

Key Definitions¹

Early childhood professional development, as defined by NAEYC and NACCRRA, is “a continuum of learning and support activities designed to prepare individuals for work with and on behalf of young children and their families, as well as ongoing experiences to enhance this work. Professional development encompasses education, training, and technical assistance.” See graphic at right. (Graphic source: NAEYC & NACCRRA, *Early Childhood*, 2011.)



Technical assistance (or TA) is “the provision of targeted and customized supports by a professional(s) with subject matter and adult learning knowledge and skills to develop or strengthen processes, knowledge application, or implementation of services by recipients.”

A **technical assistance partner** is the recipient of technical assistance services provided by a technical assistance professional.

A **technical assistance professional** is an individual who provides these targeted and customized supports to recipients of TA services through specific strategies or approaches, such as mentoring, coaching, consultation and peer-to-peer networks. See graphic below. (Graphic adapted from North Carolina DHHS, *Framework*, 2013.)



Mentoring is a process between colleagues in similar professional roles, with a more experienced individual, the mentor, providing guidance and example to the less-experienced protégé or mentee. Mentoring is intended to increase an individual’s personal or professional capacity, resulting in greater professional effectiveness.

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

Consultation is a collaborative, problem-solving process between an external consultant with specific expertise and adult learning knowledge and skills and an individual or group from one program or organization. Consultation facilitates the assessment and resolution of an issue-specific concern—a program-/organizational-, staff-, or child-/family-related issue—or addresses a specific topic.

Peer-to-Peer Networks foster the development of relationship-based learning and support communities among colleagues, often in like roles. Peer-to-peer TA is based on the premise that a significant expert knowledge base exists in the field and that peers who have solved challenges on the ground have developed tools and strategies that can be shared with their colleagues. Communities of Practice (CoP) and Professional Learning communities (PLC) are two forms of peer-to-peer networks.