The 5Rs for Early Learning Leaders: Using Resources to Support Program Quality

Beza Semu: Hey, everyone, and thank you for joining our third part of a five-part webinar series on "The 5Rs of Early Learning Leadership." Our webinar today is going to be on the third R, using resources to support program quality. My name is Beza Semu. I'm the early learning leadership project manager at DTL, and I'm your co-host for today, joined by Gail. Gail, do you just want to say hi quickly?

Gail Joseph: Hi, everyone. It's great to be here. Hi, Beza.

Beza: Hi, Gail. So we'll start today by reviewing the five effective practices of learning leaders that we've introduced in our previous webinars in January and February. For those that have joined us in the past, this will be a refresher, and for those of you that are new, this will help you get caught up.

Our main focus will be on resources, and after today's session we hope that you will be able to walk away with examples of using resources purposefully and intentionally to support individual staff's needs. We'll talk about the various types of resources that leaders can use to share knowledge, information, and to develop staff skill. You will have a chance to reflect on your current practices and the staff that you support and learn ways to build a community of practice in order to facilitate more peer support and ongoing learning opportunities in your program.

Before we dive in, one last thing – I just want to remind everyone what we mean, or who we're talking about, when we say early learning leaders. This includes, but is not limited to, program leaders who oversee educational services components, such as curriculum planning and implementation, ongoing assessment, coaching, and PD for educational staff. These learning leaders often carry the title of education managers or coordinators in Head Start at Early Head Start programs. But in some programs they may also be other leaders such as the site director or coordinators, child development specialist, master teacher or coaches, disability service coordinators, and others. So whatever the title may be, we use it very broadly. Learning leaders really encompasses anyone that acts to encourage and inspire using the 5Rs that we talk about today. So with that, I'm going to turn it over to Gail to give us a quick refresher about the 5Rs.

Gail: Thank you, Beza. So in our previous webinar, we introduced what we call the 5Rs of learning leadership. And just to give you a quick overview of how we got here, we started out by seeking to understand what effective learning leadership looked like within the context of Early Head Start and Head Start. So our purpose was to really explain what is unique about learning leadership, or effective leadership, in this context and to identify the knowledge, the skills, the values of effective learning leaders, and then to try and distill that down into what are the practical strategies that these leaders use every day that are so effective.

So our approach and process included looking at all of the existing instructional leadership type of frameworks that are out there. We had discussions with early learning leader experts and researchers, and then we interviewed education leaders who were really doing a great job of leading their programs, and we interviewed educators. So we interviewed teachers. We interviewed home visitors, family child care providers to say from their perspective, what do effective leaders do. And I have to say, that was, like – the most joyous part of doing this work was talking to people about what their experience was. And what we discovered as common themes across these various explorations is what we now call the 5Rs. Most things fit into these kind of five categories that are responsive relationships, reason, resources, reflective dialogue, and recognition. Beza take it away.

Beza: Yeah, so my favorite thing about this work is that, as Gail mentioned, these are examples and stories from the field. And discussing about the 5Rs, it hasn't been a surprise to anyone, but I think it's been really great to have a shared language and establishing that shared language, common language, about what the practices are that effective leaders do.

And so the 5Rs Gail already went over them, but the first one is responsive relationships. And this has to do with the fact that, you know, strong early learning leaders build relationship with educational staff. And then they use these relationships to build a unified culture, a workplace with trust, collaboration, and belonging. The next R is reason, and this is about learning leaders' ability to inspire and encourage their staff into action by providing the why behind the work, by providing the why behind the practices and policies that are in place. Our third R which we will dive more into today is resources. And this is about the fact that effective learning leaders really prioritize the professional development and growth of staff, and they provide materials, training, and other resources to support the development of staff. The fourth R is on reflective dialogue, and this has to do with learning leaders putting a lot of effort to learn about how children are doing, how staff are doing, and really encouraging meaningful conversations and dialogues centered around data and data used to be able to answer questions and really improve program quality. And then finally we have recognition. And this is learning leaders putting a lot of effort to make sure that they are noticing and seeing what staff are working toward and recognizing both small and big wins and successes and efforts in order to encourage staff growth.

So even though these Rs are laid out individually, and we talk about them kind of separately, they are very much interconnected, and they build on one another. So Gail, before we dive into resources, can you give us, at a high level, some recap about the first two Rs that we covered in the past two webinars?

Gail: Yes, absolutely. I would be happy to. And it's so true that we talk about 5Rs, but they're not really completely distinct. So sometimes we talk about something, and we think oh, that could go in either R, so it's a good reminder of that. But in our previous webinars that happened in January and February of this year, we talked about the first two Rs.

So the first one was around responsive relationships. And this has to do with how the learning leaders would clarify and live out their values so that they were really authentic and felt those

very trusting relationships between leaders and educational staff members. And so it was really about how learning leaders would lead with authenticity, with transparency, how they look for opportunities to consistently apply their beliefs about educational justice, about family engagement, about staff professional development, overall program quality, and more. And in our second webinar, we talked about the reason. And that was really about how leaders use their why. You know, we always hear, "What is your why?" This was how they would use their why to inspire and lead their team into a shared vision of program quality and child outcomes. And as we go through our webinar today, notice how these effective practices are really, they're interconnected like we said before, and they also build on one another. Beza back to you.

Beza: So before we dive into our – on to resources – we want to ask you just to take a moment and reflect, what you think about when you hear the word resources, what comes to mind? And we wanted to have you thinking about both how you define resources and also what you believe are the purposes of using resources. So keep that in mind as we go along and talk about more detail.

So in this first section, we want to talk about intentional use of resources. Providing resources in intentional ways requires that we ask why, who, what, and how questions. And we'll dive more into these, but the why gets at the purpose of the resource. So why do you need this resource? Why are you using it versus some other resource? And getting at that intentionality. The who is about pertaining to the learner. So who is the resource for? What are the skills and knowledge that they need? So it's really about understanding your staff and what their needs are and what their skills are as well. The what is about what is the content that they need? What is the skill gap or the information that you want to provide to them? And the how is about the ways in which you will deliver the information or the resource. So what are the best ways to deliver this training or this professional development in order to be able to really support your professional staff growth and the skill that you want them to grow? So I'm going to kick it to Gail to talk about the why a little bit, and we'll go on talking about the rest of them.

Gail: Yes, absolutely. And so, you know, when you were saying, "What do you think about with resources?" You know, I think sometimes what comes to our mind are the material and resources in a room or in a home visitor's support. Maybe the bag that they're bringing or what supports they're using, so I think sometimes we think about resources as, like, the material things. And what was really surprising when we did the interviews is that providing the materials and the resources was coming up as something that was really important, but the resource that really was talked about a lot was around that professional development resource. So we're going to kind of move from that material, like, physical materials, into really also thinking about kind of the professional development resources that effective learning leaders supply. And I would say that even if you're thinking about the physical material resources for supporting your educational staff, you really are going to be thinking about what is the purpose, you know, the what is the why. What is this material or this resource going to do to support you? So that really comes back to having that clear purpose and vision about what you imagine high-quality early learning looking like and how does this resource support that. I just have to

say really quickly, when I was a Head Start teacher, I think one of my favorite days was when my leader came and said, you know, there was a little bit of a budget for some classroom supplies and materials and that I could kind of select what I wanted. And I really, like, what I wanted was something that was going to look cool in the classroom but not necessarily something that was going to help support the high-quality teaching and learning. And so I think that having gone back and thought about, like, so why is this material, this resource, going to help promote that, would be a really important question to have asked me.

So again, at the root of the kind of the purpose of offering resources is really that – to improve the teaching and learning that's happening whether that's in center-based and family child care programs or in our home visiting programs – so that we can increase that learning and the school readiness for all children, and learning leaders always start with that. They start with the why, clarify the values that guide their decisions and, even with regard to what resources they're choosing to use, they're always thinking about what's the why behind them, what they are, and how they're using them. And resources are selected very intentionally, and they are reflective of the priority and values that we place on educator growth and support. So learning leaders often ask, "What teaching practices do I want to improve for educational staff?" And this leads to the who. So take it away, Beza.

Beza: Thanks, Gail. Like I mentioned the who – who are the staff that you're supporting? What are their professional development needs? What are the skills or information they're interested in or need to improve upon? And what is their learning style? Some people want to have, some of a self-paced, they already have a skill base and the knowledge, and they just need a little bit of information to kind of help them stay up to date and so knowing about the learning styles of the individuals. So who are the staff that you're supporting? And for this one, you know, this also goes back to building meaningful relationships and getting to know your staff. And this includes learning about their needs and interests and being mindful of their skills. And that is critical because that is one way that you can leverage their expertise in order to have them help one another as well.

So there are two main ways that we've identified, you know, to do this. And one is through ongoing check-in, and the other is through observations of practice to really know who your staff are and what their needs are. So for ongoing one-on-one check-ins, this can be formal or informal conversations, but they're very effective in building the necessary rapport and opening doors for staff to fully share what they need support on. And I'm going to share a quote from a director that we talked with. She's referencing in this instance an example that they had with a trainer, and she says, "You know, making sure that the trainer understood staff's needs, it just flipped it completely. When we got the trainer to understand her audience better because before then I think she kind of went on with a script that said A, B, and C. OK, thank you. That was probably the biggest roadblock, but we were able to overcome it."

So we all have our, you know, materials that Gail mentioned and resources that we walk around with or a set of training and binders and things like that that we have that we deliver. But without knowing really who our audience is and what their needs are, it's really hard to

make that connection, to help them make that connection and help them see the value of the resource. So during your one-on-one check-ins, think about what are their short-term goals, for the staff, what are their immediate needs and long-term needs. And you can ask questions like, "How are you doing? What is going well? What's difficult at the moment? What would you like to get better at? And how can I help you get better at these things?" And opening this communication also shows that you're invested in their growth, and it prompts them to also be agents of their own growth and professional development and come to you as a trusted resource. Gail, do you want to talk a little bit of observation of staff practice?

Gail: Yes, absolutely. So another great way to build relationships and understand staff needs is to observe their practice. I know that kind of seems like Captain Obvious, but it's very true. It really needs to be intentional and ongoing to continue to be an astute observer of what your educational staff are doing and where resources could really help support.

We heard from one program director that we interviewed, and she said once a week she was observing developmental preschool to see what resources, what strategies they were using, and then she went and bought that classroom pretty much all the equipment that they needed. Clearly, she had some support for that. And what was neat about this situation is that it was observing in a developmental preschool and then finding out what materials were needed to support that child in the Head Start classroom. So notice how the observation was very purposeful. It was to understand what resources and strategies they were using and to identify what was needed. And then when you decide to observe staff practices, be very intentional about what it is that you are looking for, and this can be predetermined between you and the educational staff. What should I observe? Are there some trouble spots, that if I observe, I can help you with? They might want you to observe mealtime. They might want you to observe transition time. They might want to see how they can maximize learning time to extend conversations within these contexts. And this way, when you're very intentional about it, when you are in the space, you know exactly what to focus on, and your follow-up and support through resources will also be very helpful and specific to the one thing that the staff is hoping to improve the most. And now, Beza, you're going to talk about, a little bit more around the who of resources.

Beza: Yes, so this one we want to talk about setting SMART goals. And this came up again in the interviews where staff wanted to be, again, intentional about the resources and being able to check in periodically to see if the resources that they're using, the trainings, and the professional development is helping staff get to a desired outcome and attaining a certain skill level. So we wanted to talk about just setting that intention in the beginning and setting that goal for professional development and growth.

And SMART goals, we do have a handout in the Resource widget that you can download and use. But, you know, S stands for specific, meaning that these goals are well defined and clearly stated. So, for example, I want to know every child and staff in this program. That is a very broad statement. And so making that more specific by saying that I want to know every child

and staff by name, interest, and skill between now and the end of May. So you've made it very concrete about exactly what do you want to know, you know, about children and staff.

Gail: Absolutely. And then the next one is M, and that stands for measurable which means you have a specific criteria and a way to measure progress toward the accomplishment of that goal. So, for example, using your goal, your example, the goal was to know every child and staff by name, interest, and skill by the end of May, then you might measure that by creating a checklist, listing a roster of all of the children and staff in your program, and track your progress on how you're doing with that.

Beza: And then A stands for achievable, and this means that it's possible to attain – it's not too far out or unattainable. So, for using the same example, are you able to meet this goal within the timeline that you've identified? Like one day is probably not enough to learn about every children's name, and at the end of this year is probably not relevant either. So is it achievable in the time frame that you've identified.

Gail: Yes, and then the R stands for realistic. So we do want these, like, exciting and achievable goals, but we also want to make sure that it is something that is reachable and relevant.

Beza: And also lastly, just needs to be timely, so meaning that you've attached a clearly identified timeline. And this is really asking by when. By when do I want to achieve this? So for practice, we invite you to use the resource to create the SMART goal collaboratively with your staff. And as you create this goal, both you and your staff will have ways to be accountable and to stay on track and have a way to measure progress.

So we also now have another resource for you in the Resource widget. It's a handout labeled "Who, What, How of Resources." We want you to download that, or you can have another space, a journal, or a planner where you can answer some questions about staff. So think about up to three staff in your program and write down their names. And for each individual think about at least one thing that they've expressed or something that they would like to work on, and identify one skill that they have or something that they're really good at. And so for now, just list one, but I'm sure if you think of more, you can add it later. And if you don't know their needs or skills, make a goal to find that out, and so that might be thinking about a time that you're going to have a check-in with them to understand and ask these questions. So go ahead and take a moment to download that, and start thinking about it. And we're going to go ahead and transition. We'll have time to come back to this throughout the webinar.

Gail: That is so great. I love how intentional we are thinking about resources. So now let's shift into the what. And the what is about the content. What is the topic area for the skill, the knowledge, or information that the staff needs to know and cultivate based on their needs? So again, remember, that resources, what we heard from educators is that they really thought about resources as being those, the professional development supports. So what is that support going to be?

So the content that educational staff need to know can be different for each staff member. And some content – this is the kind of the skill, knowledge, or awareness – could be needed around program norms and procedures. This includes understanding of a new program policy or some new routine that's going to be in place. I think a lot of us have had to have some new routines that have been in place. And this is usually the case for maybe new staff when, or when existing routines and policies shift. And again, I think we've all experienced that. The content needed could also be around effective teaching and home visiting practices. This includes a broad range of things from, everything from knowing children, knowing child development, theories, and best practices to understanding program quality, measures, and assessments to individualizing for children with suspected delays or identified disabilities, implementing curriculum with fidelity, or supporting children who are dual language learners, for example. And then the third area of skill and knowledge that a staff member might need or might want to know is to develop around interpersonal skills. And this can be, like, communication skills to build better relationships with their team members, I hear that a lot, and with their families.

So just a reminder, there are a wealth of resources on the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, or ECLKC as we like to call it, everything from webinars to articles, tips, tools, templates, videos that can all help you to support your staff in the area of the program norms and procedures, effective teaching practices, and supporting interpersonal skills such as developing relationships. Now, to support effective teaching and home visiting practices, you can access several resources including the Head Start Program Performance Standards, in particularly, 1302.31, I got that one out. Teaching and the learning environment is a good source of information about the elements of an effective learning environment, including effective teaching practices. 1302.35 is education in home-based programs, which provides specific information about the effective teaching practices home visitors use and how they support families to promote learning in a home.

Now, the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, or ELOF, is designed to support a continuum of learning for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. And the ELOF is grounded in comprehensive research around what young children should know and be able to do during their early years. You can click on the link in the Resource widget to learn more about this resource and also download, if you haven't, the app on your phone ELOF2Go and ELOF@Home.

And we also want to highlight the ELOF Effective Practice Guides that teachers, family child care providers, and home visitors can use these to learn about how to effectively support children's growth and development across the ELOF domains. They are fantastic, if you haven't seen them yet. And the IPD, which is a learning management system created to support ongoing professional development for staff in Head Start in child care settings, is fantastic. It contains accessible, self-paced modules based on staff roles and interests. And you can access courses by practitioner. There are modules for educational staff, there are for directors, for managers, for technical assistance providers, home visitors, family child care providers, family service workers. Some of these include the Beginning Teachers Series, which is fantastic if you have some new teachers that are starting, Effective Practice Guides, assessing infant and toddler

behaviors, Head Start leadership and governance values, regulations, and skills. It's just chock-full of all kinds of great things. So Beza.

Beza: So thanks, Gail, for laying that out. The links for all this stuff that Gail mentioned is also in the Resource widget, so be sure to grab that. So for now we want to go back to the activity, the handout, the who, what, and how, or wherever you chose to write your initial responses. And for each staff member that you've identified, write down the skill that you think they would want to grow or what is the area of need. Is it around program norms? Is it around effective teaching practices or interpersonal skills? And if you identified multiple areas, try to list them all and prioritize later in collaboration with your staff. And we'll come back to this handout one more time, but now, we're going to transition to the how.

The how is about the best way to support the skill and professional development. So what is the best resource that you can provide? Is it materials? Is it training? Is it professional development? And how should this resource be delivered to maximize learning? Is it best shared one-on-one in a visual and the modeling? Is it by offering articles to read or modules? So we'll dive a little bit more into that, into the how. And I wanted to share this because it is my, you know, a really fun way to express that. It doesn't matter how many resources you have if you don't know how to use them, it really will not improve practice. So we want to talk a little bit about, we want to use a visual to talk a little bit about the different types of resources there are out there in supporting the how. So some resources, like I mentioned, are delivered through self-paced learning. These include materials, handouts, modules, webinars. So these are things that the staff, depending on, you know, what their learning style is and what you want them to learn, this is something that they can go and do and learn on their own.

Gail: And some resources and content are best delivered through training or workshop. And this could be both internal, one-on-one training or it could be programwide training or statewide or national conferences.

Beza: And self-paced learning and trainings are a great way to support staff to acquire knowledge, awareness, and skill on a specific topic.

Gail: Yes, and another way of supporting staff learning is through coaching. Coaching can be one-on-one or it can be programwide. There can be a coach who can support an individual staff member, but it could also include directors and education managers so that there's a common language for quality.

Beza: And another way of supporting and sustaining staff's ongoing professional development and growth is by setting up peer learning opportunities through communities of practice and reflection. So these communities include having a peer support or partner who holds one another accountable on an ongoing basis and communities to offer professional development and collaboration. And so these communities of practice are ways to support skills and the application of skills in growing and deepening an existing skill.

Gail: That is so true. And while these self-paced learning opportunities really are there in such great ways, I think now we want to really kind of dive a little bit more into that who, what, and how. So, Beza.

Beza: So let's take a final look at the handout that Gail just mentioned. And for each staff you've identified, based on this skill or knowledge you've identified, write down how you will deliver the content. So what is the best way to ensure they acquire the information needed? Is it self-paced? Is it training? Coaching? It might be best that you need to deliver the same content in different ways to different staff.

So to kind of close out this intentional use of resources segment, we wanted to showcase a case study. I'm going to play a video in a moment of an education leader discussing her approach toward supporting staff through the use of specific resources. So pay attention to how this connects to intentional use and creation of resources.

[Video begins] [Music] Abby Mayers: Typically, in our program our teachers were pretty much just teachers during their home visits and conferences and responsible for solely the education. We went to a different model. Last year was our first year of the pilot model where our teachers took on more family service roles because truthfully they are in contact more regularly with families than our family service providers had been. So we revamped the model, made them take on some extra duties, much to their chagrin initially, and then rehired some upper-level family service coordinators who would do high risk and triaging.

So with the teachers, I had to devise a plan to get them up to speed with some of the basic competencies in Head Start around family services and family engagement. So I actually created a training program that was divided into three parts. Head Start has nine competencies for staff working with families. And those include things like cultural, you know, cultural awareness, cultural humility, working with interpreters and community partners and in teams, just multidisciplinary teams, believing family's well-being. So different components, and there were nine of these competencies. So I devised a whole training module, divided into three sections for them including activities where they could role-play, and they could answer some questions and even some quizzes so that I can "certify" them. It doesn't quite meet Head Start's upper level of what they are expecting for the teacher's information, but it was a really good start. And feedback from our region was pretty positive that, you know, I undertook that on myself to just create a program that would kind of, at least, give them enough insight and understanding of the role and the duties they were taking and feedback. On the final exam, I had them write, you know, what do they really get out of all of this? You know, we met three times, you know, for two to three hours each and reviewed these and did silly lessons and quizzes. And they all said they had a really deeper understanding for what family needs were or how to connect with families or working with more challenging families.

So it's really impactful. And we had our ups and downs when we actually were running this program with the teachers, of course. And some really took to it, you know, better than I could have predicted and some struggled. So being able to kind of identify those who needed some extra support, and I think role-modeling is always the best tool to show them here, "Here's how

I would do this. Let's brainstorm together. What ideas do you have?" But to see some of the teachers really gain an appreciation and take to this upper level, and they said that just the work in general improved a lot by having this information in mind as they approached families. It just changed their perspective, and in turn that was better outcomes for kids and families, so. [Video ends]

Gail: I just – you know, I love this so much because she really, really describes what it is that we're thinking about in that resource R. I mean, she's talking about, you know, why did she do it. It was a very intentional decision about thinking how teachers really do have a lot of contact with families, regular contact with families, so expanding their role into thinking about more family engagement and family service. So that why was there. The who, you know, she really focused on it being educational staff. And then the what, she was very clear on kind of what they needed to know in terms of the competencies. And then the how, she was very intentional on the how she was going to provide that new skill and knowledge support, and just I think it's really great. And I also think it's great that they tried something out that was new, kind of a pilot based on some of their experiences and what they wanted to do, so really fantastic.

So the following matrix that we have up here on the slide shows various levels of professional development, or PD, and how each of them could be used intentionally depending on the educational staff member need and skills and the purpose of the professional development. So if you, the first tier of professional development is just building awareness and knowledge. And this is often best accomplished through, maybe it's reading an article from "Young Children," maybe it's attending a lecture or listening to a podcast, maybe it is another kind of a training or a training video that they can watch. And it's just a great way to lay the foundational understanding of the practice that you are trying to support. And then reading lectures and watching training videos are really great in that they can be scheduled around the learner's schedule, and they can be self-paced. And we already talked about so many resources you can find on ECLKC that do that. However, we also want to recognize that these are, the way that often we participate in them is a bit of a passive learning. Right? So we're getting this new information. And we really want to support staff in also gaining that foundational knowledge.

So you might start there, but we also what to think about how we can kind of make sure that they are learning things that are exciting and new to them by engaging in these knowledge checks. So thinking about knowledge checks, thinking about the ways that they would also maybe engage in discussion. So you can really think about they've received the knowledge through reading, lectures, training, and now we want them, we kind of want to check that knowledge and see if we have a shared common understanding about what it is that they're learning. And I loved how Abby, who we just heard about, was kind of intentional about these kind of quizzes. She called them silly quizzes, so I feel like they're not super high stakes. And even a final exam that provided some feedback on them. But you can do this just by asking like, "Hey, what are three things that you're taking away from that video? What are three things that you learned in that article that you want to try out?"

And then another way is through discussions. If there are several staff members that are reading the same material, maybe you're starting a little journal club. They can have meetings to discuss or engage in reflection, conversations. They can be online discussion boards, or they could do something on Google Docs, is easy to do that with. And some discussions can also lead to rich team meetings where educational staff can collaboratively identify that practice that they want to improve, engage in some brainstorming or problem-solving around that. So maybe they've learned something. We know that, we've kind of checked their knowledge, and now they're going to start to think about how they can implement that or what it would look like in their program. So Beza, you're going to talk about the next level.

Beza: Yeah. So building on that, on what Gail said about team meetings, the next level to extending and deepening that knowledge and awareness is through observing, you know, modeling of other's practices and then practicing what has been modeled for them so that they're able to really deepen it and have a stronger connection with: "This is what I've seen and now I'm going to try to apply it and use it in my everyday practice." And the loop between observing practices, applying the practice and trying to do it themselves, getting feedback by someone that's observing them doing that is really helpful in kind of continuing that cycle of being able to reflect and refine and being able to improve their practice on a regular basis, incrementally. And then the last one, Gail, you're going to talk about using it in context.

Gail: Yeah. So the most effective way to implement and sustain professional development is by embedding that learning within the everyday practices. Right? So I can read it. I can tell you what I learned. I can, you know, watch some videos and practice observation. But now I want to, like, actually implement it. So embedding that into everyday practice in order to sustain the learning it needs to really be intentional, it needs to be ongoing, and it needs to be applied within their context. How does this look in my classroom or in my home visiting practice or in my family child care? And so educational staff need to engage in some goal-setting, practicing, implementation, and follow-up and feedback. And coaching and mentoring are great ways to support educational staff as they implement that practice within their context. Beza.

Beza: So we hope that so far the intentional use of resources has been, like, helpful for you to learn about and think about. And for the remainder of our time we want to talk a little bit more about modeling and promoting peer learning groups and peer learning opportunities. And we want to start that out by having a video that we want you to look at. And in this video you'll see several staff talking about how when they've been able to observe someone else doing the practice and being able to apply it and when they've engaged in peer learning opportunities, how that has transformed their learning and their ability to engage deeply in the work.

[Video begins] [Music] Priscila Bess: She would just come in and be, like, another set of hands. And she would be, you know, like, kind of model for me how to do this, how to handle this child that's not wanting to line up or that having issue, behavior issue. And I would be like, "Oh, OK. I know. I know what to do next time." Or it helped me – it gave me more confidence, I think, especially with her being in there just kind of OK, this, OK getting her approval, but not really because she was always kind of, like, "Yeah, you're doing a good job." You know, so I liked the

feedback from her or whatever I needed I would just come and ask her, "What do you think about this?" And she would come in the classroom more of a lecture in saying, "You need to do this, this, this, this." It was more hands-on with me and modeling for me. And so, not overstepping either but letting me lead and then being like, "Yeah, that was a good job." You know, so I liked her, so.

Tiffany Brown: Back in, I want to say 2010, '09 or '10, I don't remember, but I had a coach, her name was Rosalyn Adams. And she was a former kindergarten teacher, and just her whole style was just different. She would come in and just like, hands-on, everything hands-on and show you what's – because at the time they wanted us to implement OWL curriculum. And we were already doing creative curriculum, and we had to, like, infuse it – it was just, it was a lot. So instead of her just handing us the box and being like, "Here you go." You know, she actually put her apron on, and she asked me would it be OK if she showed me what to do. And I said, "Yes, and then I'll just copy." So that's what she did. She got in there, and she just showed me what to do for, like, a week. I know she didn't have a lot of time at our site, but she would come there anyway and just put work in. And I think she had that, like, the teacher, like a certification, that piece of it, where she knows you need help implementing something new.

Janae McClure: It's a group of teachers. There's usually, I think between three and four teachers per grade. And then we all come together and meet once a month. And basically we are learning, maybe a new part of a curriculum, a new technique, or a new, just something new. And then us capacity builders learn how to do it. We try it on ourselves. We have a leader for, like, pre-K capacity builders. We have a leader, so she kind of tells us what we're going to be doing. She'll come in and model it if we want her to. And then we try it out, and then we kind of, our pre-K capacity builder group will kind of watch each other do it and get, like, "Oh, that was really great, I should have done that." And then we have all the, we have demonstration days where then we do that new lesson. And all the other pre-K teachers, they get subs and they come in, in groups, and watch what we do and then pick our brain afterward in a little meeting. And so that was really helpful because at the beginning I was just really nervous. And it was something new and very, very out of my comfort zone, and having our capacity builder leader come in and kind of show me what – "This is what I would do, this is kind of what it looks like" – was really big for me. If I can just watch it first, it makes it a lot easier for me to feel comfortable trying it on myself. [Video ends]

Gail: So I love this video for so many reasons. And I love it when we hear from educators what it is that leaders can do to help support their growth and development. And we saw many examples of what we were looking at in that matrix. But I absolutely love this idea, the last teacher talks about, about the capacity builders. So this is a program in which they identify some of their teachers, maybe some more experienced, veteran teachers that are ready for a challenge as capacity builders. And then they have a capacity builder leader who might be like a coach. And they, when they're trying to implement a new curriculum or they want to try a new practice out, they get these capacity building teachers together to learn it, try it out, kind of toss ideas around, how can they improve it. It's just such a really great model to do that. And

another thing that we heard about over and over again is how much educators want to learn from each other.

And communities of reflection and practice, CORP groups as we call them, are really great ways of doing that. They're groups of people who have a common interest in a specific topic, knowledge, skill, or maybe it's even a role that they share. And these groups will collaboratively, regularly share information. They will improve their skills, like in capacity building, and they'll actively work on advancing the general knowledge of the individual as well as the group.

And so now, I just want you to think just for a second where, I know we're kind of getting short on time here, but what do you believe are the benefits of peer learning groups or communities of reflection and practice? So just be thinking about that. We've actually heard from some educators about how they feel about them. So you might be thinking about this for yourself. And there are so many benefits to building these communities of reflection and practice or these peer learning groups. They're called teaching and learning in groups, lots of different names for them, but some of the benefits are that you really can deepen the knowledge and the skills which leads to that sustainability of the new practice that they're learning. It really supports staff to implement strategies learned in professional development more consistently. It supports ongoing engagement and personal growth and development that continuous quality improvement loop. It is an opportunity to develop leadership skills, again that capacity building model is such a great way of doing that, and it deepens their ability to engage in collaboration and teamwork successfully. Beza.

Beza: So what are the components of successful communities of reflection and practice? First and foremost, it's really important to have educational staff buy-in and commitment. And again, this goes back to having strong relationship with staff and involving them in the process as decision makers have much to learn from and much to contribute to these communities of peer learning experiences and can show up as groups and organizers themselves.

Gail: And there's a clear intent and purpose for the CORP groups that is essential. This goes back to the reason and the why. What is the purpose of the CORP? What do you want individuals and groups to get out of this CORP group? What are the needs and skills you've identified and educational staff have identified for themselves? And how will this space be used to extend and deepen learning skills and collaboration?

Beza: And thirdly, successful COPs need support for participants, and this includes time away from other duties to engage in peer learning groups. This may mean hiring substitutes. And you also want to plan for additional training for facilitators or group leaders or the capacity builders that the teacher was, you know, talking about.

Gail: And what we've heard from all interviews is that staff who had clear goals felt like their professional development opportunities and trainings were purposeful. They were able to go back to the initial goals, see what they've learned, what they still need to learn and grow, and

how they could collaborate with their educational leader to more clearly articulate the path and the necessary resources to get them to reach their goals.

Beza: And then last but not least, you'll need materials. And these are the actual physical materials, so, that are adequate to support communities of practice. So this can be things like meeting space, a dedicated time for staff to step away and engage in communities of reflection and practice, a time to observe one another's practices, and if you're going to film this and have them watch, you know, their recording you'll need cameras, tripods, memory cards, and things like that. And it's also helpful to provide information about communities of reflection and practice and create annual goals and plans and agendas that can help facilitate the flow and ongoing process in engaging in these communities of reflection and practice.

And lastly, we want to share that on MyPeers education leaders page, where we hope that you continue to engage on that page. We'll have resources, we'll have the webinar recordings posted on there with some additional resources. So we hope to see you there. And just finally, I just wanted to say thank you for joining us today. So thank you and take care.

Gail: Take care, everyone. We'll see you over in MyPeers.