding of how to teach biliteracy to children learning two languages at once. The rapid growth of the ELL population causes crucial professional development for teachers to meet the unique needs of these students. McNamara (2016) advocated for better teacher professional development through targeted training in home language and suitable teaching practices, ensuring developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate learning experiences in language and biliteracy using both languages.

Recent literature on professional development has suggested that coaching, consultation, mentoring, and communities of practice help promote change in teacher knowledge, skills, and performance (Hsieh et al., 2009; Sheridan et al., 2009; Winton, 2006). These studies support the importance of implementing the Practice-Based Coaching (PBC) model for providing professional development to develop the pedagogical knowledge base of teachers and the knowledge dynamics in teaching emerging biliteracy to young emerging bilingual students ages three to five years old. The PBC model is a cyclical coaching model supported by the Office of Head Start and the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning to support teachers as they implement effective practices (Godfrey-Hurrell, 2015; Howard, Rankin, Fishman, Hawkinson, McGroder, Helsel, 2013; Joyce and Showers, 2002; Snyder, Hemmelter, Meeker, Kinder, Pasia, McLaughlin, 2012). The significance of this research to the early childhood preparation workforce is to support the use of the PBC model to provide professional development to teachers on how to implement effective emergent biliteracy practices for emerging bilinguals, thus, participating in continuous, collaborative learning and reflecting to inform practice that supports inclusion. The research question in this study is: What effects does the PBC model have in the practice of three coaches and three early head start teachers concerning knowledge and pedagogy of emergent biliteracy instruction?

### Summary of the Literature Review

This research, rooted in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and concept of internalization (Vygotsky,

1978), explored the cognitive development of three coaches and three teachers using the PBC model to strengthen their knowledge, skills, and pedagogical understanding of emerging bilingual learning in classrooms with students immersed in simultaneous language learning environments. Research emphasizes the importance to provide teachers with intensive and focused professional development to help them gain better content, pedagogical, skill and knowledge to create a high-quality learning environment to meet their student's needs in emergent biliteracy development (Delbridge & Helman, 2016; Reyes, 2012; Reyes & Azuara, 2008). This research adds to the research of Godfrey-Hurrell (2015), Howard et al. (2013), and Hsieh et al. (2009) in implementing the PBC model in providing professional development to support teachers implement effective emerging biliteracy practices for positive student outcomes.

The PBC model is a collaborative coaching partnership between experts in education and teachers to improve teacher quality. This study used the PBC model to improve teachers' emergent biliteracy instruction for emerging bilinguals. Each component relied on continual support for teachers to reflect and receive performance feedback to improve their instructional practices. Creating a goal and action steps based on the teacher's self-assessment needs was the first component of the PBC model. The coaching partnership helped teachers set goals and action plans by providing cognitive apprenticeship and scaffolding. The second PBC model component centered on observations. Coaches completed observations to gather and record information about teachers implementing teaching practices during ongoing classroom activities based on the goal and action plan steps described during component number one.

The third PBC model component reflected on and sharing feedback about implemented teaching practices. It used the information gathered during focused observations to identify successes, challenges, and areas for additional improvement. This occurred in debriefing conversations between teachers and coaches in a nonthreatening atmosphere. The teacher and coach collaboratively determined goal achievement. Following the PBC model cycle again, teachers and coaches refined goals and

created new ones. It was through this successive cycle that internalization took effect as teachers gave meaning to their experiences, observations, performance, and reflections to provoke a change in their instructional practices.

This study also used Reyes and Azuara's (2008) research findings, which recommended using an Ecological Model for Emergent Biliteracy to help coaches support teachers in providing appropriate and effective emerging biliteracy instruction. This model posits interactions with peers and adults shape children's emergent biliteracy development. Emergent bilinguals need opportunities to use both emerging languages in different genres and for different functions while speaking, thinking, writing, and reading. Reyes et al.'s (2008) Ecological Model for Emergent Biliteracy supported coaches in helping teachers teach biliteracy effectively. The first step was to create social integration opportunities for emergent bilinguals with their peers and teachers. The second part comprised creating meaningful, authentic biliteracy situations for young emergent bilinguals. Part three focused on implementing early literacy activities, such as phonological awareness, print concepts, letter recognition, oral language development, and writing. The combined effect of these emergent biliteracy components positively affect the biliteracy development of young Spanish English emergent bilinguals by increasing their engagement in their classroom.

### Summary of the Research Findings

The research findings show the PBC model to be effective in using for coaches and teachers to foster their learning of emergent biliteracy instruction. All participants agreed that the components of the model were effective, detailed, and helpful. Together, teachers and coaches worked together to improve their emergent biliteracy knowledge, practice, and confidence in teaching, with an ending result of higher student engagement.

Coaches and teachers perceived the PBC model to be only effective because of the trusting relationship they had with each other to establish a trusting partnership. Teachers felt confident, safe, and motivated to work with their coaches to receive constructive and supportive feedback. This trusting

relationship increased their collaboration and ownership of their learning through reflective thinking and dialogue. It also increased their knowledge of emergent biliteracy practices to enhance student engagement.

The results show the ripple effect the PBC model had, as seen in Figure 1 in the main article. The components of creating a shared goal and a plan of action, conducting a focused observation, and discussing reflections and feedback based on performance developed a collaborative partnership between the teacher and the coach. It was this collaboration that started a ripple effect by influencing teachers and coaches to own their learning and reflect on it to improve it. For coaches, they owned their learning by reflecting on what and how they would deliver their coaching based on the teacher's goal and needs. Teachers owned their learning by internalizing the professional development their coaches provided and putting it into practice in their classrooms. As a result, there was an increased student engagement and biliteracy learning.

### Suggestions for Practice

The suggestions for practice include coaches and teachers collaborating through social interactions to develop their cognitive development and learning through professional development guided by the PBC model. The qualitative data yielded four primary practices to be integrated into practice. They are:

1. The PBC model increases collaboration between coach and teacher.
2. The PBC model increases coaches' and teachers' knowledge of emergent biliteracy practices that leads to a change in practice
3. The PBC model leads teachers and coaches to own their own learning and engage in reflective thinking
4. The PBC model enhances students' engagement in emergent biliteracy learning

First, coaches can guide teachers' learning by providing information, resources, modeling, and side-to-side coaching based on their teacher's goal. Together, they can analyze and learn in-depth information related to what, why, and how implement-

ing emergent biliteracy instruction sparks student engagement. It is through this social interaction and collaboration that teachers enhance in-depth understanding of their practice and change their perceptions and performance in the classroom. Coaches can scaffold and support their teachers in moving within their Zone of Proximal Development and gain the needed skills and knowledge to teach emergent biliteracy practices (Vygotsky, 1978). This supports the growing research identifying the overall positive effects of coaching on teaching by increasing teacher's knowledge and confidence in teaching emergent biliteracy instruction that leads to higher performance and children's outcomes (Neuman et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2010; Reyes, 2006; Reyes et al., 2008).

Second, the PBC model equips teachers to implement effective emergent biliteracy practices to enhance student engagement and learning. Godfrey-Hurrell's (2015) research shows that practice-based coaching helps teachers learn how to provide children with language and literacy opportunities that prompt engagement and skill development. Teachers can provide opportunities for students to engage in literacy and language experiences (i.e., segmenting syllables, writing activities, and rhyming activities) that motivate them to interact with language and literacy activities.

Third, the implications for practice are to use the PBC model and integrate the following factors; (a) individual needs of the teachers; (b) emergent biliteracy practices that align with developmentally appropriate early childhood practices; (c) rapid guidance, feedback, and evaluation of practices implemented; (d) high intensity and duration of guidance based on the need of the teacher; and (e) cooperative participation between teachers and coaches (Hsieh et al., 2009; Sheridan et al., 2009; Winton, 2006). Together, the PBC model with these factors supports teachers in learning new skills and knowledge to implement appropriate and evidence-based emergent biliteracy practices to support their emerging bilingual students.

Last, this research also recommends integrating the Reyes & Azuara's (2008) Ecological Model of Emergent Biliteracy to help teachers provide effective instruction related to the precursors for emerging biliteracy development such as concepts

of print, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, oral language and writing in both languages. Teachers need to immerse students in social interactions with adults and peers to create meaningful and authentic biliteracy contexts in both languages to develop the precursors of print. Together, these emergent biliteracy components support the biliteracy process as part of the natural development of young Spanish and English emergent bilinguals.

This research suggests integrating the PBC model along with the Ecological Model of Emergent Biliteracy (Reyes et al., 2008) to develop and facilitate language and biliteracy learning in both languages for emerging bilingual students. Both models are grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the concept of internalization; meaningful and authentic biliteracy contexts and activities, delivered through diverse social interactions, immerse students and teachers. Implementing the PBC model advances teachers' understanding of dynamic children's bilingual development and trains them to effectively engage students in developing biliteracy.

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