



Case Study: Adult Learning in an EI/ECSE Context

Part 1: Context

A mid-size early intervention (EI) program has recently transitioned to a routine-based, family-centered model. The program serves culturally and linguistically diverse families, including recent immigrant and refugee communities. The agency director has noticed inconsistent implementation of the new model across practitioners.

To address this, the director assigns Dr. Elena Ruiz, a newly hired EI/ECSE specialist with a doctorate in early childhood special education, to develop a professional learning series for 18 practitioners (service coordinators, developmental specialists, speech-language pathologists, and occupational therapists).

Dr. Ruiz is instructed to align the learning experience with:

- Adult learning principles (self-direction, need-to-know, readiness, problem-centered orientation, use of experience).
- Evidence-based adult learning practices including introduction, illustration, authentic, job-embedded, practice, reflection, guidance, feedback, and follow-up.
- The six features of effective in-service PD: introduction, modeling/illustration, authentic practice, reflection, coaching feedback, and follow-up support.

Discussion Prompt:

- How might the cultural and linguistic diversity of the families influence practitioners' readiness and motivation to engage in a new routines-based, family-centered model?
- Which adult learning principles (e.g., self-direction, use of experience, readiness) are likely to be most important for this group of 18 practitioners, and why?
- What challenges might arise when designing a learning series that must support practitioners across multiple disciplines (SCs, SLPs, OTs, developmental specialists)?

Part 2: The Challenge

Although staff completed self-paced modules on routine-based intervention practices, implementation data show:

- Only 35% consistently use collaborative joint planning with families.
- Many rely on direct instructional methods rather than coaching.



- Team members report feeling “overwhelmed,” “not ready,” and “unsure how this actually works in real home visits.”

Some practitioners express concern that the coaching model may not align with the cultural expectations of certain families. Others note that tele-intervention (which expanded during the pandemic) is still used but feels “less relational.”

Discussion Prompts:

- What factors may explain the gap between practitioners’ completion of self-paced training modules and their inconsistent real-world implementation of routines-based practices?
- In what ways might feelings of being “overwhelmed,” “not ready,” or “unsure how this actually works” reflect adult learning needs that Dr. Ruiz must address in her PD design?
- How should Dr. Ruiz consider practitioners’ concerns about cultural alignment and the relational challenges of tele-intervention when planning PD that promotes coaching-based practices?

Part 3: Case Scenario

Dr. Ruiz decides to implement a two-session professional learning cycle using the ECPC Adult Learning Tool and grounded in the evidence syntheses on effective PD.

Session 1 (2 hours): Learning the Practice

Objective: Deepen understanding of routines-based intervention and connect it to practitioners’ existing experiences.

1. Introduction (Explain)

Dr. Ruiz opens by clarifying why the routines-based coaching model benefits children and families, using simple examples tied to IFSP routines. She highlights consistent evidence across PD syntheses showing that practice change requires explicit explanation plus modeling.

2. Illustration (Show)

She shows two short clips:

- A strong example of parent-embedded intervention during a morning routine.
- A contrasting example where the practitioner remains directive. Practitioners discuss what they noticed, drawing on their own experience.



3. Authentic Practice (Implement)

In small groups, practitioners role-play home-visit scenarios:

- A bilingual family navigating a hectic morning routine.
- A family preferring more directive guidance because it aligns with their cultural expectations. Each group must co-plan a strategy with the “family” using the coaching model.

4. Reflection

After the role-plays, practitioners participate in a structured reflection using prompts from the syllabus (e.g., What.assumptions.did.you.bring.into.the.scenario?. How.did.your.prior.experience.help.or.hinder.your.decision_making?)

Discussion Prompts:

- How do the introduction and illustration elements of the session (e.g., explanation + contrasting video examples) support adult learners in connecting theory to their existing knowledge and practice?
- During the role-plays involving culturally diverse families, what opportunities arise for practitioners to examine their assumptions or biases about family routines and expectations?
- Which aspects of the Session 1 design best reflect evidence-based adult learning strategies (e.g., authentic practice, reflection), and why are these likely to support changes in practitioner behavior?

Session 2 (90 minutes): Practicing in the Field

Objective: Provide coaching, feedback, and follow-up to support application in real contexts.

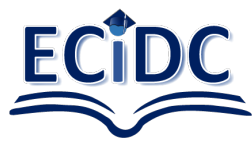
1. Job-Embedded Practice

Practitioners complete real home visits or tele-intervention sessions during the week. They record 10-minute segments focused on joint planning or caregiver practice.

2. Guidance & Coaching Feedback

Dr. Ruiz uses a shared rubric aligned with the ECPC tool to provide concrete, actionable feedback:

- Strengths (e.g., “You validated the parent’s interpretation of the child’s cues.”)



- Corrections (e.g., “Try shifting from giving directions to asking reflective questions.”)
3. Reflection and Self-Monitoring
Practitioners complete a self-assessment checklist and meet in pairs to discuss challenges, internal motivation, and next steps.
4. Follow-Up Supports
Dr. Ruiz schedules:
- One optional peer-coaching session
 - A short “check-in huddle” two weeks later
- These steps reflect evidence that sustained PD requires duration, intensity, and ongoing support.

Discussion Prompts:

- How does incorporating job-embedded practice with real family visits strengthen the likelihood of practitioners transferring new skills into routine practice?
- What makes the coaching feedback provided by Dr. Ruiz effective—or potentially ineffective—in supporting adult learners’ growth and confidence?
- In what ways do follow-up supports (peer coaching session, 2-week huddle) align with research on PD sustainability, and how might practitioners benefit from these continued touchpoints?