First Connections: Infant and Toddler Development and Care
Training Series
Report of Evaluation
Executive Summary
December 2013

In 2011, the Oregon Center for Career Development in Childhood Care and Education developed a coaching component to be available for First Connections: Infant and Toddler Development and Care, Oregon’s training curriculum for teachers and providers of care and education for the State’s youngest citizens. The First Connections curriculum, which consists of 61 clock hours of Set One training in five core knowledge categories, is directed toward fostering strong and positive relationships with infants and toddlers in respectful and responsive care and education environments. The coaching model of delivery is available for six of the First Connections sessions (18 hours) which have been designated as the “core,” meaning that these sessions offer the content that is most essential for infant and toddler caregivers. This report presents an overview of the curriculum and the coaching model, the evaluation plan, a summary of findings, and recommendations for further action.

Overview of the Training Series

Curriculum

First Connections: Infant and Toddler Development and Care is based upon a widely-used training curriculum, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC), developed by WestEd in California. PITC materials, which are based upon research and best practices with infants and toddlers in care and education settings, were adopted by Oregon in the 1990s for use in training infant and toddler providers in a format known then as First by Five. In 2004-2006, a state work group re-examined the PITC materials and explored other possibilities. The work group re-affirmed Oregon’s commitment to use the PITC materials and to reformat the training curriculum to the current First Connections. The table below presents an overview of the 21 sessions that comprise the current First Connections curriculum.
Table 1. Overview of First Connections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PITC Module 1</th>
<th>PITC Module 2</th>
<th>PITC Module 3</th>
<th>PITC Module 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social-Emotional Growth and Socialization</td>
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<td>Session 1: Development of Social and Emotional</td>
<td>Session 7: Environment of Respectful</td>
<td>Session 11: Discoveries of Infancy (3 hrs)</td>
<td>Session 16: Partnerships with Families (3 hrs)</td>
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<td>Competence (3 hrs)</td>
<td>Caregiving (3 hrs)</td>
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<td>Session 2: Getting in Tune w/ Infants and</td>
<td>Session 8: Environment of Relationships (3 hrs)</td>
<td>Session 12: Supporting Early Learning (3 hrs)</td>
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<td>Toddlers (3 hrs)</td>
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<td>Session 3: Developing Emotional Strengths</td>
<td>Session 9: Space to Grow (3 hrs)</td>
<td>Session 13: The Ages of Infancy (3 hrs)</td>
<td>Session 17: Protective Urges (3 hrs)</td>
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<td>Session 4: Supporting Emotional Development</td>
<td>Session 10: Routines and Relationships (3 hrs)</td>
<td>Session 14: Early Language and Communication (3 hrs)</td>
<td>Session 19: Culture, Learning, and Development (3 hrs)</td>
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<td>Session 5: Guiding Social Behavior (3 hrs)</td>
<td>Session 15: Communication- Friendly Programs (3 hrs)</td>
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<td>Session 20: Resolving Cultural Issues (3 hrs)</td>
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<td>Session 6: First Moves—Introducing Children to a New</td>
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<td>Group (2 hrs)</td>
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<td>TOTAL: 17 hours</td>
<td>TOTAL: 12 hours</td>
<td>TOTAL: 15 hours</td>
<td>TOTAL: 17 hours</td>
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</table>

The First Connections Core Curriculum was developed and offered to providers in 2011. Six of the First Connections sessions (18 hours) were determined by a work group, comprised of First Connections certified trainers and other professionals affiliated with Oregon’s childhood care system, as constituting the “core,” meaning that these sessions offer the content that is most essential for infant and toddler caregivers. (The core sessions are shaded in the above table.) The core sessions were, and continue to be, delivered in sequence to a cohort of participants as follows:

- Session 1: Development of Social and Emotional Competence, 3 hrs.
- Session 2: Getting in Tune with Infants and Toddlers, 3 hrs.
- Session 7: Environment of Respectful Caregiving, 3 hrs.
- Session 10: Routines and Relationships, 3 hrs.
- Session 13: The Ages of Infancy, 3 hrs.
- Session 18: Cultural Sensitivity, 3 hrs.
Coaching Model

The First Connections coaching model was designed for use with the core sessions to enhance caregivers’ learning and ability to transfer knowledge to practice. As described in the 2011 NAEYC and NACCRRA Early Childhood Education and Professional Development: Training and Technical Assistance Glossary (p. 11):

Coaching is a relationship-based process led by an expert with specialized and adult-learning knowledge and skills, who often serves in a different professional role than the recipient(s). Coaching is designed to build capacity for specific professional dispositions, skills, and behaviors and is focused on goal-setting and achievement for an individual or group.

The primary focus of First Connections coaching is to support the development of specific skills and practices that participants have gained in their training sessions, leading to observable implementation in their practice with infants and toddlers. The First Connections coaching model focuses on five measurable outcomes tied to concepts and skills taught in six core sessions of the curriculum. These outcomes are:

1. A confidential description of one “challenging child” in her/his early care and education setting.
2. A confidential plan for improving “goodness of fit” with this child.
3. A demonstration of skill in using the responsive process (“watch, ask, adapt”) with a child in her/his early care and education setting.
4. A plan for changing a caregiving routine (feeding, diapering or toileting, napping, arriving or departing, dressing) in her/his care setting to make the routine a social learning experience for the children.
5. A demonstration of skill in making a routine a social learning experience.

The essential elements of the First Connections coaching model designed to support the providers in accomplishing the outcomes include:

Training: Presenting the six First Connections core sessions in sequence to a cohort of participants.

Follow-up contacts: Following up the training with individual contacts with each participant in the cohort to establish relationships and discuss coaching activities.

Coaching: Providing the coaching component to the participants enrolled in the cohort.

This model is consistent with research findings on best practices in relationship-based professional development. Weber and Trauten summarize in their 2008 review of literature, “intensive, continuous, and individualized training appears more likely to change teacher/caregiver behavior than short-term workshops” (p. 21). In this same report, Weber and Trauten state, “relationship-based professional development strategies, when combined
with training, has proven to be an effective tool in helping teachers/caregivers apply the knowledge and change behaviors in their work settings, thus improving program quality and child outcomes” (p. 3). According to Joyce and Showers (2002), when on-the-job coaching was added to training, 95% of teachers who participated used their new skills in the classroom. Of participants who attended training without coaching, only 5% used their new skills in the classroom.

Of key importance in coaching is the establishment of relationships between more skilled and less skilled members of the childhood care and education workforce (Weber & Trauten, 2008). Weber & Trauten’s review of various models of relationship-based professional development models found more positive outcomes with lower ratios of mentees to mentors. Bromer, Van Haitsma, Daley, and Modigliani (2008) found ratios of twelve participants per coordinator to be more effective than higher ratios. The First Connections coaching model specifies:

- The coach-to-participant ratio must be maintained at one coach to twelve or fewer participants (1:12 or fewer).
- The coach must:
  a. contact participants by phone, email, or a meeting in person to discuss outcomes 1, 2, & 4;
  b. observe the participant in her/his care setting while demonstrating skill in outcomes 3 and 5;
  c. provide photocopies of written observations to coaching participants, including feedback and agreed-upon plan of action;
  d. determine the status of completion of each outcome, offering more contacts and/or observations and/or resources to increase skill in accomplishing each outcome; and
  e. complete a coaching log for each coaching session to document the progress of each participant.

**Trainer and Coach Training**

The First Connections training curriculum and coaching activities can be offered in Oregon only by certified First Connections Trainers. These trainers have attended a training of trainers in order to explore the underlying research and concepts in the PITC philosophy and curriculum, the format and training delivery of the First Connections training sessions, and the First Connections coaching component. The Oregon Center for Career Development in Childhood Care and Education convened a three day training of trainers (TOT) and training of coaches (TOC) in Salem OR June 8 through 10, 2011. Twenty six applicants were selected to attend the training based on the following criteria: the applicant’s connection to a local state-supported child care resource & referral program; their access to training audiences that would include participants from child care and education programs in Oregon; and their experience with infants and/or toddlers. Additional consideration was given to applicants who can deliver training in Spanish and to certified Community and Master Trainers.
To maximize the number and availability of trainers qualified to offer the First Connections Core Curriculum with Coaching, a second training was offered in Wilsonville, Oregon on September 9, 2011. The one day training was directed toward existing certified First Connections trainers and focused on the skills and knowledge related to the coaching component of the training. Fifteen trainers completed the coach training at Wilsonville, bringing the total number of trainers certified to offer the First Connections Core Curriculum with Coaching to forty-one. A complete list of certified First Connections trainers is available at the Oregon Center for Career Development in Childhood Care and Education website at www.pdx.edu/occd.

**Delivery of Training and Coaching to Care and Education Providers**

In the summer of 2011, Oregon Childcare Division invited directors of state-sponsored childcare resource and referral programs to request extra funding for First Connections training and coaching to be delivered to cohorts of providers. Ten programs applied for and received funding to carry out First Connection Coaching Projects from September 2011 through June 2012.

Reports prepared for Child Care Division by the ten participating CCR&Rs indicated that First Connection core sessions and coaching were delivered to 125 participants in 20 cohorts. The reports inform that 116 participants completed the coaching process. The training and coaching were delivered by certified trainers who had participated in the June or September 2011 Trainings of Trainers and Coaches. Subsequent to the original funded projects, certified trainers have continued to offer the First Connections Core with coaching throughout the state.

**Evaluation Design**

Ongoing formative evaluation was integrated throughout the processes related to the delivery of TOT/TOC training and delivery of the training and coaching to care and education participant providers. The following questions, which were formulated to guide the evaluation, serve as the focus for this evaluation report.

1. Are participants able to transfer the quality interaction skills learned in training into the worksite thus increasing opportunities for positive outcomes for infants and toddlers?
2. Were key outcomes met for each participant?
3. Do the results indicate need for changes to:
   - First Connections curriculum
   - Trainer/Coaches preparation and support
   - Coaching model
A mix of quantitative and qualitative data were collected throughout the training sessions. The sources of data derive from the following:

- Data for the Training of Trainer/Training of Coaches (TOT/TOC) training sessions were evaluated utilizing primarily post survey data. Surveys were available for all 41 participants (June 2011 TOT/TOC: n = 26; September 2011 TOC: n = 15).

- Evaluation surveys administered following each training session for all six core sessions – available for six cohorts representing more than 96 participants/providers who received trainings between September 8, 2011 and June 6, 2012. The total number of training session surveys available for analysis varied from session to session within each cohort as follows: Session 1: n = 88; Session 2: n = 84; Session 7: n = 83; Session 10: n = 69; Session 13: n = 69; Session 18: n = 59.

- Narrative reports submitted by ten CCR&R that offered the First Connection Coaching model from September 2011 through June 2012. The reports detail the number of sessions presented by the CCR&R, the number of cohorts and participants, the highlights and challenges they experienced in delivering the training and coaching activities, the important lessons learned, and their recommendation for implementing coaching.

- The coaching logs and observation report forms used by the coaches - available for 81 coaching participants. Coaches utilized the logs and observation reports to track each participant’s progress in meeting the five measurable outcomes.

**FINAL INTEGRATED ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

Following an initial analysis of each body of data, the findings were integrated to respond to the three questions that guided the evaluation. The results of the final analysis are as follows.

**Are participants able to transfer the quality interaction skills learned in training into the worksite thus increasing opportunities for positive outcomes for infants and toddlers?**

In the training session surveys, many of the care and education participant/providers spoke of the knowledge and ideas they gained as a result of their participation in the First Connections opportunity. They also spoke of setting goals to implement the new skills and knowledge in their daily work with infants and toddlers in their care. In the CCR&R project reports, trainers communicated that, indeed, many of the providers had made changes to their routines,
practices, behaviors, and environments to “create less chaos and (improved) clear communication. One trainer explicitly claimed that “Skills learned in training were being put into practice before coaching visits.”

The clearest evidence in the answer to this question is contained in the observation reports for the 81 providers who received coaching. Most coaches supplied detailed notes documenting the providers’ activities as they put into practice outcome three, “The Responsive Process” and outcome five, “Making Routines a Social Learning Experience.” The observations also included narratives describing the “Caregivers Plan for Next Steps” indicating the caregivers’ intention to continue the transfer of these skills in their work settings. Coaches reported completion rates of 69% to 74% for the 3 components of outcome three. For outcome five, completion rates for the 6 components range from 59% to 73%. Unfortunately, no status was indicated for between 12% and 26% of the participants on the various components of the two observable outcomes. It is also important to note that the combined bodies of data analyzed for this report give no evidence as to whether the transfer of skills learned in trainings and coaching activities has been sustained over time since the coaching activity was completed.

**Were key outcomes met for each participant?**

From the care and education participant/providers’ session evaluations we know that the self-reported level of achievement of the training objectives is very high. When asked to indicate their level of agreement that the objectives had been met; with five meaning “yes definitely,” three indicating “somewhat,” and one indicating “not at all”; the average rating given by all participants across all six sessions was 4.83.

Attainment of the key behavioral outcomes, however, was not as successful. A review of the tabulation of all coaching log and observation data recorded by the coaches shows that, of the 81 providers, 37 successfully achieved all components of the five outcomes—a 46% total achievement rate. Achievement rates were above 90% for the first two outcomes. Ninety-four percent completed outcome one n “Describe a challenging child including three characteristics of the child, and identify the child’s temperament” and 91% completed outcome two. “Develop a plan for improving goodness of fit with this child.” Completion rates fell off appreciably for the outcomes requiring demonstration of skills ranging from 69% to 75% for the multiple components of outcomes three and five.

However, because coaching logs and observation reports were incomplete as to the final status of outcomes for a significant number of participants, it is difficult to definitively answer this evaluation question.
Do the results indicate need for changes to First Connections curriculum?

The narrative data from training session evaluation surveys and the CCR&R reports indicate that, from the perspectives of participant/providers as well as trainers/coaches, the First Connections Core curriculum was well received and is highly valued. Aspects of the content that received the highest praise were related to understanding a child’s “temperament,” and using the “Watch, Ask, Adapt” approach. Comments from trainers in two of CCR&R reports suggest that some session content may need to be reassessed to assure that activities are suited to the time allotted for the session.

In terms of logistics and delivery, participants strongly supported the sequential, pre-set scheduling arrangement as well as the cohort model. Trainers and coaches concur that this scheduling and model are desirable to maximize learning but acknowledge the challenges faced when carrying this out for all six sessions. Alternative scheduling was suggested by some trainers but most agreed that the key to attendance and retention of the cohort was early planning and notification and involvement of administration or directors of centers.

Do the results indicate need for changes to Trainers/Coaches preparation and support?

A review of findings from the evaluations of the TOT/TOC indicates that the trainers and coaches successfully met all of the objectives for the training and were eager to deliver the training and coaching to care and education providers. The session evaluations are definitive in their favorable assessment of the trainers’ preparedness and skill. When participants were asked to indicate (on a Likert scale of one to five) their level of agreement with statements about the trainers’ trainers’ knowledge, organization, experience, respectfulness, and responsiveness, the average of the responses for each cohort across all six training sessions ranged from 4.75 to 5.00.

However, CCR&R reports and TOT/TOC evaluations suggest that some additions or changes to the preparation and support of trainers and coaches are indicated. In terms of content delivery, CCR&R reports characterized the curriculum as alternately “trainer friendly” to “too much content for the time allowed” to “not enough content for the time allowed.” One trainer noted that preparation took much longer than for other standardized curricula.

Inconsistent practices in use of the observation form and coaching logs would also indicate that more time and practice may need to be devoted to the use of these materials. This would include increasing coaches’ understanding of the value of their ratings and comments to the ongoing formative evaluation of the coaching model.
Do the results indicate need for changes to Coaching model?

Although comprehensive data is thin, the effectiveness of the coaching model is supported by the data achieved and indicates high levels of outcome implementation. In the TOT/TOC evaluations, trainers and coaches spoke favorably about the potential strengths and value of the coaching activities and expressed eagerness to undertake the coaching activities. In their project reports CCR&R directors and coaches are generally positive in their assessment of the coaching model and stress the value for building relationships and the transfer of learning to practice. However, they also note the many challenges that were faced in carrying out the coaching activities and offered suggestions for scheduling of the contacts and observations to enhance relationship building and assure greater comfort of the participants.

Although provider/participant coaching evaluations were not implemented, the rate of outcome achievement included in this report can be attributed to the success of the model. Additionally, one of the project reports included provider/participant statements that were unanimously favorable and characterize the coaching experience as “valuable” and “supportive.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS**

The results suggest that the First Connections Core Curriculum with Coaching model is effective in supporting participant/provider outcome implementation in the work setting. It appears to be an effective investment meriting continued support. This evaluation also speaks to several modifications likely to further enhance the model’s effectiveness:

1. Adjustments to the coaching model are indicated to facilitate ease of observations and to allow for more flexibility in the application of the skills learned in accomplishing the observable outcomes. Adjustments could include utilizing video or other electronic media for the observations and expanding the focus from one child to several in demonstration of the “responsive process” or “making routines a social learning experience.”

2. Ongoing support and increased communication between OCCD and the trainers/coaches should be built in throughout the coaching process. This would provide reassurance to coaches, stimulate the exchange of suggestions and solutions to issues that arise, and assure effective use of the coaching logs and observation forms to enhance accountability.

3. Retroactive evaluation of the coaching process is needed. To add strength and validity to future evaluation, the voices of providers who have received coaching to date should
be added to the assessment of the coaching process. It is important to determine, from
the perspective of each provider who has received coaching:

- What was their expectation going into the coaching process?
- What was the nature of their relationship with their coach?
- What did they like most about the process?
- What did they like least?
- Did the coaching activities help them transfer interactive skills they learned in
  training to their practice?
- Which skills or practices are they still using today?
- Do they have any suggestions for improving the coaching experience?

4. An evaluation survey could be included to be completed by each participant at the end
of their coaching experience. This would a) make the survey an integral part of the
coaching experience (as is already done for training session evaluations), b) is in keeping
with the formative nature of standardized training session evaluation, and c) is
exceptionally important to the development of an effective coaching model.

5. Facilitate an occasion or system for dialogue among the trainers and coaches to weigh in
on changes to improve both the coaching model and the delivery of the First
Connections core curriculum.

As discussed earlier in this report, the CCR&R project reports contain many salient
recommendations for improving the First Connections Core Curriculum and Coaching
model. Those recommendations and the findings of the preliminary analyses in this
report can be the basis for productive dialogue among the trainers/coaches to
deliberate such issues as: proportionate volume of training session content, scheduling
and logistics of the sequence of trainings, the need for participant commitment to the
coaching process, the importance of the coaching documents and the practicality of
their use, and the timing and the logistics of scheduling observation, to name a few.
These are all issues on which the findings are not definitive, but which are mentioned
with varying degrees of frequency in the bodies of data.

Dialogue to improve the training and particularly the coaching process can be achieved
in a number of ways. The simplest strategy is to develop an electronic survey to elicit
suggestions around the topics of concern and to encourage trainers/coaches to share
experiences. The most dynamic approach involves bringing coaches and trainers
together to dialogue in “real-time.” This definitely involves logistical challenges and may
be cost prohibitive. It may be feasible, however, if combined with a prescheduled event
such as an OAEYC Conference during which First Connections trainers and coaches
would be invited to meet. With the invitation they would be sent the findings of this
report and/or the CCR&R reports and an agenda to guide the meeting.
This evaluation has found that the First Connections Core Curriculum with Coaching model is highly valued and has been well received by the childhood care and education community of Oregon. The data supports the model’s effectiveness. Nonetheless, because it is relatively new and unique in its combination of the best practices of sequential training combined with one-on-one coaching, it is vital that assessment is diligent and continuous. The modifications this evaluation suggests are likely to intensify the model’s demonstrated effectiveness.
REFERENCES


Oregon Center for Career Development in Childhood Care and Education. (2008). Core Body of Knowledge for Oregon’s Childhood Care and Education Profession. Portland, OR: OCCD at Portland State University.


