

# Southern Regional Hub-funded project

Project Report



## Professional learning opportunities for postgraduate specialist teachers

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## Executive Summary

This project developed a coaching resource that reflects the insights and hindsight of what Field Advisors (qualified Early Intervention Teachers) and postgraduate Early Intervention students find critical in their coaching relationship during students' practicum. The coaching resource gives voice to their experiential-based knowledge and understanding.

Experiential-based postgraduate programmes have an important and increasing role in New Zealand in the post-compulsory education sector, which includes adult and community education, workplace education, and formal tertiary institutions such as universities and polytechnics. Coaching is seen as an important strategy for supporting co-enquiry and professional learning of undergraduate students participating in experiential-based degrees such as psychology and education (Smith et al., 2012). However, to our knowledge, no empirical evidence of the effectiveness of this approach with postgraduate students, at least in New Zealand if not internationally, is available. For this study, we collected data on Field Advisor (i.e., experienced early intervention teacher) and coachee (i.e., postgraduate student learning to become an early intervention teacher) perceptions of the critical attributes that contribute to a successful coaching relationship. These insights and hindsight were then used to develop a coaching resource that can be used by Field Advisors and students during their practicum to build the key attributes and characteristics necessary for a successful coaching relationship. This coaching resource can be used in other educational and professional contexts where coaching relationships exist.

Eleven postgraduate students and seven of their Field Advisors took part in the project. The Field Advisors were experienced Early Intervention Teachers (EITs) working in early intervention services such as the Ministry of Education (MoE), CCS Disability Action, Conductive Education, and the Champion Centre. Early intervention services provide support for children with additional needs, and their parents, whānau and kaiako from birth until the child starts school. Students were qualified and experienced early childhood educators working as teachers or EITs. Field Advisors and students were paired based on the region they worked in.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with Field Advisors and students. Transcript data were imported into the qualitative research software, NVivo version 12, and a thematic analysis was used to identify key themes that represent attributes of a successful coaching relationship.

An important aspect of the coaching relationship was that it was reciprocal and non-judgemental. Field Advisors and students stated that key attributes of a good coach included: reciprocity, invited input and reflection, relational behaviours, provided constructive feedback and feedforward, suggested and modeled a range of strategies and approaches, extended and challenged thinking, and promoted joint planning. Key attributes of a good coachee included: being open-minded, flexible and adaptable, engaged in the learning process, respectful and professional etiquette and engaged in inquiry and reflection.

## The Teaching Context

This study will be set within the context of the Postgraduate Diploma in Specialist Teaching – Early Intervention endorsement, a postgraduate Programme offered by the University of Canterbury. A portion of the programme is funded by the MoE and is targeted at registered early childhood teachers. The programme is completed over two years with the final year comprising of 150 hours of practicum. The second-year practicum paper is the focus of this study. The practicum provides an opportunity for students to engage in authentic, experiential experiences to support their professional development in early intervention. Students are assigned to a Field Advisor (FA) who is a qualified and experienced Early Intervention Teacher. The role of the FA is to provide ongoing guidance and support throughout the student's practicum, as a coach. This support may be offered in the form of: constructive feedback on teaching and learning practices, suggestions about different approaches to early intervention, strategies in working inter-professionally, as well as the development of new insights and understandings, promoting professional competence, and increased self-efficacy and critical reflection. The collaborative nature of the Field Advisor and student relationship is aimed to build capability and skills in students to respond to the unique needs of children within their early childhood educational services.

## Recommendations Summary

The project team has found that there is great potential in coaching for postgraduate students completing an experiential-based programme. However, there is a need to scaffold this relationship and promote the key attributes that are considered to contribute to a successful coaching relationship. We cannot expect a coach and coachee to know how to engage in a successful coaching relationship without a resource to support them. This report identified four recommendations for supporting coaching relationships in experiential learning programmes.

1. Match personality and professional goals, where possible  
Coaching relationships will be more successful when the personalities of coaches and coachees complement each other. Similarly, identifying coach and coachee's areas of interest and professional goals may be an important step in setting the foundation for a successful coaching relationship. This was a clear recommendation that came from the students in the study. It is not always possible to consider these factors if there is limited availability of coaches to be paired with coachees, as was the case in this study. However, where possible, experiential learning coordinators (i.e., the Postgraduate Programme Coordinator who facilitated the course) are encouraged to consider personal and professional aspirations of the coach and coachee to determine the best fit.
2. Select coaches carefully  
Coaches need to have extensive practice knowledge and experience in the discipline. Students also recommended that Field Advisors not be *forced* to be a coach because this puts pressure on the coaching relationship, often leading

to students feeling their coach resents their presence. To ensure both the coach and coachee get the most out of their relationship, we recommend that coaches volunteer to support students. These coaches will likely be intrinsically motivated to support another individual rather than seeing the experience as a burden. Coaches who volunteer their time to support a coachee may also have the leadership skills that will benefit the coaching relationship. For a coaching relationship to be successful, the coach needs to believe in their ability and care about building the capability of less experienced professionals.

3. Organise a meet-and-greet

Providing coaches and coachees with the opportunity to meet face-to-face in an informal setting is important in facilitating early conversations about their coaching relationship. The meet-and-greet is also an opportunity for the experiential learning coordinators (i.e., the Postgraduate Programme Coordinator who facilitated the course) to: outline the expectations of the practicum experience, introduce the coaching resource, and make suggestions about how to get the most out of the coaching resource. Opportunities for coaches to share common barriers, challenges, and opportunities based on their previous coaching experiences with others are also beneficial in preparing students for their practicum. In the context of this project, students completed 150 hours of practicum experience while being coached by a Field Advisor (experienced EIT). We strongly suggest that the meet-and-greet occurs long before students commence their experiential learning practicum (e.g., 4–5 weeks) to avoid additional stress and anxiety that often comes with starting a new programme of study. Early communication between coach and coachee will also provide students with the field-based knowledge and support they need to develop their professional development goals before starting their practicum experience.

4. Encourage regular check-ins

Coaching relationships will be more successful when the coach and coachee regularly communicate and check-in with each other. During these check-ins, the coach and coachee are encouraged to use the coaching resource as a stimulus to communicate about each of the key attributes of a coaching relationship: relationships, dialogue, identity, and knowledge and skills. For instance, during their check-in they might speak about the frequency and style of their dialogue and whether this has been effective for both parties. Regular check-ins and communication will allow concerns to be identified and responded to early in the coaching relationship.

## Introduction

Governments today recognise that the quality of early childhood programmes are dependent on the quality of its workforce and this requires participation in ongoing professional learning (PL) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012). Coaching is seen as an important strategy for supporting co-enquiry and professional learning of undergraduate students participating in field-based degrees such as psychology and education (Smith et al., 2012). This collaborative learning is a highly valued aspect in the development of professional learning and competency, however, research has focused on preservice and beginning teacher education and psychology programmes and to our knowledge, no empirical evidence of the effectiveness of this approach with postgraduate students, at least in New Zealand if not internationally, is available.

For this study, we sought to understand the key attributes that contribute to successful coaching relationships and develop a resource that can be used by the coach and coachees during postgraduate experiential professional development courses.

Our research and coaching resource is situated within the Ako Aotearoa values of: Awhitanga (inclusiveness), Whanaungatanga (positive relationships), Pūmautanga (strengthen sector capability), and Whakamanatanga (empowerment) (Ako Aotearoa, 2020). We are particularly interested in the professional development of postgraduate students and their Field Advisors who are experienced coaches in the early intervention sector. We are especially guided by the principle of *ako* – to teach and to learn – which is especially relevant for all involved (project team members and participants).

This report begins by reviewing the literature on coaching, followed by literature which looks specifically at the professional partnerships that are developed in early childhood education contexts and why these are important in building capability within the sector. Next, we describe our study which aimed to identify the key attributes that coach and coachees indicate were critical to a successful relationship. This data was used to develop a coaching resource that would be used to inform the coaching relationship. Although coaches have a lot of specialist experience and knowledge in early intervention, they lack tangible resources to help scaffold and guide the relationships they are required to develop with a coachee. Our findings, therefore, build on previous research by considering ways in which experienced in-service early childhood educators and specialist teachers can be supported to develop strong, successful coaching partnerships.

## Coaching

The model of effective adult professional development is developed around reciprocity, relationships, and reflection-on-reality (Robertson, 1997). To develop teacher pedagogy and educational leadership, a constructivist approach to the relationship is adopted whereby there is shared responsibility of the coach and coachee to contribute to new knowledge and learning (Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, Cooper, Lambert, Gardner & Slack, 1995; Robertson, 2008). However, the relationship

between coach (i.e., Field Advisor – experienced early intervention teacher) and coachee (i.e., postgraduate student learning to become an early intervention teacher) has not been routinely examined in postgraduate experiential learning environments.

Coaching is defined as “the process used to help people reflect, find power and courage within themselves, and think and act in new ways in order to bring about positive change” (Wise & Jacobo, 2010, p 163). The coach approaches the professional partnership “as a learner and not all-knower: sometimes teacher, sometimes learner; sometimes leader, sometimes follower; sometimes expert, sometimes novice” (Robertson, 2008, p 42). Direct teaching, on the other hand, involves an experienced practitioner (i.e., the teacher) directing the learner towards the knowledge they need with little input from the learner. The success of a coaching relationship between student and coach has shown to have a significant impact on the practicum experiences and professional learning of the student and the coach. Reported benefits of successful coaching relationships include lifelong learning, confidence and competence in skills and abilities, and can result in leadership opportunities (Thornton, 2010). This approach to professional partnership and learning has rarely been used in early childhood education and to our knowledge, no empirical evidence of the effectiveness of this approach in early childhood contexts is available in New Zealand.

## **Continuing Professional Development within Early Childhood Settings**

A recent review of literature and practice on the continuing professional development in early childhood education in New Zealand revealed that, while government funding by the MoE has increased, the number of professional learning opportunities available across the sector, which have contributed to improving educators’ practices in their settings, have been limited to key focus areas aligned with policy priorities (see Cherrington & Thornton, 2015 for a review). Cherrington and Thornton (2015) raise the concern that early childhood educators and services that are outside the targeted communities or key focus areas must make their own arrangements for PL. In these cases, traditional short-term courses are accessed as the preferred form of PL, potentially limiting the skills and knowledge that contribute to improving educator practices. Continuing professional development that promotes greater teacher innovation, autonomy, knowledge, and engagement in critical reflection on practice are considered to be more effective in improving teaching and learning when compared to short term courses (Cherrington & Thornton, 2015). Thus, the teaching context provided in the Specialist Teaching Programme (described below) is considered an important opportunity to promote the professional development of students and their coach, leading to meaningful professional growth and change in practice.



## **Our Study**

The main aims of this study were to (a) examine postgraduate early childhood educators' and experienced early intervention teachers' perceptions about their role and relationship as coach/ee, (b) identify the attributes that contribute to an effective coaching relationship, and (c) use this data to develop a coaching resource that can be tested with postgraduate students completing their studies in early intervention.

Participants included eleven postgraduate students who were completing the Postgraduate Diploma in Specialist Teaching Early Intervention and seven Field Advisors who were qualified Early Intervention Teachers working in the field. Postgraduate students were from various regions across New Zealand and were working in a range of early childhood educational settings including centre-based services, hospital-based services, and playcentres. All students have a minimum of three years of in-service experience. Field Advisors were working in a range of early intervention services including the MoE, the Champion Centre, CCS Disability, and Conductive Education. Field Advisors volunteered their time to coach a student and were identified by their Service Managers as highly experienced Early Intervention Teachers with extensive practical experience in the sector. Students and Field Advisors were matched based on the region in which they worked.

The research team held preliminary meetings with students and Field Advisors to outline the rationale and data collection procedures of the study. Each participant received an information and consent form describing the research aims, process, and the potential impact on practice.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data included audio recordings of the semi-structured interviews conducted with students and Field Advisors. All students and Field Advisors chose to be interviewed individually via phone or Zoom/Skype. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by a research assistant. All audio recordings were de-identified before transcription to ensure all participant's confidentiality was upheld. All transcripts were imported into NVivo 12 (QSR International, 1999) and were auto-coded according to each of the interview questions. The interview data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) guided by existing theory and literature on coaching in early intervention. An inductive approach was used to identify key themes that were relevant to the participants in this study. Thematic analysis is the process of searching and identifying key themes that emerge from each of the interviews and to identify common themes across all participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step guide to conducting qualitative analysis was used for the analysis of all the interviews. This approach provides a systematic structure for categorising participants' responses to each of the interview questions. First, the transcriptions were thematically analysed, initially individually by the lead investigator and research assistant, and subsequently collaboratively during a whole team research hui. Inter-coder reliability for this study was high (ICCs > .93).

Next, initial codes for each interview question were generated by re-reading participant's responses for the interview question. At a broad level, initial codes emerged as the researchers read each participant's responses. Codes are labels that are used to identify themes that emerge from the data (Wong, 2008). Once the researchers had established initial codes for each of the interview questions, each code was closely examined to ensure that the responses that had been coded were consistent and reflective of that code across the participants. Where there was disagreement between coders, a discussion about the responses and codes took place until a consensus was reached. The research team then reviewed, defined and named the key themes that emerged from Field Advisor and student interviews. A comparison between and within Field Advisors and students was also conducted to identify similarities, differences and relationships between participants' experience of the coaching relationship. Each of the key themes that emerged from Field Advisors and students' interviews, as they relate to each of the research questions, have been summarised below.

## Findings

The students and Field Advisors were enthusiastic about the project and the coaching resource that ensued. In this section, we focus on describing the key attributes that students and Field Advisors identified were important to a successful relationship. We will then describe how these key attributes formed the basis for the development of a coaching resource and how it might be used more broadly to support the successful partnership between student and Field Advisors.

### What are the attributes of a good coach?

#### Reciprocity

Field Advisors acknowledged the differences between being an expert and a coach. They spoke about the shift in their perceptions of students and the way they conducted their work when coaching a student. For Field Advisors in Early Intervention Teacher roles where they are expected to be the expert, the reciprocal nature of a coaching relationship did not come naturally to them. However, these Field Advisors were aware of the differences in their approaches and adapted their thinking and coaching behaviours when supporting the student.

*I think [coaching] changes your thinking and I would hate to ever think that I was coming into this as an expert but we are still often with families that we work with. We are always perceived [as the expert] but if you use a coaching approach, it makes your communication more egalitarian... you genuinely change your perspective to one of 'let's figure it out together'.*

*(Kim, Field Advisor)*

The reciprocal relationship between Field Advisor and the student was also important to the Field Advisor and represented an *ako* relationship whereby the Field Advisor and the student are both learners and teachers. Field Advisors spoke about the

coaching relationship as an opportunity for them to develop their content knowledge because the students contributed contemporary evidence-based literature that can be used to inform their daily practices. The reciprocal nature of the relationship between Field Advisor and the student was also an opportunity for Field Advisors to critically reflect on their practices and provide a rationale for why they do what they do.

*As a post-graduate student, they are not new on the block. They come with experience and that's why I love being a Field Advisor because I always learn so much from them.*

*(Sue, Field Advisor)*

*You need a real openness in terms of when you get assigned a student that it's not "I'm the expert and I am going to teach you". You've got to have the mindset and approach that this is a learning experience, a journey, where I am going to learn from the students and she may learn from me as well. It's very much reciprocal learning and you have to go into it with that mindset thinking "now, the student is going to come in and she is going to be looking at what I am doing and learning and I am going to be listening to what her feedback is and also learning from what she is seeing me doing."*

*(Lisa, Field Advisor)*

*I think you can't support someone else's learning and not learn something yourself.*

*(Kim, Field Advisor)*

*I have to say that having a student made me celebrate what I do as well: it made me feel quite proud of what I do. It's a good motivator and reminded that I have got a good job and it's very rewarding.*

*(Matthew, Field Advisor)*

## **Invites input and reflection**

The majority of the students and Field Advisors described a good coach as being someone who invited input and reflection. The coach creates opportunities for the coachee to share their perceptions, thoughts, and suggestions. The coach facilitates input and reflection through exploratory and open-ended questioning, supportive statements, and shared decision making. Terms such as *problem-solving* and *discussion* were used by students and Field Advisors to describe this attribute.

*[A] coach is not just a hat of knowledge and experience, but they allow the person they are coaching to formulate their own solutions to issues... A good coach allows ownership of that problem-solving process... I am trying to take more of an inquiry approach, to ask open-ended questions and to think of a successful outcome... not being provided answers.*

*(Matthew, Field Advisor)*

*She was quite open to different points of view... if it wasn't something that she had [agreed with] she would still be open to discuss back and forth rather than close the discussion or practice down.*

*(Jamie, Student)*

For some of the students, the process of inviting their input and reflection allowed them to contribute their expertise, increasing their sense of empowerment and confidence. Leah's description of her coach's behaviours (see below) demonstrates the principle of *ako* – to teach and to learn – allowing her to feel included within a collaborative team.

*It was definitely a coaching role in a sense that it was two professionals working together to collaborate... and come up with solution, versus one person holding all the knowledge and telling you what you should be doing... she never really told me what I should be doing, but was saying "okay, you know this child now, what do you think we should do?" and if I had an idea she would say "okay, yup we will try it and see how it goes." She was really empowering and ... I never felt that I was just a student, I felt like they welcome me in as one of the team members. They really valued my expertise they would ask me at team meetings, "what was your opinion and what was your observation of how this child was behaving at the session today?"*

*(Leah, Student)*

The literature on the importance of inviting input and reflection confirms the sentiments expressed by students and Field Advisors; namely, the ability to engage in bidirectional conversational strategies, whereby both the coach and coachee take turns to: share information and ideas, ask and respond to questions, problem solve and invite reflection, and generate new ideas to contribute to discussion and practice (Friedman et al., 2012; Jayaraman, Marvin, Knoche, & Bainter, 2015).

Not all students were invited to provide input and reflect on their knowledge, skills, and contributions. Three students described their coach taking a top-down, supervisory role where "I'm the expert and I am going to teach you." Coaches that invited input and reflection were more effectively able to build a sense of equality in their relationship with the student. Many students and Field Advisors acknowledged that a coaching relationship is time-consuming and requires the coach to put time aside to engage in reflective reciprocal conversations that invite input, otherwise these conversations may not occur.

## **Relational behaviours**

The students and Field Advisors spoke about the importance of relational behaviours such as trust, respect, honesty, effective communication and empathy for each other. Where relational behaviours were high, students spoke of the intrinsic motivation they had to learn and contribute to the relationship.

*Being honest; I learned a lot once we had built up that trust, it was really the honest conversation that I learnt the most about the realities of practice rather than the sugar-coated practice should look like.*

*(Megan, Student)*

Effective and open communication was described as important relational behaviours to allow students and Field Advisors to reflect on challenging situations or cases. Throughout students' practicum, they are likely to experience sensitive or difficult situations or circumstances related to young children. For many students, their practicum will be the first time experiencing these feelings. Field Advisors described ways in which they would coach students through these experiences, ensuring they spoke openly and honestly with their student.

*To speak very openly and to touch base after we go out for visits so they can share how they are feeling, if they are feeling a little bit insecure or they found that to be quite a hard meeting. But to be there so that you could take some offload and hear what each other was doing. I was very open with my student too. Afterwards, we would say to ourselves we found that quite hard and being honest is really important.*

*(Lisa, Field Advisor)*

Students recognised when Field Advisors were 'forced' to take on a coaching role. When this was evident, students were less motivated to engage in their practicum learning. Field Advisors who volunteered to coach students were more likely to take the time necessary to build strong relationships with their students.

*It's a challenge to get a Field Advisor but I know that forcing somebody to be a Field Advisor wouldn't be beneficial because you don't want to be working with somebody who is resenting your presence and having to help you.*

*(Megan, Student)*

*[Field Advisors] have to want to be a coach and want to be involved or working with students. I think there are a lot of situations where somebody has been pressured to being a Field Advisor or kind of feeling obligated to do it... they are not fully engaged and involved.*

*(Jamie, Student)*

### **Provides constructive feedback and feedforward**

Constructive feedback that expanded students' current level of understanding or specific teaching strategies enhanced their confidence and competence in implementing their newly learnt skills within their day-to-day practice. Literature suggests that teachers rarely have the opportunity to receive constructive feedback and feedforward as they attempt to implement new practices (Snyder, Hemmeter, & McLaughlin, 2011). The process of scaffolding and coaching students during their practicum, rather than telling them what to do, allowed students the opportunity to actively engage and learn how to apply their knowledge and skills, helping them to retain their learning.

*Being able to talk about what went really well, what didn't go so well and what would you like to do next time and then sort of back and forth the different solutions and scenarios to achieve the outcomes you want next time.*

*(Diana, Student)*

*She would encourage me to try things on my own and give me really good feedback so that I can improve and build on the experiences so that I can use it in my future.*

*(Nicole, Student)*

*It was good to have my Field Adviser in with me on some visits... because it was supporting children on her caseload and so she would coach me through, she could see where I was getting stuck... then she would step in and talk me through it rather than doing it for me. I think that was really good because I retained [my learning] better because I was actually doing it with her talking me through it.*

*(Naomi, Student)*

### **Suggestions and models a range of strategies or approaches**

Students stated that a strong coaching relationship included opportunities for the coach to make suggestions about other approaches or strategies that the student could try in their professional practice. These suggestions were not criticizing the student, rather, the coach used statements or comments that provided an explanation or rationale that added new information for the student. This coaching behaviour went beyond an affirmation/observation and included specific reference to a child, the teacher's behaviour, or a particular situation.

*She always gives feedback and she never criticises anything that I did, she always says "what you did...how do you think how well it went?" and if I say "oh well, this area.." and she'll say "I'll give you some advice and maybe next time we can try this or this". There was never a "you have to do it this way, you have to do it that way."*

*(Leah, Student)*

*Feedback on how things went and maybe if something didn't work well then saying how about doing it this way and sort of role-modelling a different way of approaching the situation.*

*(Alison, Student)*

Students described effective coaches being able to model and demonstrate the suggestions they made about alternative approaches or strategies the student could try. For instance, when working with children who have behavioural challenges, providing feedback on the student's current practices and other strategies they might try (e.g., getting down to the child's level) to improve their practice. In these situations, the coach models how to get down to the child's level and capture their attention before engaging with them. This process allowed the student to observe the coach 'in action' which built their confidence to implement the approach or strategy themselves. Observing practice 'in situ' appeared to be a reciprocal experience for

some students, allowing them to seek immediate clarification or affirmation from their coach.

*I found it really valuable to watch how people do things and for people to watch me, how I do things and then to get that feedback because sometimes you both have different perspectives... Also, people see what you are doing slightly different from how you might have aimed to do it.*

*(Diana, Student)*

Often modelling or demonstration was accompanied by a discussion about the rationale for the approach or strategy. This helped students make links between theory and practice and justify their teaching practices.

*It's a lot of patience and a lot of explaining the why behind certain learning activities as well. We set up paint not just so that kids can paint, there is a lot of stuff that is happening... It's helpful when you can understand the thought behind what they are actually doing.*

*(Leah, Student)*

The research literature highlights the links between explanation and demonstration during the coaching process in leading to changes and improvements in early childhood educators' teaching practices (Friedman & Woods, 2015; Rush & Shelden, 2011) and our research supports this. Increased understanding seems to result from the students having observed or participated in a variety of new strategies or approaches with the support and guidance of their Field Advisor. Suggestions and modelling of alternative strategies or approaches by the coach appeared necessary if students were to try different teaching approaches in their own practices.

## **Extend and challenge**

Students and Field Advisors spoke about the coaching relationship as an opportunity to extend and challenge the student in their professional thinking and practice. This included recognising the strengths of the student and building on their weaknesses. To do this, relational behaviours described above were critical in ensuring the student and Field Advisor had open communication and respect for each other.

*To be open, to be a real coach is to help the person to reach their potential.*

*(Lisa, Field Advisor)*

*A good coach has the ability to draw out the best in [their student] and to support them in developing their weaknesses.*

*(Rebecca, Field Advisor)*

*She was really good at recognising strengths and giving recognition to that or encouraging me to build on my strengths and weaknesses.*

*(Jamie, Student)*

Some Field Advisors acknowledged the long-term impact a positive coaching relationship could have on the field of practice. For instance, Stephanie, an experienced Early Intervention Teacher and Field Advisor said “*what we do in our*



*coaching relationship is important. We want the best [practitioners] out there... because that is going to support us in our role. So we do really need to extend and challenge our students."*

### **Promotes joint planning**

Students spoke about their Field Advisor setting time aside to allow for joint planning for the next steps that will happen between meetings and/or visits. This was critical because many students only had one day per week to work with their Field Advisor, so organisation and planning were important in ensuring this time was meaningful and productive.

*She set aside time, we organised my practicum hours so we started my first week with a full week so she set aside that first day when she has no other appointment so that we could just sit down together and plan... one of the things she commented on several times was "alright, where are we at with your goals". So we could sit down together and see what we could get done and how she could support me to get my goals done.*

*(Megan, Student)*

Some Field Advisors spoke about the importance of joint planning as a way to understand what the student wants to achieve from their practicum and to help Field Advisors identify other professionals that can provide further support and expertise to their students' experiences. Similarly, students appreciated when their coach directed them to other resources to extend their professional development goals. By planning and connecting students to other professional experiences, Field Advisors were building the capability and capacity of students to achieve their goals and network with other professionals in the field.

*She was quite open to exploring things further and I think she was really good at looking for opportunities for me and for working with me as well.*

*(Jamie, Student)*

*She planned a lot of experiences to maximise [my learning]... initially, it was a little bit like "whoa, far out... you've got all these plans for me," but she had the best intentions and it was more that she was excited to contribute in a way and share her knowledge and expertise and direct me to others.*

*(Leah, Student)*



## What are the attributes of a good coachee?

### Open-minded, flexible, and adaptable

Field Advisors and students emphasised the importance of having a plan but being flexible and adaptable when challenges or barriers are faced that prevent things from going to plan. Flexibility and adaptability are reflected when the student recognises the need to take a different course of action when faced with the new situation or set of circumstances. Being flexible and adaptable are also described as important attributes when working with young children, parents/whānau and practitioners in the context of early intervention because of the unpredictability of day-to-day routines.

*[The student] might come in and think this is going to happen today, and with us, a lot of the time, that can change, so flexibility is key.*

*(Lisa, Field Advisor)*

*Flexibility and adaptability are pretty key because your field advisor, they don't necessarily have much control of what their casework looks like and so you can go in with a plan... I certainly went in with a plan to do all these things but there were just no opportunities to complete those goals. That was fine... Being able to be flexible and adapt to the opportunities that I had were really important but also being confident to ask questions.*

*(Megan, Student)*

Field Advisors and students spoke about the need to be open-minded. Similar to definitions provided in the literature (e.g., Bautista, Misco, & Quaye, 2018), Field Advisors and students described open-mindedness as a willingness to consider their own and others' beliefs, values, perspectives, and experiences. Students who were open-minded about their practicum experiences and learning asked questions, contributed their opinions and had open communication with their Field Advisor.

*It is really important that they develop a relationship that is open and honest with the coach. They feel secure to be able to share that, "oh I am feeling a little bit uncomfortable with that, tell me more about that". So you must have that openness to be able to share those feelings... I think that is really important.*

*(Kim, Field Advisor)*

*Open-mindedness, willing to learn. Willingness to take on other people's perspective. Sometimes you think you know something but then your coach says, "I actually do it this way". So, having that ability to accept the opinions and views of others is important.*

*(Alison, Student)*

*Being open to their suggestions and feedback and not being too precious with their feedback.*

*(Leah, Student)*

Open-mindedness was also considered an important attribute of a coachee. As Vanessa describes, the information a coachee gathers about a particular situation may create some biases and stereotypes that may impact on the coachee's

interactions and approaches to the situation. Thus, being open-minded to conduct independent assessments and observations to inform the coachee's professional judgement was considered an important attribute to the coaching relationship.

*Also making sure that I go in with a really open mind about a child, if it's about a child, because often teachers and staff have told you all sort of negative things. We might have read the referral and it's telling you all these things about the child, but you kind of go in with a really open mind...*

*(Vanessa, Student)*

## **Engaged in the learning process**

Student engagement and willingness to learn from their Field Advisor and other professionals was considered an important attribute to the success of students' practicum experience. Rebecca, an experienced Field Advisor, highlighted the importance of students' perceptions of mistakes; rather than perceiving mistakes as a negative outcome, they are an opportunity to learn and grow.

*But also feeling comfortable enough that they could make a mistake and that it was okay to make a mistake...in particular when you work with children, nothing is clear cut, nothing is black and white so you could do something one day and it works and when you do it again another time and it doesn't work... accepting that actually, that is okay.*

*So for a student to understand that and to come away at the end of the practicum saying "actually it was okay overall, I've learned even though I've learned from what people perceived as a mistake, it wasn't just a mistake it was actually learning experience". So taking every moment as a learning experience.*

*(Rebecca, Field Advisor)*

Receiving and responding to the feedback provided by Field Advisors and other professionals was also described as a way to engage in the learning process. Some students spoke of the pressure they felt to be the expert and their reluctance to try new things for fear of making a mistake. Alison, a practicum student describes the importance of students seeing themselves as learners and looking for strengths and opportunities to build on the constructive feedback provided by Field Advisors.

*To be willing to pick up all other types of things... maybe something that you may have been reluctant to try... be prepared to. When you receive feedback that is not always positive... Being able to take that constructive criticism in a way that was going to be positive in helping them.*

*(Alison, Student)*

## Respect and professional etiquette

Field Advisors and students spoke about respect and professional etiquette in coaching relationships. Field Advisors expected students to be punctual, to uphold professional ethics when working with parents, children, and other professionals, and to be respectful of professional etiquette standards within the early intervention service or organisation.

*The basic ones like reliable and punctual and that goes for the coach as well, if you say you are going to turn up at 10'o clock you need to be there at 10 o'clock or communicate if there is something that has happened.*

*(Lisa, Field Advisor)*

*...Even just simple things like agreeing on a time to be there, being punctual... Just being friendly as well... Being trustworthy is pretty important and being able to show that you are not going to go off and talk about what you have seen; being ethical in my practice.*

*(Megan, Student)*

Nicole, a practicum student, spoke about the need for coachees to be respectful of the time commitment and day-to-day job demands of Field Advisors above and beyond their responsibilities as a coach. Nicole's comments highlight the fact that coaching is in addition to other professional responsibilities and tasks, however, it is a critical role in building the capability and capacity of less experienced professionals in the field.

*...Just being respectful of them as well. You know realising that this is not their only role as a field advisor. They obviously have got a very busy job as an early intervention teacher and there might be personal life issues going on so just be respectful of that.*

*(Nicole, Student)*

Some students highlighted the important distinction between being a coach and a friend. This appeared to be particularly important in smaller regions where the degree of separation between personal and professional lives was small. This is something for coaches and coachees to be aware of when establishing a coaching relationship. The coach and coachee may need to be reminded that they are neither a friend nor a supervisor but a professional guest learning alongside each other. Students and Field Advisors should be guided by organisational code of ethics and conduct, and professional ethics as they form their relationship. It is the Field Advisor and student's responsibility to become familiar with the Code of Ethics and be familiar with how to conduct ethical practice when working within a coaching relationship, as well as, with children, families, whānau, colleagues and other professionals, and the community. These guidelines are also pertinent for maintaining ethical professional practice. Other students acknowledged that despite a personality clash, it is important that they remain professional with their Field Advisor. Leah, a student, goes on to highlight that differences in personality can create learning opportunities that wouldn't have been available otherwise. Learning to adapt to different personalities appeared to be an important attribute for Field Advisors and students who were engaged in successful collaborative relationships.

*Understanding that plans change and personality aren't always the same and that's what makes people, people. You might get a field advisor that you wouldn't associate with outside of practicum but it's still a learning opportunity.*

*(Leah, Student)*

## **Inquire and reflect**

Field Advisors and students spoke about the ways they inquired and reflected during their practicum. For some students, this learning required a shift in their perspective. For instance, Naomi, a practicum student, described how she had to be more flexible in her thinking, recognising that she could not fix everything all of the time. This perspective is common in the early intervention context, where professionals are often expected to find solutions to solve problems. When solutions are not found, there is a sense of incompetence and a decrease in self-efficacy in the professional's ability to help the young person, parent/whānau, or other professionals. When this pressure to 'fix' things remains, there is the risk that professionals do not engage in the necessary steps to obtain the information required to make an informed decision about early intervention.

*And one of the really big skills I learnt was to listen... because I am a fixer, I want to fix things and sometimes you can't fix things, you just need to listen. And I think that is one of the big skills I learnt being on practicum... my field advisor was... 'it's okay not to fix things straight away.'*

*(Naomi, Student)*

Inquiring through questioning was an important attribute described by Field Advisors and students. Asking questions allowed Field Advisors and students to understand the situation, circumstances, processes and rationale for early intervention. Questioning was also a way in which students could ensure that they had obtained sufficient information before they decide the next steps for the child or parent/whānau.

*Asking why she does it that way, asking lots of questions in the different situations and with different families... To find out why it works for some, for this person, and a different type of person. Questioning, lots of questions, I guess.*

*(Alison, Student)*

Field Advisors spoke about reflection as an important attribute of coachees, noting that this was a skill that contributed to the growth and confidence of a student. Consistent with previous research, reflection often involved discussions and problem-solving between Field Advisors and students with a focus on how the students' past and future pedagogical practices could be improved (Elek & Page, 2019). Field Advisors encouraged students to engage in reflective practice, particularly after they made a mistake. The process of reflecting encouraged students and Field Advisors to identify the strengths, challenges and barriers to a situation or experience and identify ways in which things could have been done differently. The importance of engaging in critical reflection is highlighted in the literature as a key component that leads to transformative pedagogical practice (Elek & Page, 2019)

*Being reflective, that works both ways as well. For a coachee to be reflective that is a critical skill. (Sue, Field Advisor)*

*One of the strategies, even if it wasn't a purposeful strategy, was the building of confidence and building of reflective practice. So they sort of be an active, reflective practitioner. But also feeling comfortable enough that they could make mistake and that it was okay to make a mistake... you reflect on those things.*

*(Rebecca, Field Advisor)*

## **Resource Development**

The findings described above has implications for experienced teachers of field-based degrees as it provides evidence about ways in which postgraduate students can be guided and supported more effectively when out in the field. While each dyadic relationship between the Field Advisor and the student is considered organic, the descriptions of the attributes that make an effective coach and coachee were used to inform the development of this coaching resource that is intended to improve coaching relationships and the professional learning of postgraduate students.

The coaching resource was designed using a layered approach, recognising that some attributes are important to a successful coaching relationship throughout students' practicum experience, while other attributes may be more or less important depending on the situation, context, and experience of the Field Advisor and student. The first layer that was considered the most important attribute to a successful coaching relationship was the concept of *ako* – to teach and to learn. The next layer is the four attributes that were described by Field Advisors and students as critical to a successful coaching relationship. These included: relationships, dialogue, personal identity, and knowledge and skills. Micro characteristics for each of the key attributes comprised the third layer of the coaching resource. These characteristics are listed in Table 1. The final layer describes characteristics that broadly encompass the coaching relationship between Field Advisors and students across all attributes of their relationship. These characteristics include: strength-based, mana-enhanced, contextualised, culture, and reflection. At each point within the coaching relationship, Field Advisors and students are encouraged to consider how their relationship can be strength-based (i.e., identifying the current strengths of the coachee and using these as building blocks to develop further skills and competencies), mana-enhanced (i.e., use each interaction as an opportunity to enhance a person's mana – values, authority, control, pride, influence, status, talents etc.), and contextualised (i.e., decisions are made by taking into consideration each person's unique social, physical, and cultural context and the context of a situation). Further, how do they draw on culture and reflection in their learning, experiences, and relationship. The full resource is provided in Appendix 1.

Table 1: Key attributes and characteristics of a coaching relationship

Attributes	Characteristics
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership</li> <li>• Balance of power</li> <li>• Relational trust and respect</li> <li>• Expectations</li> </ul>
Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reciprocal dialogue</li> <li>• Frequency and style</li> <li>• Non-verbal communication</li> <li>• Structured and outcome-focused</li> <li>• Feedback and feedforward</li> <li>• Reflective questioning</li> </ul>
Personal Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal setting</li> <li>• Open-mindedness</li> <li>• Self as an active learner</li> <li>• Critical friend</li> <li>• Leadership</li> </ul>
Knowledge and Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence and efficacy</li> <li>• Knowledge for, in, and of practice</li> <li>• Transfer of knowledge, skills, and strategies</li> <li>• Theory to practice</li> </ul>

## Using the Resource

Field Advisors and students are encouraged to use the coaching resource at their initial meeting to discuss their perspectives about expectations, preferred forms of communication, personal and professional goals, and the prior knowledge and skills that each individual can contribute to the relationship. The coaching relationship between Field Advisors and students is organic and evolving, thus, different attributes and characteristics will be more or less central at different times during the coaching relationships. Field Advisors and students are encouraged to refer to and use the coaching resource at regular intervals (e.g., during fortnightly meetings) to ensure they have the opportunity to build each of the attributes and characteristics that are considered critical to a successful coaching relationship.

## Conclusions

Field Advisors and students in this project described their coaching relationship as *ako* – to teach and to learn. Many spoke of their coaching relationship as an opportunity for personal and professional growth in skills and knowledge related to early intervention. Some Field Advisors and students stated that having a resource to support their coaching relationship would help guide them through how to build a successful coaching relationship. This research project sought to address this by identifying the key attributes that make a successful coach and coachee and integrate these within a tangible resource that can be used by Field Advisors and students to build and maintain a successful relationship. The participants described coaching attributes that were relatively consistent with previous literature. However,

these findings extend previous work by demonstrating the attributes that are considered critical to postgraduate students who come into a coaching relationship with extensive knowledge and skills that they can contribute to the relationship. The students noted that their coaching experience was different compared to their initial teacher training supervision because this relationship represented a reciprocal interaction between coach and coachee where both were teachers and learners. Some students experienced more top-down hierarchical relationships with their Field Advisors and consequently, did not lead to as much learning and professional growth. This study highlights the opportunities and challenges that Field Advisors and students can experience when engaging in experiential professional experiences as part of a postgraduate programme.

This study had its challenges; it was more successful when Field Advisors and students had already established a strong relationship and were able to reflect on the attributes that contributed to their success. Preliminary pilot evaluation of the resource indicates that Field Advisors and students need to be intrinsically motivated to improve their coaching skills before they actively implement the resource. Otherwise, the coaching resource is seen as another thing for them to do that takes away from valuable time 'getting on with the work'. To overcome some of these challenges, the researchers would be interested in working with Ako Aotearoa in the future to develop short videos on each of the key attributes. It is likely this will be a more efficient way to motivate and stimulate discussion between Field Advisors and students.

Despite these limitations, both Field Advisors and students reported benefiting from sharing their coaching experiences and reflecting on the skills and strategies they used to establish and maintain a successful coaching relationship. We suggest that using a coaching resource, such as the one developed for this project, addresses the existing gap in the provision of providing a tangible resource that coach and coachees can use to develop a successful coaching relationship. Moreover, there is no reason why our coaching resource cannot be used in other postgraduate experiential programmes and within other professional environments where models of coaching are encouraged.



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## Appendix

Figure 1: The Coaching Resource with Four Attributes

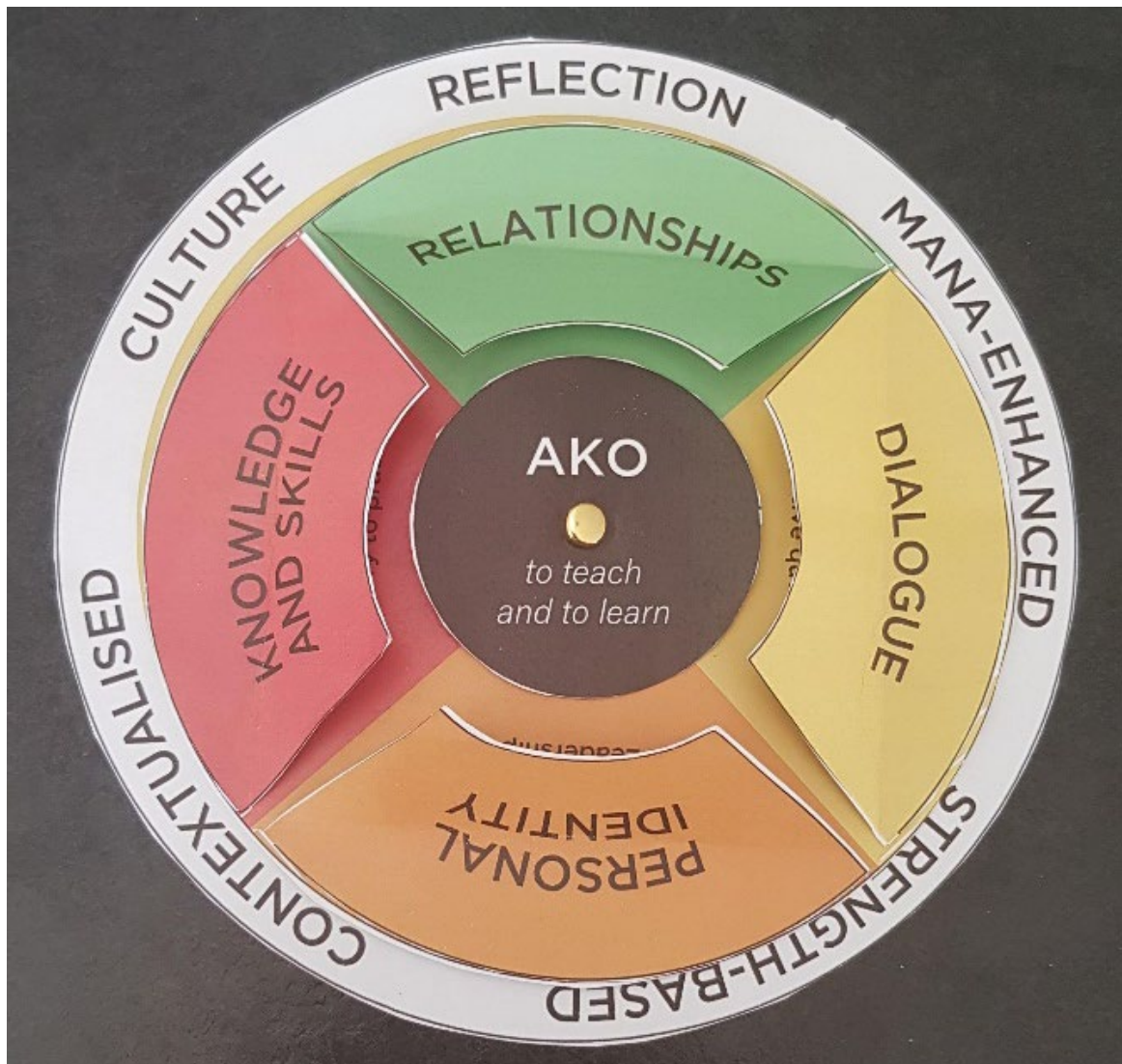


Figure 2: The Coaching Resource with the Characteristics of each Attribute

