

Transformational Coaching for Early Childhood Educators

[TRANSCRIPTS]

Constant HINE:

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Ron SPREEUWENBERG:

Constant, welcome to the Preschool Podcast!

HINE:

Well, thank you so much. It's lovely to be here!

SPREEUWENBERG:

It's our pleasure having you, Constant. We're going to be talking to Constant today about coaching for early-childhood educators. She is an author and president at Horizons In Learning. She just released a new book in November last year called *Transformational Coaching For Early Childhood Educators*. So, I'm looking forward to getting some knowledge from you, learning about what your book's all about and how you can apply some of the components that you include there.

Let's start off learning a little bit about you, Constant. How did you get involved in early-childhood education? And what inspired you to take your learnings and your knowledge and put them in writing for others?

HINE:

Well, I started as a classroom teacher over 40 years ago. I worked with two-and-a-half to five-year-olds in many different settings, in many different states. And after working with children for some years I started working with the adults. And I found out I loved working with the adults as much as I loved working with the children. And so I started doing... back in the old days, as I say, it was more around curriculum development and developmentally appropriate practices 30 years ago.

But in the last 15 to 20 years I've really focused in on, how do we really impact change and get people to change their behaviors, whether they're classroom teachers, coaches, administrators, [or] leaders? And that led me to coaching because training does not change behavior.

So, that's what led me into doing my own research and ultimately developing my own coaching model. That was really the motivation, is because how do we really get people... it's like with kids, how do we really get them to learn? To learn is to change. [We] want to do the same thing with the adults who are working with the children.

So, my model got developed over time. I think the first prototype of it started about 10, 12 years ago. And then about three years ago I modified after years of coaching coaches and other people, there were some missing pieces. And so that was about when I started to write the book and really talking about – it's my passion point – about really, how do we facilitate change that impacts children and families and early-childhood professionals?

SPREEUWENBERG:

Cool, and that actually sounds like a pretty good place for us to start in terms of training versus coaching. What's the difference? And how would you describe what coaching is and what that entails?

HINE:

Well, there are typically two types of coaching. One is, what is in the field called, transactional coaching. And then there's transformational coaching. And transactional coaching is more a coaching model where you're facilitating somebody to help them set goals, create action plans of how they want to achieve their goals and their outcomes. And it's a bit more like a business dealing. And that's why they call it transactional, that way.

And in our early-childhood industry, I think traditional forms of coaching, in a transactional approach, the coach often tends to be seen more as what I would call the "content expert". And then we help the person based on what we think is

needed. Or sometimes with a partnership, what they need to do is setting the goal and the action plan.

And my approach is a transformational coaching approach. And transformational coaching is really when you start to look at... we certainly attend to goals and action plans but I don't know about you, but I certainly know I have in my life set a lot of goals. I even know how to get to those goals. But I don't do what I know how to do. And transformational coaching is much more effective at actually getting underneath the beliefs, the values, the thoughts, the emotions that are holding actions, and ultimately habits, in place, why we actually don't change our habits.

So, transformational coaching is really aimed at getting underneath the actions we take, either because they're familiar – even if we know they don't work very well – or we've just created a very strong habit and we need some help changing the habits, which can be professional practices, diaper changing, how to facilitate circle time all the way up to our attitudes about anything, including children with challenging behaviors or, for a director or administrator, it could be about, "How are we going to actually manage and get our team to do what we want? It does matter what level we're at."

But transformational coaching is really getting at what's holding actions in place. And so the coach spends a lot of time helping the coachee think. So, I would say the big difference between teaching – teaching is imparting knowledge and helping somebody gain new skills –and knowledge and data doesn't change behavior. And what really changes behavior is helping somebody get reflective about what they're doing, how they know whether what they're doing is working and what's necessary to really change that.

So, in the coaching approach that I use, I also developed a "groomer" framework for change. And it is a mental model for coaches to use to help guide them on how to help a coachee reflect and what's necessary to get what I call "sticky change". Because I know I've worked with teachers and early-childhood providers who do change because there's an upcoming assessment or somebody is coming in to observe them but it doesn't stick over time either because they fall back to old habits or because they just did the change so they could jump through the current hoop to meet the new rating, X, Y, Z.

And we're all really looking at, what's the kind of continuous quality improvements we want to see happen with children and families that are really going to impact the children and families? And that takes more reflection. And I'd call it the facilitation guide by their side, really helping you in the messy bits. And the messy bits are when they're trying stuff out and it's not going so easy. They're making mistakes because I think most of our learning happens through mistakes. And coaches are right by their side while they're accompanying them.

So, I think of a coach as a change agent and I think of a coach as a thinking partner for the coachee and less of a content expert, which I know is a little shocking for some people. But I think in our field our content expertise as coaches gets in our way because then we tend to tell teachers and providers what to do and we don't want teachers behaving with children that way. We want the teachers actually modeling investigation and exploration and open-ended learning.

And my approach to coaching is we want to do a parallel process. We want to interact with the adults in the same way we want them interacting with children. So, it's much more a facilitative, less content-expertise model. I hope that makes sense.

SPREEUWENBERG:

Yeah, absolutely. And it's quite interesting because I was reading an article not too long ago, which I believe was in the Harvard Business Review, and it was on a very similar topic of whether in business we have it all wrong with this kind of performance review and coaching model of goals and action plans. And it really hit on the point that you hit on, which is it really makes the coach the content expert. And for us to assume that that one individual is the best person to help somebody else is pretty presumptive.

And so your point about sort of the individual themselves, the coachee being more reflective, really aligns with what this article was saying, as well, that I was reading.

So, absolutely it resonates. And so you talked a bit about this "groomer" framework being this mental model for reflection. Can you tell us a little bit more about that framework and dive into what that looks like?

Yeah, "GROOMER" is an acronym for the seven components that I think a coach needs to help somebody think about in order to get sticky change. And I'll tell you what the component parts are but when I tell you that I want to also, upfront, say it is not a sequential framework. So, I had to make up a word but it doesn't mean that the first letter of the word is the first thing we do.

So, the "GROOMER", the G stands for Goals. We have to help people identify, where do they want to go? And their criteria for success, how will they know when they got there?

The R stands for Reality – what's the current reality? Where are you? Where are you starting from? What's working? What's not working?

The first O stands for Options, which is "possibility thinking". I find that we have a lot of practitioners and a lot of adults who actually don't have good problem solving skills. They really haven't been taught – their own schooling didn't model it for them. And many people think they're going to come up with an action and they've got to come up with the right action, right away.

And I find first actions are rarely the most successful. It takes brainstorming and, I call it, unicorn thinking. We have to help people get comfortable brainstorming and getting outside the box before really good ideas show up. So, part of us helping people change is helping them learn how to do possibility thinking and permission to do unicorn thinking.

The second O in the "GROOMER" is Obstacles and barriers. We have to identify, what are the obstacles and barriers that are in people's way for changing their practices? And I have a little acronym of the six most common obstacles and barriers that I find most people have to changing. And the acronym is "AAMESS" – if you don't deal with it, you've got a mess on your hands and it's "AAMESS": Awareness, or issues around lacking awareness; Attitudes, usually limiting or negative attitudes; M is Motivation, usually conflicting motivation or lack of motivation.

E is Emotions, and it usually has to do with lack of self-regulation or getting triggered; and the first S stands for Stress and we definitely have to help the adults who work with children learn how to manage their stress and become more

resilient because it's mandatory for them to be working with children, to be doing that themselves, becoming resilient the same way we want kids to be resilient. And the last S is Skills – how do they actually master skills, either learn skills or master the skills? So, that's the Obstacles part of the ["GROOMER"] framework.

The M stands for Mobilize. I would have picked the word "action", except I had too many vowels. So, I just had to pick another consonant, you know? So, I chose the word "mobilize". And mobilizing, or setting actions, has two parts: there [are] action plans to achieve your goal – we call those "goal plans" – and there [are] action plans to bust a barrier and we call those "targeted plans". And you need both kinds.

And then the E is, you've got to go Experiment; you've got to try it out. In design thinking and engineering, they call this prototyping. And we have to have a huge permission for people to make mistakes and learn by trial and error. And that's where a lot of the coaching encouragement is needed, is it's okay that it blows up; it's okay it didn't work. You just need to do some thinking about what needs to happen and mess around with it the same way we want children to experiment with block building or anything else. And they learn from what doesn't work.

And then the final R is about Refining. So, we want to use analytical thinking to find out, how do we refine our experimenting? We want to also use data and our documentation to make data-informed decisions about how to change our professional practices. And either you'll find a solution that's going to work or we're going to... the "GROOMER" model is an iterative model where sometimes we're just going to go back in and go around again the same way design thinking is an iterative model.

So, those are the components. And, from my experience, you have to touch all seven of those components for the change to be sticky but you don't have to do it in any particular order. You start and you follow where the coach-coachee starts.

And I have an approach I call a "followership approach" rather than a "leadership approach", that an expert tends to lead. And in my transformational coaching approach, we do a followership where, if you follow, you're respectful of what they need and what they want. You can really build on strengths and you can help them

make sure they do go to all seven components at some point during the process of learning and changing.

SPREUWENBERG:

Okay, interesting. And one of the things that stood out to me there was, in obstacles and barriers, skills was one of only six obstacles and barriers [whereas] the other ones are really under your control in terms of awareness and attitude, motivation, emotions and stress. These are all things that we can work on in.

And so this sounds like a very interesting framework. How would I go about applying it practically? So, let's say I want to go ahead and try to roll this out in my center with my teachers. How would I go about doing that?

HINE:

Well, the book in itself, the Groomer Framework for Change is one chapter in the book. The book is very designed about strategies. So, it's kind of more of a workbook than a reader textbook. And there are concrete strategies to facilitate reflection. And so that's the first place, is, really, how do you shift from being given technical assistance and consulting – giving advice and suggestions – and how do you shift into helping people actually reflect?

The same way, again, that we want teachers helping children, we want to ask more open-ended questions rather than tutorial questions or giving direction. So, becoming a more versatile and experienced person to reflect, really thoughtful, which is actually how to become more aware. So, there are concrete strategies on how to do that.

And then in the obstacles, for each of the obstacles I talk about there are concrete strategies on how you bust every one of those obstacles. So, there's a whole chapter just on that – how do you bust the awareness strategies? But where I think this model and the book in itself is helpful is really, how do you foster problem-solving, reflective thinking and empower the learner to be the person who's learning how to change and to come up?

And in the groomer model, I don't keep that private and hidden. I share that with my coachees. I show them the model. They learn the model themselves so they know [that] when I'm gone – which I hope happens soon, I don't want to be building myself and enabling them that they need me, I want them to become independent, problem-solving thinkers so they can deal with future problems – they've got that model themselves to be able to implement.

So, the thinking about, “Where am I? Where do I want to go? How will I know when I got there?” Those kinds of questions. And I do have open-ended questions that go with each of those components in the groomer model. So, a lot of this has to do with, really, how do you foster reflective thinking, open-ended questions?

And lots of strategies – I have both universal coaching strategies as well as targeted strategies to help people when they run into barriers like obstacles. But also just, what are some strategies to help people reflect? So, I think that the book is very practical in its orientation. Did that answer your question, Ron?

SPREEUWENBERG:

Yeah, yeah. And it's really cool because I am someone who's always been very passionate about international aid. And so an analogy is, in terms of philosophies for international aid, there's things that sometimes are required to just give money so countries or regions can provide food and shelter. But that's sort of a short-term fix. The longer-term fix is to help them become self-sustaining.

And so that's really what you're doing with this coaching, as well, is to allow the individual to – like you said with the problem solving – figure things out themselves and be reflective and learn. And in that way when the coach is not there anymore they are self-sustaining, yeah.

HINE:

Which is what we want. We don't want to have to be there; we don't want to enable them to be dependent on us. And that's the danger of the content expert model. And we have... there is some research. Joyce and Showers did some research talking about, when you just lecture or teach, the person knowing how to do it only

results with about 10% and being able to do it is only 5%. But to do it consistently as a daily practice is zero [percent].

And in a lot of our coaching models we do a lot of modeling and feedback. And unfortunately modeling and feedback also does not result in consistent change in daily practice. Modeling only results in 30% knowing how, 20% being able, but, again, 0% in consistent, daily practice.

So, modeling is actually not a very effective method. And then giving feedback like observation or practicing and giving feedback is 60%, you know how to do it, 60% you're better able to do it, but still only 5% in consistency of implementation.

But when you shift to an ongoing coaching model, you get 95% knowing how, 95% being able to do it and 95% implementation of consistent, daily practice. That is big results. That's sticky change.

SPREEUWENBERG:

Awesome!

HINE:

Yeah, and that's why I think it's really important – and I love your international aid idea – it's really important that we foster learning and not just skills. It's not just about skills. And I find, by the way, of the people that I coach – both practitioners and coaches – that it's less than 20% [of] what's needed is about skills. It's all the other issues that are needed in that busting barriers, which you so keenly observed, are all within a person's control. And people need help to get inside themselves, to contemplate, to think and for us to help them just be thinking buddies.

SPREEUWENBERG:

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And I really love how you've created your book to be more of a workbook than a textbook. So, it's really practical for people. Where can folks go to get a copy of your book if they're interested?

HINE:

Well, they can certainly get it on Redleaf Press, which is www.RedleafPress.org. And in March [of 2020] it'll be available on Amazon. And they can also go to my website, which is my name: www.ConstantHine.com. And they can find out more about my trainings and what we offer.

And we've got a radio show, a coaching radio show [Coaching Connections Radio Show] [that] people might be interested in, as well. So, they can go to any of those three places to get a copy of the book.

SPREEUWENBERG:

I love it. And I think all of our listeners should know by now that people in our cultures and our childcare organizations are so important, both for our programs to thrive and for our children to thrive. So, working with adults to be effective learners and problem-solvers through reflection in this transformational coaching is super-impactful.

Thank you so much, Constant Hine, for sharing this knowledge with us and giving us a great intro to this. And I encourage people to learn more by going to Constant Hine's website at www.ConstantHine.com or checking out her book, *Transformational Coaching for Early-childhood Educators*, available through Redleaf Press. Constant, thank you so much for joining us on the Preschool Podcast today.

HINE:

Thank you for having me, Ron. I really appreciate the opportunity.