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**Rural** Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed)

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R<sup>2</sup>Ed Working Paper 2014-5

## **Evaluation of Early Childhood Coaching Implementation in Nebraska**

### **Technical Report Vol. 1:**

### **Key Findings from Participant Follow Up Survey<sup>1</sup>**

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## Introduction

The Nebraska Early Childhood Coach (ECC) training was a 3 day (8 hours) professional development event sponsored by the Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Child Development in 2009-2010. Sixty-five early childhood teachers and related service providers participated for the purpose of learning the basic principles and behaviors associated with current or proposed job responsibilities as a ‘coach’ to parents, care providers or preschool teachers. The purpose of this training was to advance/enhance the early childhood professionals’ ability to support individuals they may be coaching, mentoring, and/or supervising. The learner objectives for the training were to: (a) understand the research evidence for the practice of Early Childhood (EC) coaching, (b) understand EC coaching as an adult-learning strategy, and (c) demonstrate the use of targeted EC coaching characteristics.

Held in Omaha, Nebraska in the eastern part of the state, the ECC training participants included practitioners from across the state representing both rural and urban communities. Participants represented different agencies serving young children under age 5 and their families. Coaching responsibilities focused on the needs of family members, care providers or teachers associated with one of three primary program or project missions. These could include coaching related to children’s Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP) or Individualized Education Plans (IEP) for children with developmental delays/disabilities, the quality of classroom environments following observational assessment using with the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (CLASS) or *Early Childhood Environmental Ratings System* (ECERS), and/or implementation of relevant strategies to advance children’s social emotional development in follow up to professional development sessions teachers attended on the *Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children*. The ECC training sessions were provided in both dyadic lecture and small group discussion format and included case study problem solving opportunities. Participants were asked to outline a Coaching Development Action Plan before departing the training.

An independent evaluation of the ECC training outcomes was completed and a final report addressing the major evaluation questions was submitted to Nebraska Department of Education in October 2011. The Early Childhood Coach training evaluation focused on the fidelity with which coach participants implemented the coaching model on which they received training and evaluated the coach training efforts. Furthermore, the evaluation included information on the current state of coaching in Nebraska, as described by subsets of coach participants who attended the ECC coach training.

This Technical Report provides a more detailed description of those findings and summarizes additional analyses of data collected from survey, interview and direct observations of participants. The Technical Report is divided into two parts. Volume 1 summarizes the findings related to survey data from 35 participants. Volume 2 summarizes the data from videotaped observations of 21 coaches’ interactions with coachees on the job.

This online follow-up survey to the ECC training consisted of 21 items and was completed by 35 participants that attended the training. These 35 EC represented mental health, Head Start/ Early Head Start programs, and independent contract consultants and public school employees. The EC coaches had an average of 15 years of experience in early care and education and 8 years of coaching experience. A summary of the EC coach respondents is provided in Table 1.

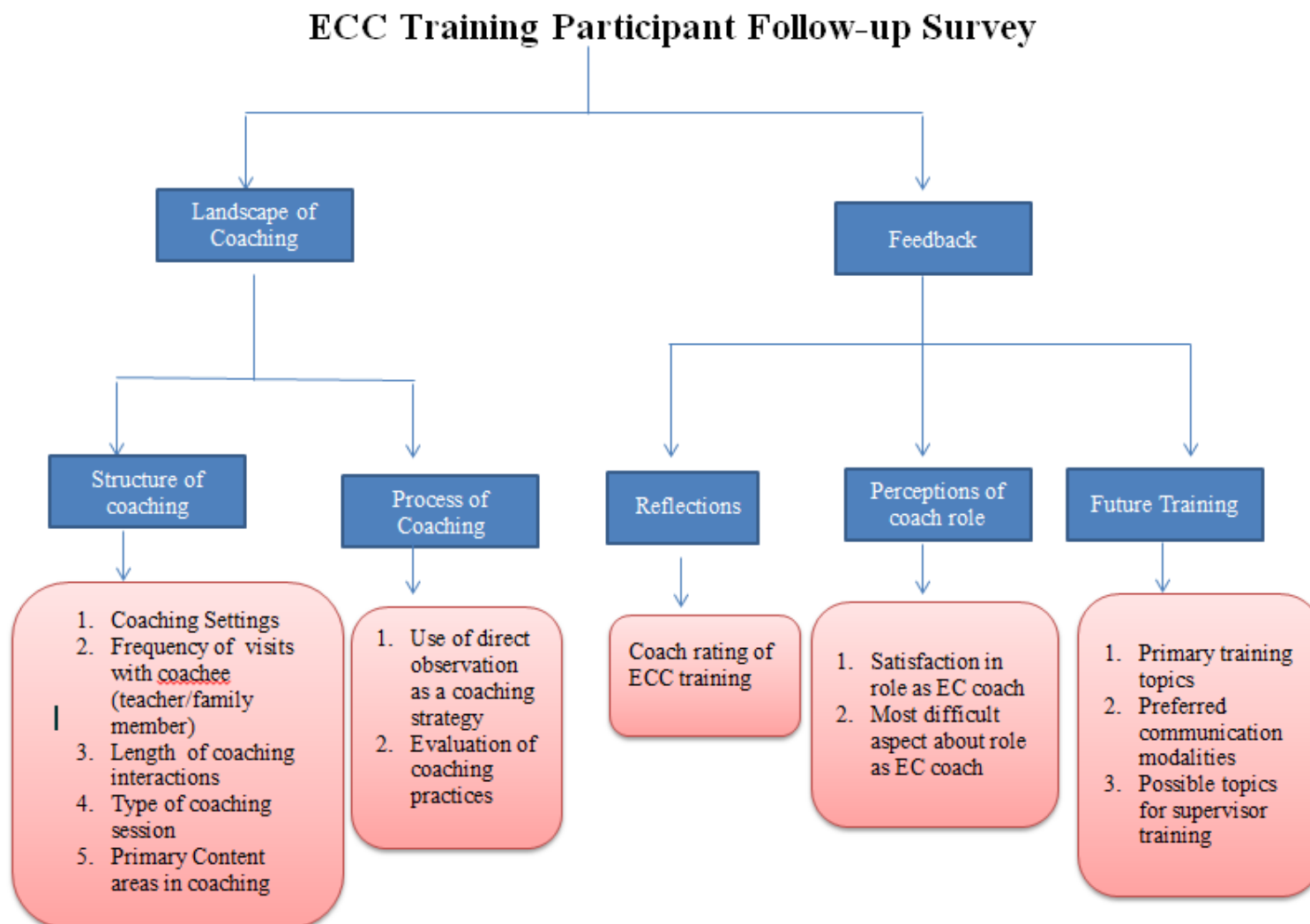
**Table 1.** *Demographics Characteristics of the Survey Respondents*

Coach Characteristics	N = 35
Mean Age (years)	39.63 ( <i>SD</i> = 10.30)
Gender: Female	100%
Race/ethnicity	
White, non-Hispanic	89.0%
White, Hispanic or Latino	5.5%
African-American	2.9%
Biracial/multi-racial	2.6%
Education	
Training beyond high school	2.9%
Two year college degree	8.6%
Four year college degree	20.0%
Some graduate coursework	17.1%
Graduate degree	51.4%
Current CDA	5.7%
Experience in number of years	
Early care and education	15.00 ( <i>SD</i> = 10.63)
Coaching experience	8.12 ( <i>SD</i> = 7.69)
Supervision experience	5.89 ( <i>SD</i> = 6.13)

The participant ratings and responses can be used as formative data to shape future professional development experiences on coaching. The key findings from this survey are synthesized in two broad sections (See Figure 1).

1. **Landscape of Coaching-** includes information from coaches on the *structure* (where, when, how often, and how long), and *process* (what and how) of coaching with their coachees (teacher/family member).
2. **Training Feedback -** includes overall *reflections* on the ECC training, *perceptions* of their role as a coach, and identified *future training needs*.

**Figure 1.** Content of Follow-Up Survey



## **Key Findings: Landscape of Coaching**

### ***Structure***

This includes the typical content, settings, frequency and length of participants' current coaching sessions with coachees (teachers, care-providers and family members). The participating EC coaches provided coaching in Preschool (n = 33) and infant/toddler (n = 8) classrooms, home (n = 21) and family-day care settings (n = 9). The preschool settings included Head Start (n = 13), community preschools (n = 6) and Child Care centers (n = 9), and preschools operated by school districts (n = 5). Infant/toddler settings included state-funded infant/toddler classrooms for high risk populations (n = 12) and Early Head Start (n = 9) group programs. Home-based settings included family and child care homes served by Early Head Start (n = 2) and public school-sponsored Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE; n = 6). One-half of the EC coaches were working in multiple settings.

Coaches reportedly visited directly with their coachees two to five times a month. Coaches working in Head Start and Early Head Start programs met with their coachees most frequently (three visits per month). The reported length of individual coaching interactions in all settings ranged from 20 to 60 minutes. Although a variety of topics dominated the focus of coaching sessions, the most commonly reported topics included children's socio-emotional or communication development, child care and program quality, and behavior management. Nearly 100% of the coaches working in home-based programs (EI and EHS) reported addressing staff relationships during their coaching sessions; this was notably higher than for coaches in other settings.

### ***Process***

This addresses coaches' use of direct observation as a coaching tool and for evaluation of their coaching practices. Nearly 100% of the coaches reported using direct observation of coachees' interactions with children and/or their classrooms as a key coaching strategy. In addition, 77% of the coaches reported that they make an effort to reflect and evaluate their coaching practices. Common evaluation strategies were post-meeting self-reflections, periodic feedback/evaluations from coachees, and video-taped coaching interactions with coachees. In addition, 100% of the coaches reported having a supervisor observing their work.

## Key Findings: Training Feedback

### *Reflections on Training*

Overall, the participating EC coaches felt the ECC training program was fun, engaging, thorough, and relevant to their program area/practice. The training reportedly helped improve their active listening and expressive communication skills, ability to engage in self-reflection, and their ability to guide their coachees in some self-reflection.

In addition, coaches were asked to provide a rating for a list of training topics and training materials that reflected the degree of a) benefit for improving coaching skills and b) use during coaching interactions. Coaches rated topics related to *coaching relationship* (73%), *making observations* (67%), and *communication techniques* (64%) as being *used* during every coaching session interaction. The topic of *cultural awareness* was rated as being used the least during coaching interactions (39%). The materials used most by coaches following the EC training were coaching documentation samples, books, videos and copies of powerpoint presentations for topics related to early childhood education, mentoring, etc.

### *Perceptions of Coaching Roles*

Coaches reported that the *most difficult aspect* of coaching was finding a mutual and convenient time to schedule coaching sessions with coachees. In addition, it was difficult to connect and build relationships with some coachees, particularly preschool teachers, and handle sensitive or controversial topics with their coachees. The coaches reported that the *most satisfying aspect* in their role as a coach was seeing the changes/improvements made in the quality of the child care programs, and progress in specific behaviors of classroom teachers, families and the children. In addition, they also reported that building work relationships with coachees was also very satisfying.

### *Future Training Needs*

Coaches described a number of training topics they would recommend for future ECC trainings and professional development activities. These included a) how to approach family members with tough questions, b) use of effective communication practices, and c) how to handle difficult situations like arguments during coaching sessions. In addition, the coaches suggested training focused on reflective questioning, mutual problem-solving techniques, conducting observations in the classroom/home environment, and understanding different coaching models.

Coaches suggested that including a “live run through of a coaching session” in the form of role-playing would be attractive in future trainings. Coaches also indicated that a refresher training could help them understand concepts and suggested strategies in greater detail. Finally, coaches welcomed professional development activities via telephone, networking websites, and blogs as beneficial to enhance their coaching skills.



## Landscape of Coaching -> Structure of Coaching

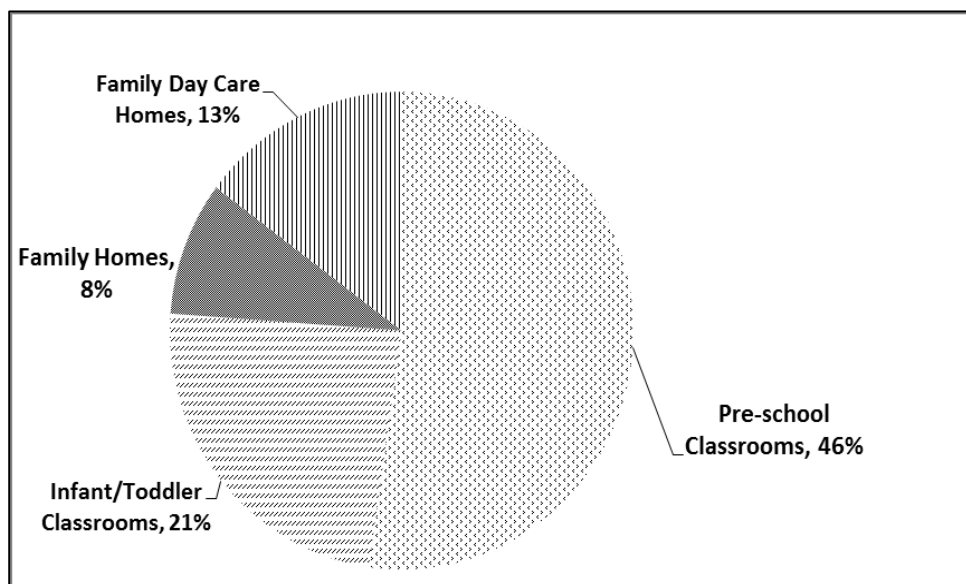
The 35 survey participants/coaches provided information to describe the structure of their current coaching practices. This included the following components:

1. **Settings** where the coaching was provided
2. **Frequency** of visits with the coachee
3. **Length** of coaching interactions/sessions
4. **Type** of coaching session (1:1 or group)
5. **Primary focus** of coaching discussions

### 1. Settings where coaching was provided

- Coaches provided coaching in **preschool and infant/toddler classrooms, family homes and family day care** settings (see Table 2).
- One-half of the EC coaches were working in multiple (more than one) settings
  - 33 coaches provided coaching in preschool classroom settings such Head Start (n = 13), private/public community programs (n = 6), Child Care centers (n = 9), and inclusive early childhood (EC) and/or Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) school district programs (n = 5).
  - 21 coaches provided coaching in community infant/toddler classroom settings (n = 12) and center-based Early Head Start (n = 9).
  - 8 coaches provided coaching in home-based settings associated with Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education programs (EI/ECSE; n = 6) or Early Head Start-Home Visitation programs (EHS; n = 2).
  - 9 coaches provided coaching in family day care settings (n = 9)

**Figure 2.** *Coaching Settings*



- Coaching conversations focused on planning and reflection were held in and out of settings with children present:
  - Coaches working in family day care settings indicated that coaching conversations were primarily held when the children were present in the classroom, and/or when the children were occupied in activities like eating and nap time.
  - Coaches working in other home-based programs (EI/ECSE and EHS) indicated that coaching conversations were primarily held during scheduled home visits.
  - Coaches working in preschool and infant/toddler classroom programs indicated the coaching conversations were primarily held outside of classroom time with children.

**Table 2. Coaching Settings**

<b>Coaching Settings</b>	<b>Percent of duplicated settings (n = 71)</b>	<b>Percent of all coaches (n = 35)</b>
<b>Preschool Classrooms</b>	46%	
Head Start Programs		37%
Community Preschools		17%
Child Care Centers		26%
School District EC/ECSE Programs		14%
<b>Infant/Toddler Classrooms</b>	21%	
Community Infant-Toddler Centers		32%
Early Head Start Center-based Programs		26%
<b>Family Homes</b>	8%	
EI/ECSE Programs		17%
EHS-Home Visitation Programs		6%
<b>Family Child Care Homes</b>	13%	26%

## 2. Frequency of coaching

Coaches reported typically meeting their coachees at least monthly and as frequently as five times each month. Coaches working in Head Start and Early Head Start settings met with their coachees most frequently (average: 3 visits per month; see Table 3)

**Table 3.** *Average Frequency of Coaching Sessions for 35 EC Coaches*

Coaching Settings	Number of Visits Per Month
	<i>M (SD)</i>
<b>Preschool Classrooms</b>	
Head Start Programs	3.08 (1.89)
Community Preschools	2.67 (1.03)
Child Care Centers	2.50 (2.29)
School District EC/ECSE Programs	1.80 (0.84)
<b>Infant/Toddler Classrooms</b>	
Community Infant-Toddler Centers	2.67 (2.64)
Early Head Start Center-based Programs	3.38 (1.18)
<b>Family Homes</b>	
EI/ECSE Programs	2.20 (1.10)
EHS Home Visitation Programs	2.00
<b>Family Child Care Homes</b>	2.11(0.93)

### 3. Length of coaching interactions

Coaching interactions in all settings ranged from 20 to 60 minutes in length. (See Table 4).

**Table 4.** *Average Length of Coaching Sessions for 35 EC Coaches*

Coaching Settings	Minutes
	<i>M (SD)</i>
<b>Preschool Classrooms</b>	
Head Start Programs	50:00 (20.00)
Community Preschools	54:00 (40.53)
Child Care Centers	51:00 (28.37)
School District EC/ECSE Programs	46:15 (18.89)
<b>Infant/Toddler Classrooms</b>	
Community Infant-Toddler Centers	60:00 (27.78)
Early Head Start Center-based Programs	56:15 (25.68)
<b>Family Homes</b>	
EI/ECSE Programs	49:00 (12.45)
EHS-Home Visitation Programs	20:00
<b>Family Day Care Homes</b>	57:45 (28.19)

#### 4. Type of coaching session

Coaches reported providing coaching in both one-on-one sessions and group sessions with their coachees. Individual (1:1) sessions were most frequent (See Table 5).

**Table 5.** *Number of Coaches Reporting Individual and Group Coaching Sessions*

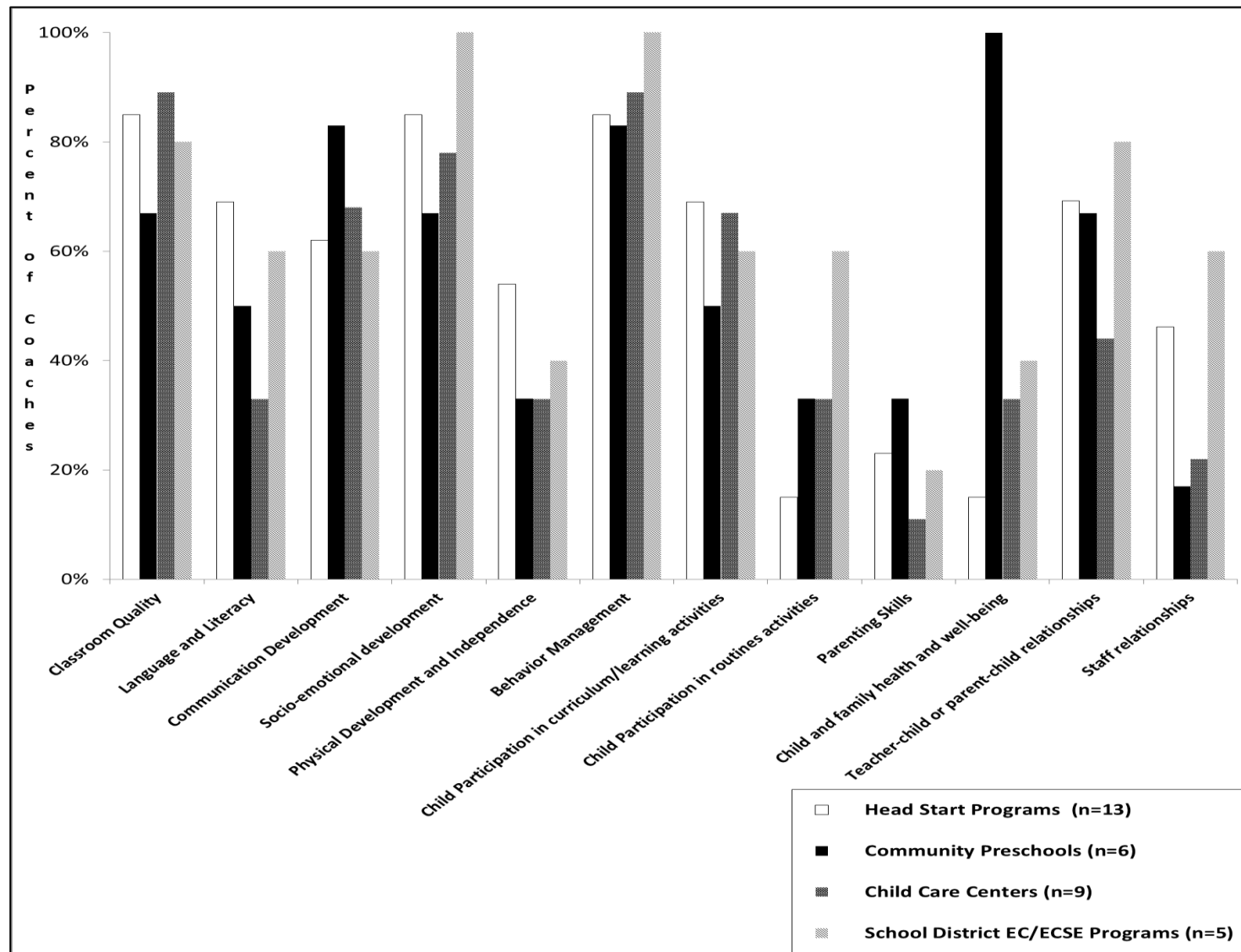
Coaching Settings	1:1 Sessions Only	Group Sessions Only	Both Type Sessions
<b>Preschool Classrooms</b>			
Head Start Programs (n = 13)	4	0	9
Community Preschools (n = 6)	1	1	3*
Child Care Centers (n = 9)	2	2	5
School District EC/ECSE Programs (n = 5)	0	2	3
<b>Infant/Toddler Classrooms</b>			
Community Infant/Toddler Centers (n = 12)	4	2	6
Early Head Start Center-based Programs (n = 9)	2	2	4*
<b>Family Homes</b>			
EI/ECSE Programs (n = 6)	4	0	2
EHS-Home Visitation (n = 2)	1	0	0*
<b>Family Child Care Homes (n = 9)</b>	5	0	4

\* Missing data (n = 1)

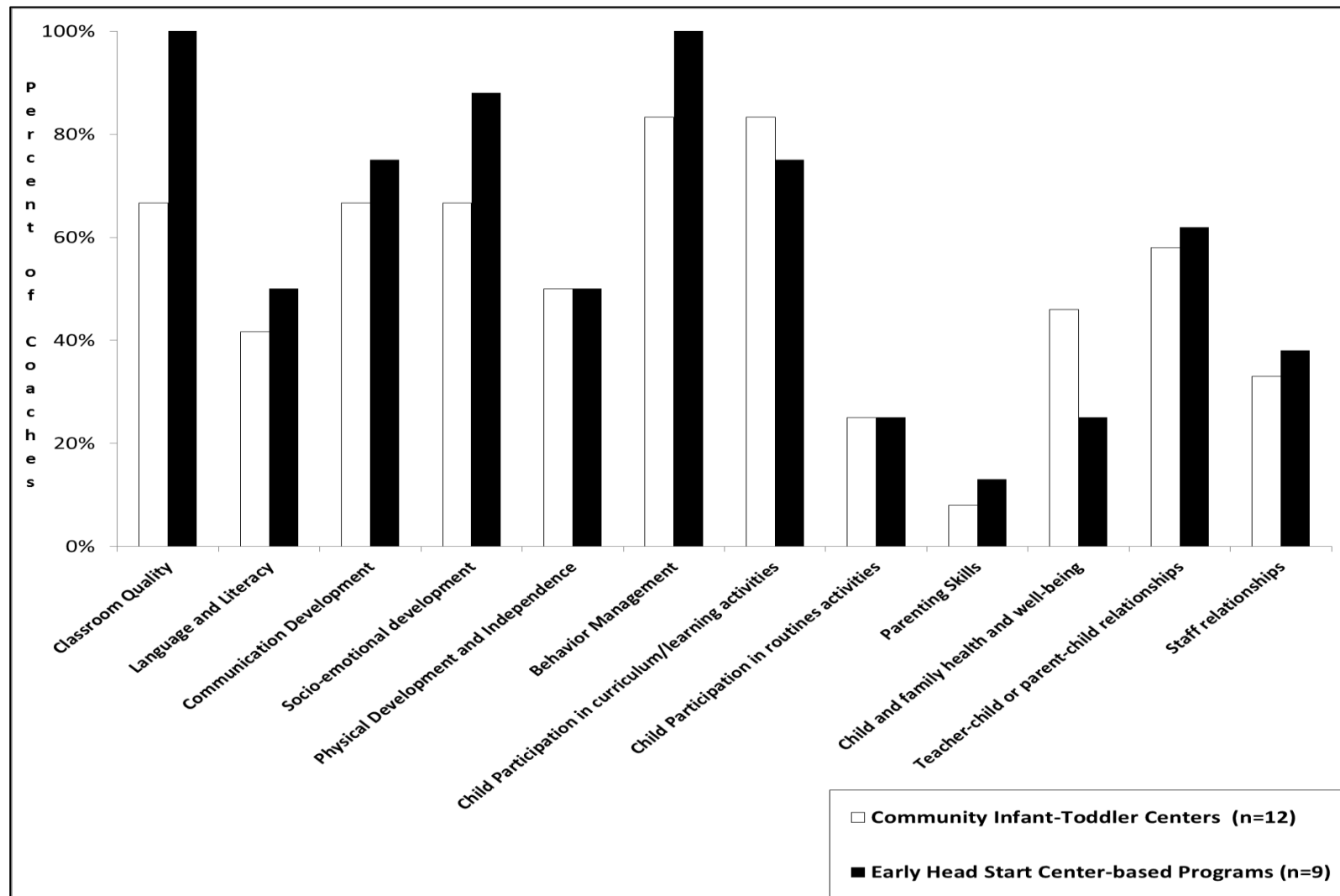
## 5. Primary focus of coaching session

- A variety of topics were reportedly the focus of coaching sessions. Conversations regarding children's *socio-emotional development and communication development, quality of child care programs, behavior management, children's participation in learning* activities and *adult-child relationships* were commonly reported by coaches from all the coaching settings. Figures 3, 4, 5 & 6 provide graphic representation of the percent of coaches in each coaching setting who reported recent discussions about each topic area.
- *Parenting skills* were discussed most frequently with EHS home-based coachees, and *staff relationships* were the reported focus of coaching discussions most frequently among EHS and EI/ECSE coaches in family home-based programs. Nearly 100% of these coaches reported discussing relationships that include reference to key characteristics of coaching interactions.

**Figure 3.** *Primary Focus of Coaching Conversations: Preschool Classrooms*

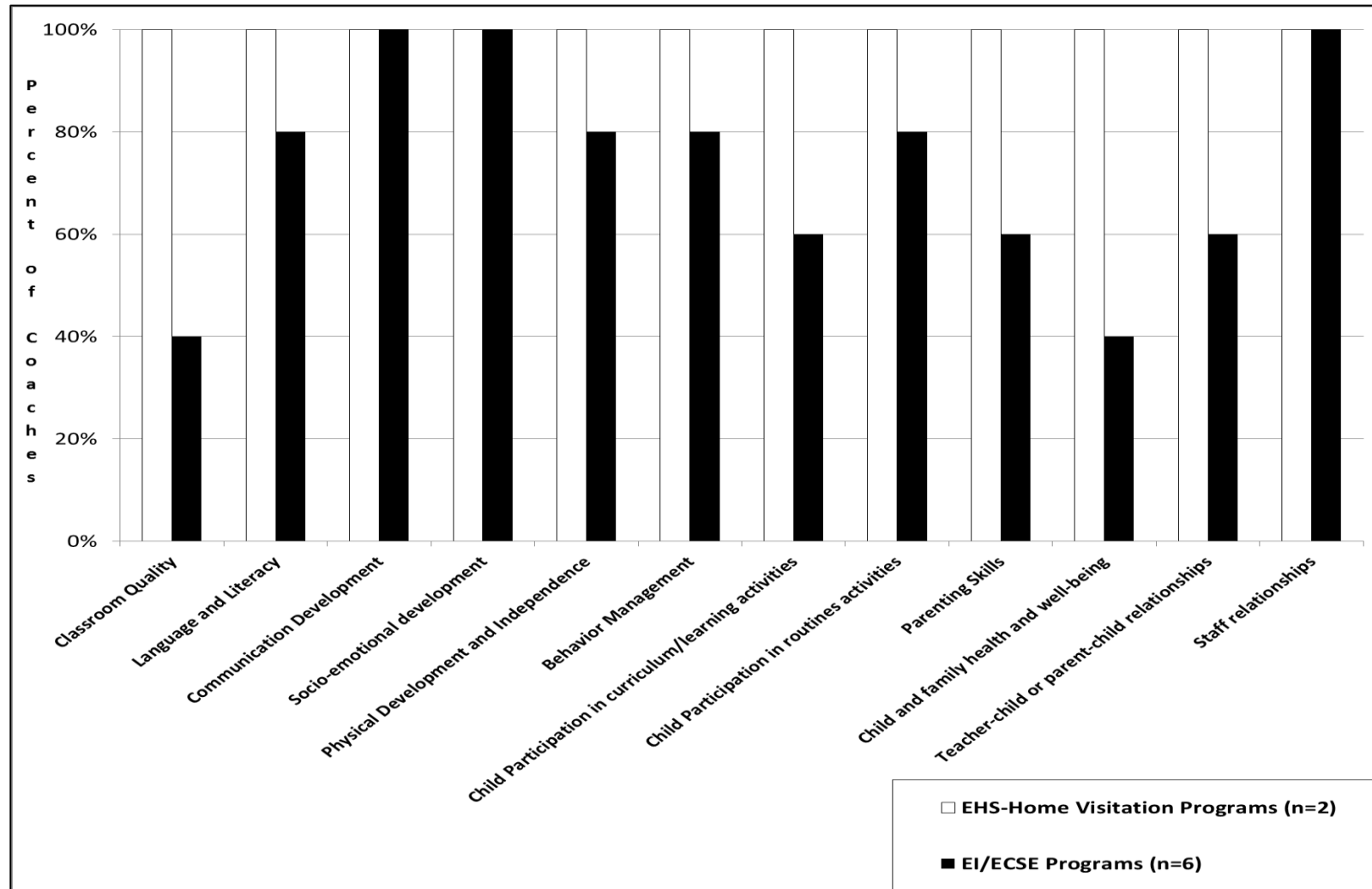


**Figure 4.** *Primary Focus of Coaching Conversations: Infant/Toddler Classrooms*

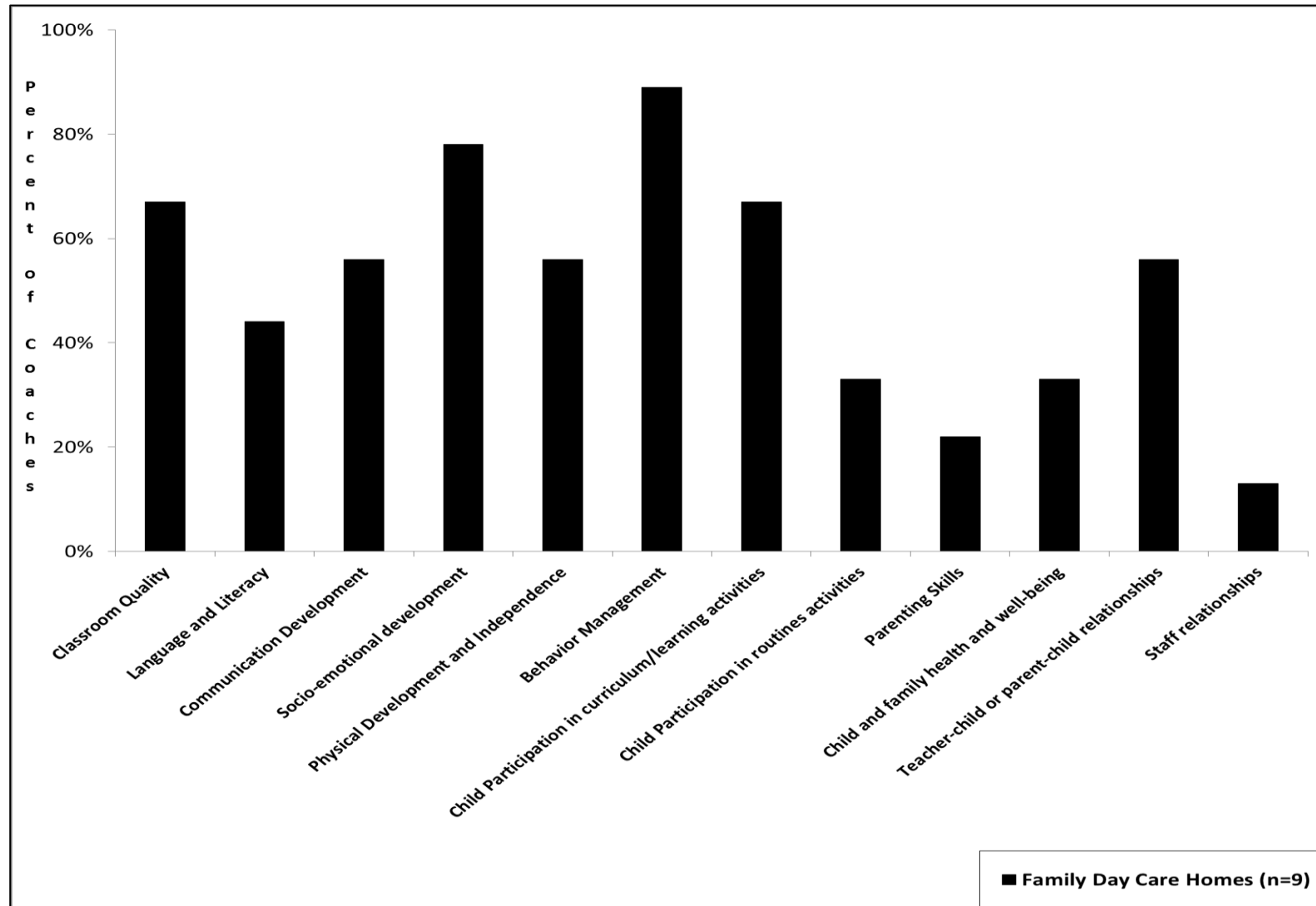




**Figure 5.** *Primary Focus of Coaching Conversations: Family Homes*



**Figure 6.** *Primary Focus of Coaching Conversations: Family Child Care Homes*



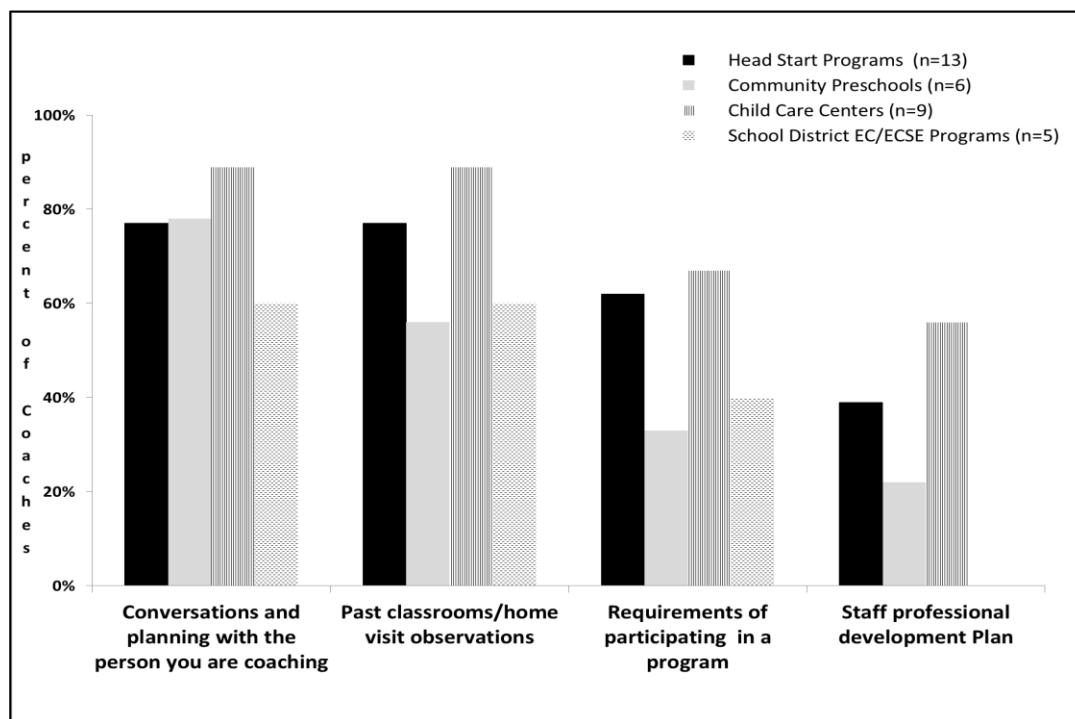
## Landscape of Coaching -> Process of Coaching

Coaches were asked to comment on the process of their coaching by describing their use of observation and their evaluation/reflection on the coaching practices/process.

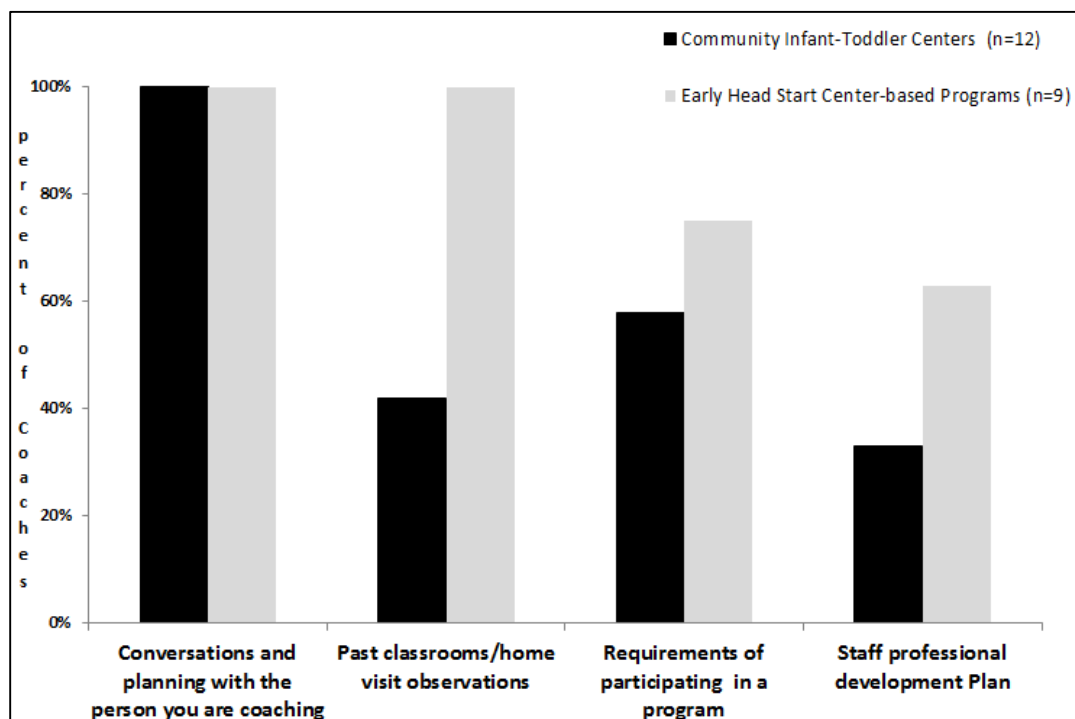
### 1. Use of direct observation as a coaching strategy

- Coaches were asked if they used direct observation of coachees, children and/or adults as part of their coaching with coachees. **Nearly 100% of the coaches reported using observation as a coaching strategy.**
- Coaches were also asked how the focus of their observations was determined. The process for determining the focus varied by the setting (See Figure 7, 8, 9 and 10).
  - Almost 75% (or greater) of coaches from all the settings reported that content of observations was determined through conversation and planning with the person they were coaching (i.e. coachee teacher or family member).
  - Coaches varied in their use of past observations of classroom or home interactions with children and/or families to determine the focus of future observations. Over 70% of the coaches for Head Start, child care and EHS center-based and home-based programs reported that the past observations helped determine the focus of subsequent observations.
  - Head Start and Early Head Start programs (in classrooms and homes) are most likely to require observations as part of the coaching process. Public school preschool and home-based EI/ECSE programs are least likely to require observations be completed.
  - Professional development plans are least likely to determine the focus of coaching observations in family daycare and EI/ECSE home-based programs.

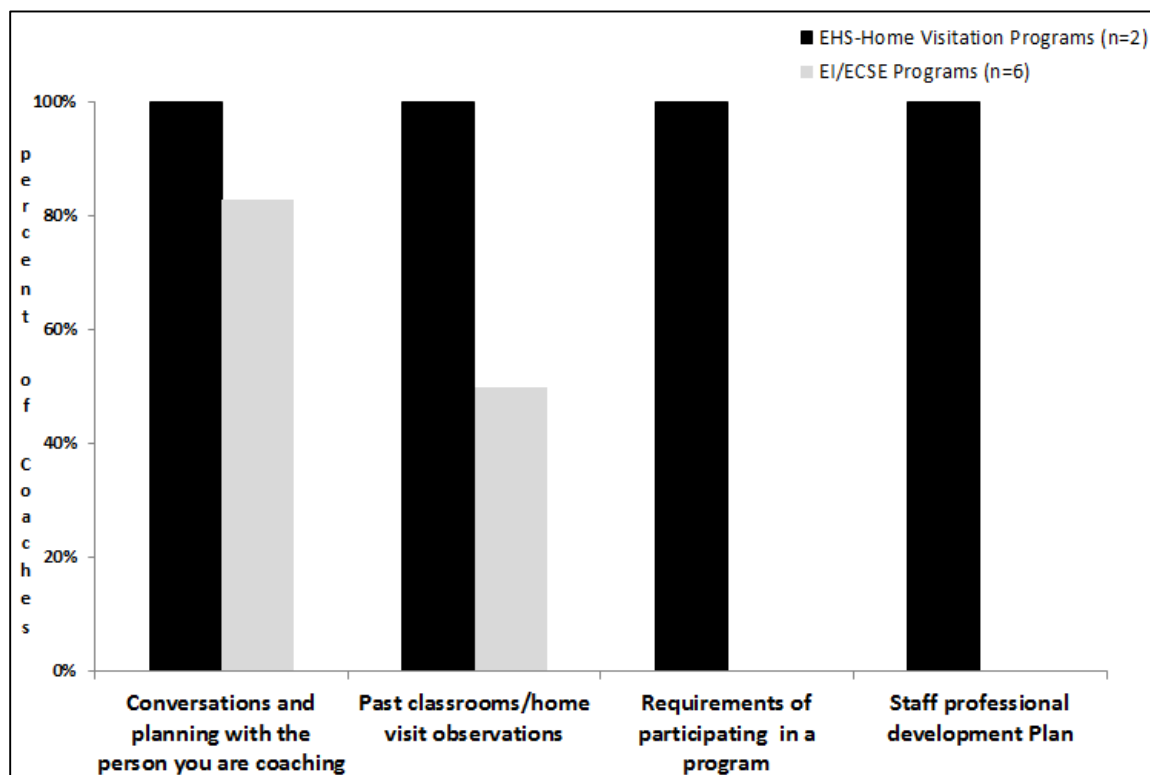
**Figure 7. Determinants of Coaching Observations: Preschool Classrooms**



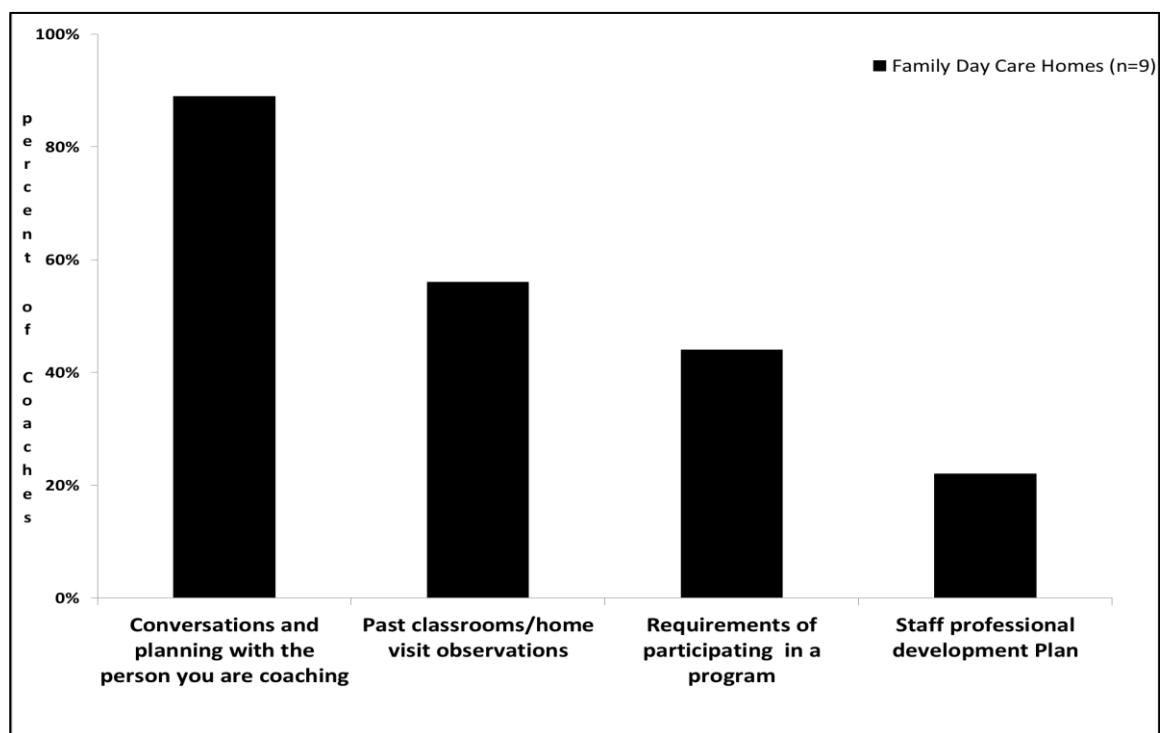
**Figure 8. Determinants of Coaching Observations: Infant/Toddler Classrooms**



**Figure 9. Determinants of Coaching Observations: Family Child Care Homes**



**Figure 10. Determinants of Coaching Observations: Family Child Care Homes**



## 2. Evaluation of coaching practices

- Survey respondents were asked to respond to open-ended questions related to commonly used strategies for evaluation of their coaching practices. Overall, 77% of the coaches reported that they did engage in reflection/evaluation of their coaching practices. Common evaluation strategies reported:
  - *Self-reflection*: Reflect and analyze how the session was conducted. Many coaches also reviewed the notes taken during the coaching session
  - *Feedback/evaluation*: Coaches reported asking for feedback from their coachees, colleagues/team members, and supervisors. Some coaches reportedly use questionnaires to request written feedback about their practices from coachees (i.e., teachers) and also engage in verbal discussion with their coachees.
  - *Video-Taping*: Coaches reported evaluating their practices by video-taping themselves in interactions with the coachees.
  - 100% of the coaches reported having a supervisor evaluate and discuss their work.

## Feedback-> Reflections-> Coach Ratings of ECC Training

Participants who attended the ECC training were asked to reflect on their experiences as a coach, as well as the benefits of the training topics and materials. The EC coaches were asked to rate the following:

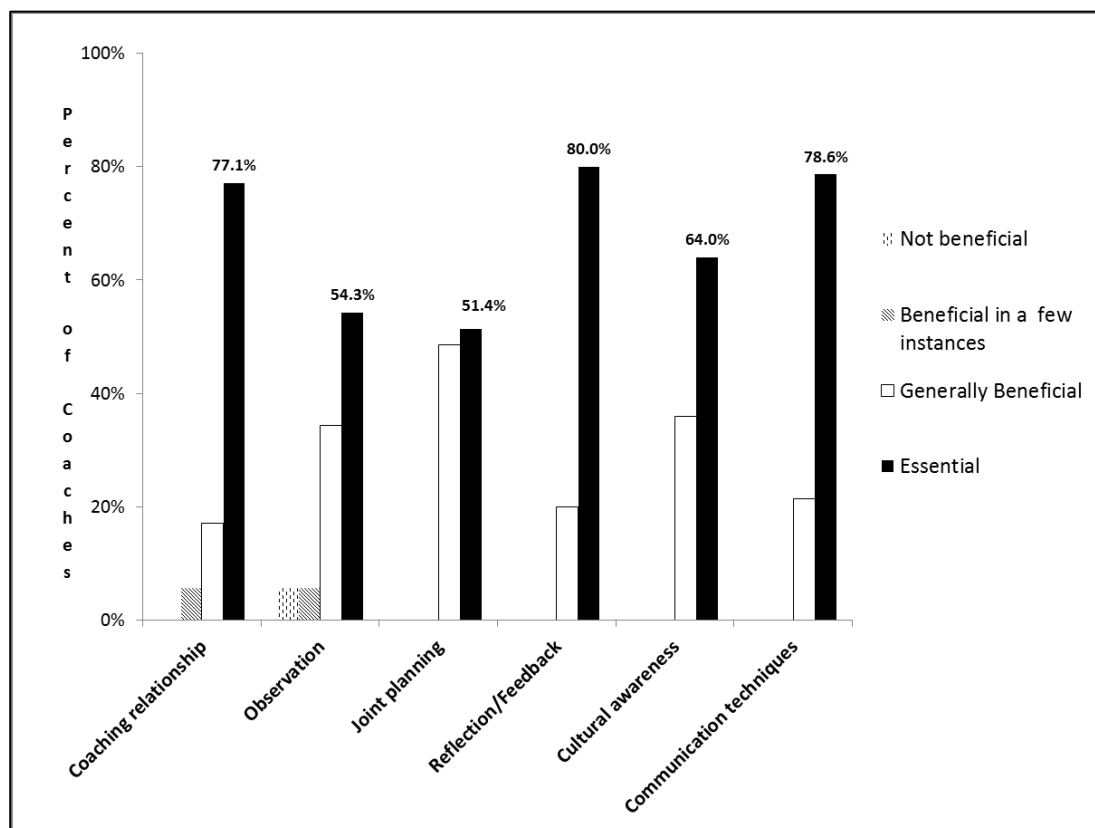
1. Training topics beneficial for improving coaching skills
2. Training topics used during coaching interactions
3. Utility of ECC training materials
4. Benefit of ECC training materials for coaching

The sections below describe the aggregate responses for 35 EC coaches for each of the topics.

### 1. Training topics beneficial for improving coaching skills

- Coaches reported that the training dedicated to *communication techniques*, *reflection/feedback*, and *coaching relationships* were most *essential* to improving their coaching skills. These topics were rated as essential by more than 75% of the coaches. The second set of beneficial/essential training topics included the use of *observation*, *joint planning* and *cultural awareness* (see Figure 11).

**Figure 11.**

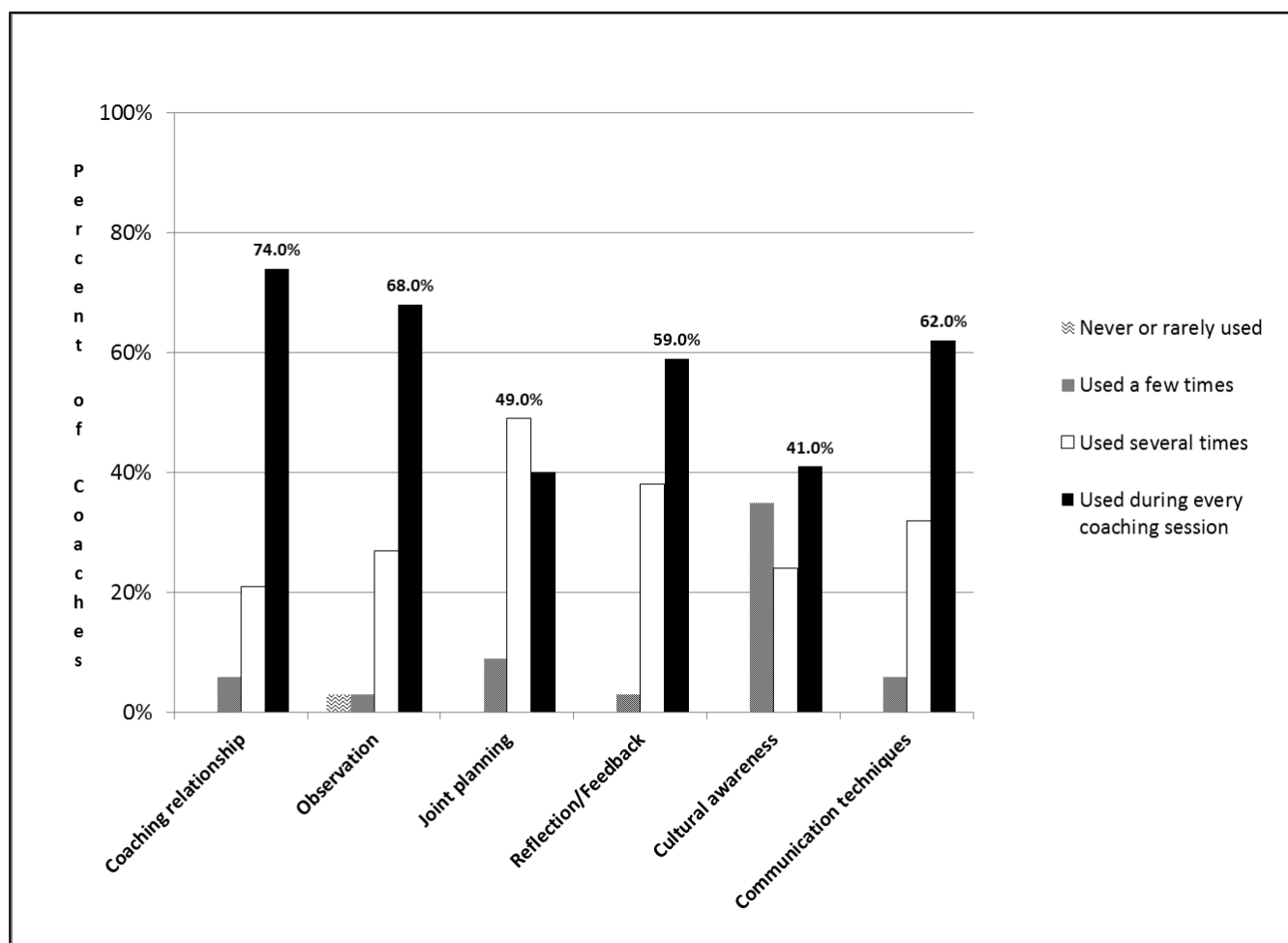


## 2. Training topics used during coaching interactions

**More than 50% of the EC coach respondents reported that four of six training topics carried over into every coaching session.**

- Training information related to the *coaching relationship, observation, reflection/feedback* and *communication techniques* reportedly were *used during every coaching session* following the training.
- Training related to *Joint Planning* was reported by less than 50% of the coaches as being *used several times* during recent coaching interactions.
- The information provided on *cultural awareness* was reportedly used the least often by coaches during coaching interactions following the training.

**Figure 12.** *Use of Training Content*

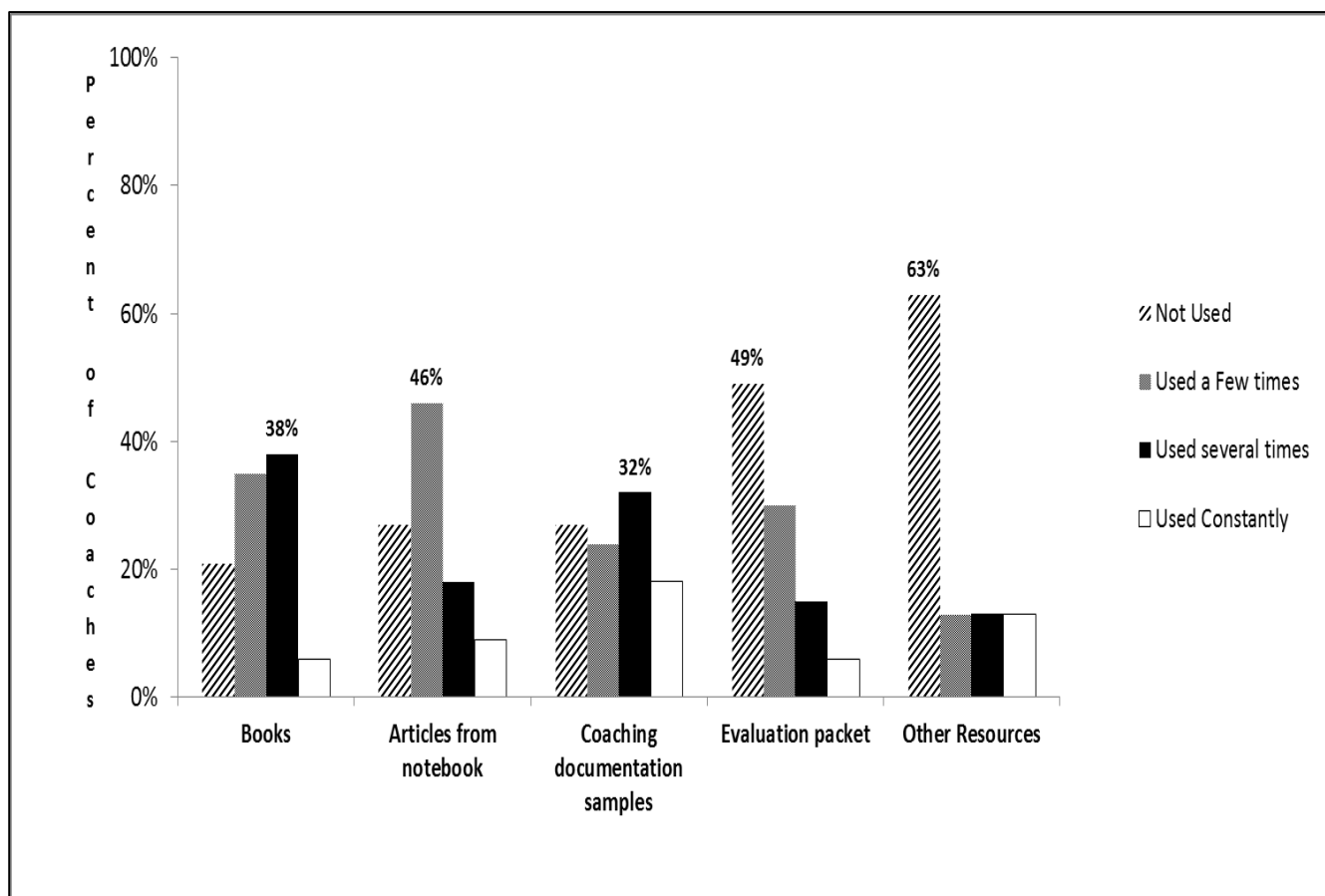




### 3. Use of ECC training materials

- Not many coaches reported frequent use of training materials (e.g. books, articles, documentation, and other resources like videos and powepoint information). Less than one-half of the coaches reported using books, articles or documentaiton materials more than a few times following completion of the 3-day coach training.

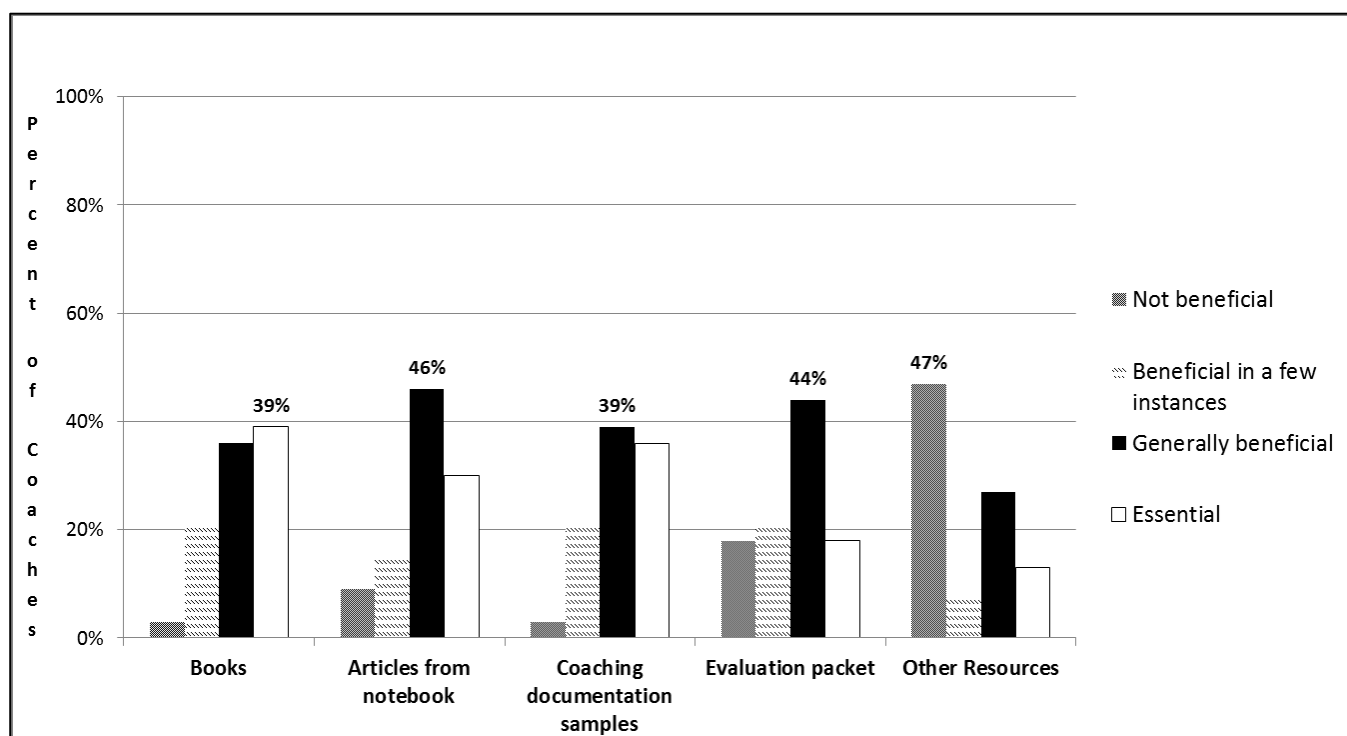
**Figure 13.** *Use of Training Materials*



#### 4. Beneficial ECC training materials

- A small percentage of coaches rated the training materials as highly beneficial to thier coaching practices.
  - Books, coaching documentation samples, and articles from notebook were the most *essential* materials to support coaching activities.
  - Other resources that were generally beneficial included *PowerPoint®* slide information and videos on early childhood education, mentoring, etc.

**Figure 14.** *Benefit of Training Materials*



## Feedback-> Perceptions of Coach Role

Coach participants who attended the ECC training were asked to reflect on their experiences as a coach, as well as the benefits of the ECC training sessions. They were asked to reflect on their a) general reflections about the training, b) most satisfying aspect of their role as an EC coach, c) most difficult aspect of their role as an EC coach. Participants responded to each open ended question in writing, and their responses were thematically analyzed. The broad themes are highlighted below:

1. **General reflections about the training:** Overall, the coaches felt the training program was fun, engaging, thorough, and relevant to their program area/practice. They also mentioned that the training helped improve their listening and expressive communication skills, and engagement in self-reflection. It has also helped them to learn to use guiding questions (e.g., “what has gone well since last time we met?”) and thus guide coachees in self-reflection.
2. **Satisfaction in role as EC coach:** The coaches reported that it was most satisfying **seeing the changes/improvements made** in the quality of the children’s learning environments, and the progress of classroom teachers, families and children. In addition, they also reported high satisfaction associated with **building relationships** with coachees and working together with them.

### Representative quotes from coaches:

*“It is wonderful to see the great improvement in the children’s comprehension of the material being taught. I feel the coaching sessions encourage the teacher to plan ahead for the next lesson and to gather needed materials.”*

*“Relationship building - instilling the belief in the providers that they can improve and the ideas/implementation processes are theirs to own! I enjoy sharing in the successes with them - we often speak about how far they’ve come since we began our work together.”*

3. **Most difficult aspect about role as EC coach:** Most coaches reported that finding a mutual and convenient **time** to schedule coaching sessions with coachees was difficult. Coaches also reported having difficulty in **handling sensitive or controversial topics** with coachees, and **listening and allowing the teacher to take the lead**.

### Representative quote from a coach:

*“Finding the time to begin a coaching cycle has been very difficult. The teachers and I usually have other things to talk about that don’t necessarily lead us to a coaching cycle topic; they are very important topics and I have been able to incorporate the essence of coaching but not an actual coaching cycle. I also struggle to schedule my coaching/Reflective Supervision times with the teachers I support, working around meetings and other obligations and not wanting to pull teachers”*

## Feedback -> Future Training

This section reflects the coaches' suggestions on the following:

1. Primary topics for future training
2. Preferred communication modalities for professional development activities
3. Possible topics for supervisor training

### 1. Primary training topics:

Coaches reported that including a “live run through of a coaching session” in the form of **role play exercises** during the ECC training would be effective. Other suggested topics included how to approach family members with tough questions, and how to handle difficult situations like disagreements during coaching sessions. Other potential topics for future trainings include: using reflective questions, mutual problem-solving techniques during coaching sessions, planning and completing observations, and understanding various coaching models used in different agencies/organizations.

Coaches also requested a refresher training that can help them to better understand concepts and strategies learned in greater detail.

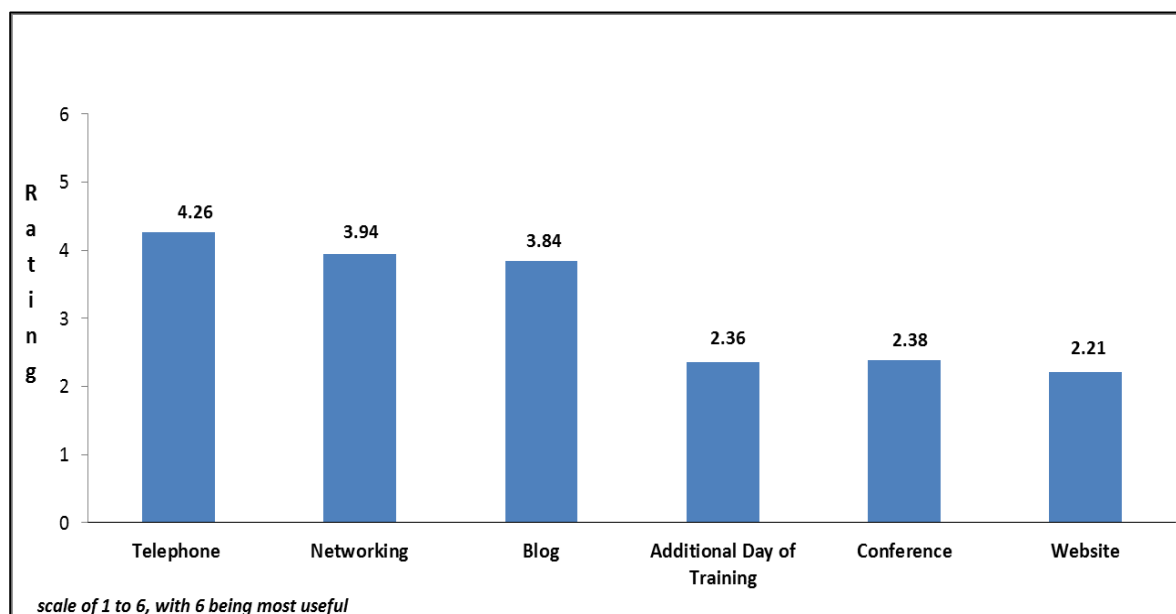
**Table 6.** Rank Order of Topics for Future Training

Suggested primary training topics	Number of Responses
Coaching in difficult situations	24
Effective communication practices	14
Evaluating the coaching process	14
Culturally competent coaching	13
Coaching process	10
Social-emotional development in young children	8
Parenting skills	8
Overall child care/classroom environment quality	7
Teacher/child and parent/child interaction	7
Inclusive practices	7
Language and literacy development in young children	4
Physical health and well being	4
Other Topics (coach-identified):	
Coaching parents	1
Strategies to improve instruction	3

## 2. Preferred communication modalities for professional development activities

- Coaches were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 6 (with 6 being most useful) the preferred form of communication/learning to enhance their coaching skills. The options provided to them were: (a) telephone conference calls, (b) social networking forums, (c) blogs or discussion boards, (d) additional day of training, (e) annual conference, and (e) website designed especially for early childhood coaches
- Coaches ranked use of **Telephone, e-Social-Networking and Blogs** as most beneficial to enhancing their coaching skills.

**Figure 15.** *Preferred Communication Modalities*



## 3. Possible topics for training supervisors of coaches

On-site or program supervisors of EC coaches may not always understand the unique needs associated with the coaching role and responsibilities. Supervisors may benefit from some professional development about EC coaching to enhance their role as evaluator, advocate and professional development facilitator of early childhood professionals who assume the role of EC coach in their community/program. The EC coaches suggested the following topics for training of their supervisors:

1. Understanding roles and responsibilities of coaches
2. Conducting effective meetings with coaches; goal setting, sharing suggestions, providing information, and providing constructive feedback