



CHAPTER 6

Using the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool to Support Implementation of Effective Practices: Case Studies

As described in Chapter 1, the TPOT can be used for a variety of purposes, including as a tool to help inform professional development. Coaching is emerging as an evidence-based professional development practice for supporting teachers' use of teaching and instructional practices such as those included on the TPOT (Fox, Hemmeter, Snyder, Binder, & Clarke, 2011; Hemmeter, Snyder, Fox, & Algina, 2011, Powell & Diamond, 2013; Snyder et al., 2011). Practice-based coaching is one approach to coaching that has promising evidence (National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, 2013).

A key component of practice-based coaching is the use of needs assessment instruments and associated processes to identify areas of strengths for teachers as well as areas of need related to a specified set of practices. The data from needs assessments can then be used to identify and clarify goals for coaching and to inform the development of action plans. Practices reflected on the TPOT can be used as part of needs assessment processes. TPOT data can be used to identify action plan goals, monitor progress toward action plan goals, and evaluate the effects of coaching on teachers' implementation of *Pyramid Model* practices.

In this chapter, we present two case studies that demonstrate how the TPOT can be used to inform the design, delivery, and evaluation of professional development related to implementation of *Pyramid Model* practices. The first case study illustrates how the TPOT could be used when coaching an individual teacher. The second case study describes the use of the TPOT at the program-wide level to identify professional development needs and then to plan and monitor professional development activities using a data-based decision-making framework.

ELLEN: USING THE TPOT TO PROVIDE IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT TO A TEACHER THROUGH COACHING-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ellen is the lead teacher in a state-funded, public preschool classroom. She has been teaching in the public preschool program for 4 years and has a bachelor's degree in child development. Ellen was eager to become an early educator and is motivated to teach because of her love of young children. She finds teaching to be stressful, however. In the past several years, major changes have occurred in the state-funded prekindergarten program, with increased emphasis on early learning standards and the addition of a state-mandated annual child assessment.

Ellen's classroom includes 15 children from 3 to 5 years of age. Of these children, two children are dual-language learners (one speaks Spanish and the other speaks Haitian Creole), and three children have identified disabilities. She has a full-time teaching assistant and the support of a consulting early childhood special education teacher who provides some in-classroom assistance (about 3–5 hours a week) for the children with disabilities. Ellen feels fortunate to have the assistance of her other team members and describes their relationship and ability to work together as strong.

Ellen learned about the *Pyramid Model* through workshops that were offered in her community. She attended a 1-day workshop offered by her school district that provided an overview of the model and associated practices. She was excited about implementing practices to promote social skills and address the behavioral challenges that were occurring in her classroom. After returning to her classroom from the workshops, she was not sure how to begin implementing *Pyramid Model* practices. She quickly became immersed in the daily demands of her classroom and never really got started. The following year, her school district offered additional workshops about the *Pyramid Model* and associated practices as well as implementation support from a coach. A series of 2-hour workshops was offered on early-release days over the course of the school year. Early-release days in her district allowed teachers to have extra planning time or engage in professional development activities.

Ellen recalled her initial excitement about the promise of the *Pyramid Model* and indicated to the district her interest in being part of the professional development. She was intrigued about having the support of a classroom coach, although she was a little worried that coaching sessions might feel uncomfortable or she would not like having someone in her classroom who would be observing and judging her teaching. She attended a district meeting where more information about the workshop series and coaching were described. Her fears about coaching were alleviated when she learned that her coach would not be in an evaluative position and that the coaching process would be driven by her needs and goals related to implementation of *Pyramid Model* practices.

The initial activities that occurred after her enrollment in the *Pyramid Model* professional development were to meet her classroom coach and sign a coaching agreement. The coaching agreement included information on coaching activities and more details about the role of the coach and the teacher in the process. Ellen liked that the coach was enthusiastic about her classroom, listened with empathy when Ellen described many of her challenges with teaching, including dealing with children's behavior challenges, and conveyed a willingness to help Ellen with *Pyramid Model* practice implementation. Once the coaching agreement was signed and Ellen received the schedule of upcoming workshops, Ellen and her coach selected a day for the initial TPOT administration that would occur in her classroom after the first workshop.

The first workshop that Ellen attended included an overview of the *Pyramid Model* and a self-assessment to allow teachers to identify their needs and goals related to *Pyramid Model* practices. The practices included on the self-assessment aligned with many practices included on the TPOT. Ellen indicated on the self-assessment that she needed support to implement practices related to teaching children how to regulate their emotions and to engage in social problem solving. She was eager to implement these practices in her classroom. She was hopeful that if she focused on teaching social and emotional skills with her children, the number of challenging behaviors that were occurring in her classroom would be reduced. Based on her self-assessment of needs, Ellen identified two initial practice goals: 1) learn how to teach children to use the turtle technique for anger management and 2) learn how to teach the problem-solving steps to children.

The coach used the TPOT to guide her first observation in Ellen's classroom the following week. Before beginning the observation, the coach asked Ellen if the children who were dual-language learners and the children with severe language delays were present in

the classroom that day. Ellen indicated that they were and discretely indicated who those children were to the coach. Consistent with TPOT administration procedures, the coach spent about 2 hours in the classroom and observed teacher-directed and child-initiated activities as well as transitions between activities. The observation ended when the classroom went outdoors for play. The coach left and returned at the end of the day to conduct the TPOT interview with Ellen. After completing the first observation and interview, the coach scored the TPOT.

In Figure 6.1, Ellen's initial TPOT scores are displayed. Ellen and her coach discussed these TPOT data as the basis for clarifying and verifying Ellen's goals from the needs assessment she completed after the workshop series. Ellen and her coach noted that Ellen's strengths were her implementation of practices related to schedules and routines, supportive conversations, collaborative teaming, interventions for children with persistent challenging behavior, and connecting with families. Overall, she had 47% of all indicators associated with key practice items scored as *Yes*. Two red flags were observed in her classroom, which resulted in a red flag percentage score of 12%, given there were 2 of 17 red flags present (i.e., Item 16, chaotic transitions; Item 20, reprimanding). The red flag score is shown in Figure 6.2.

During the initial TPOT observation, there were five occurrences of challenging behavior, with only one of the essential strategies for responding to challenging behavior being used. The areas noted by Ellen's coach as needing support were practices that would address red flags (i.e., strategies to support effective transitions, teaching children behavior expectations) as well as practices related to teaching social-emotional skills (i.e., friendship skills, emotions, problem solving), and supporting family use of *Pyramid Model* practices.

At the coaching session that occurred the week after the TPOT, the coach and Ellen finalized goals to put on the initial action plan. Ellen discussed the goals she had listed

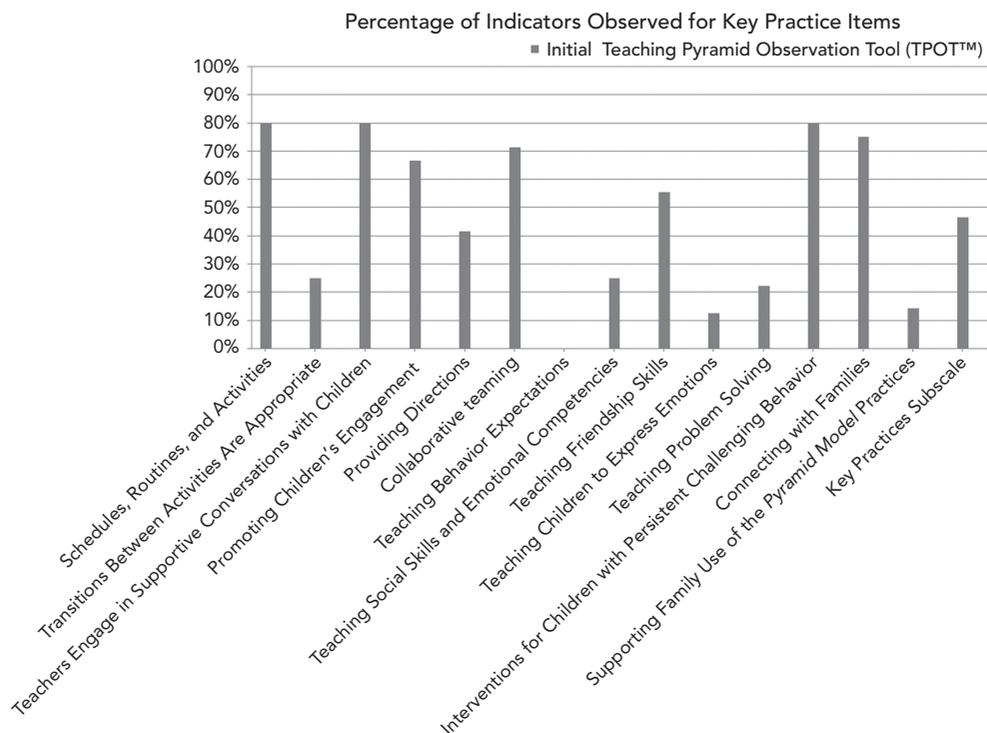


Figure 6.1. Initial key practice item scores for Ellen.

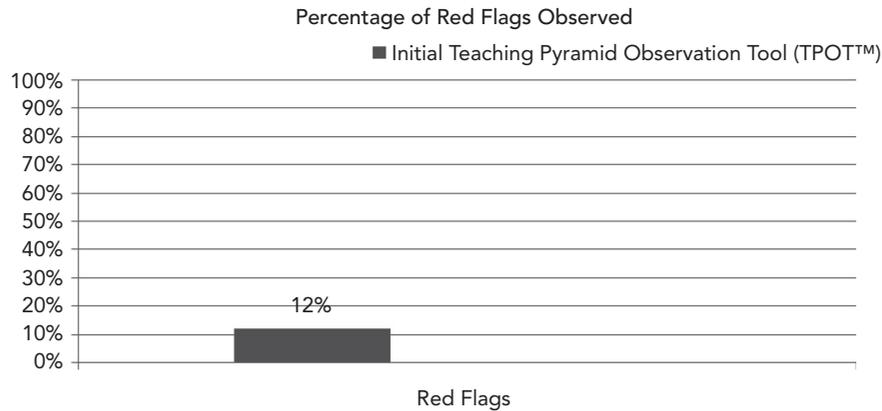


Figure 6.2. Initial Red Flag score for Ellen.

on her needs assessment and the coach and Ellen reviewed data from the TPOT. They discussed areas of strengths and needs. During this discussion, the coach shared her observation that the behavior challenges frustrating Ellen typically were occurring during transitions. The coach described the importance of having carefully planned transitions so children's engagement was supported and children knew what to do during a transition. The coach asked Ellen about her expectations for children's behavior. Ellen responded that she wanted children to be kind to each other, play well together, and take care of materials in the classroom. The coach asked Ellen for ideas about how they could work together to make those expectations clear to the children and to identify opportunities to teach the expectations proactively. Ellen shared that she and her team members usually taught those expectations when redirecting children and that she assumed the children understood what she wanted them to do because it was stated so often each day when children were redirected. The coach described that during the TPOT observation, she saw Ellen and her assistant giving redirections that included statements such as "Be a friend. Ask if you can have a turn," but some children needed more reminders than others and children were only told the expectations when they were already upset and not ready to listen. As they were discussing redirections, Ellen asked for advice about three incidents that occurred during the TPOT observation. She told her coach she was really frustrated with several children who did not respond to redirection. Her coach said she remembered those incidents. She shared that during the observation she noticed Ellen and her assistant were frustrated and their frustration was expressed by reprimanding children (e.g., "Krystal, no running in the classroom") rather than telling children what they should do (e.g., "Krystal, remember to use walking feet in the classroom. Be safe. Use walking feet.").

Following their reflection and discussion, Ellen and her coach developed the initial action plan. They prioritized three goals: 1) establishing and teaching classroom expectations proactively, 2) structuring transitions, and 3) teaching the turtle technique for anger management. The plan included action steps related to each goal, the materials or resources that might be needed, and the timeline for implementing each action step. Action plan goals also included a statement that addressed when each goal would be met and answered the question, "How will I know when I am successful?"

Over the course of the school year, Ellen worked with her coach on the implementation of *Pyramid Model* practices and attended the workshop series. Her coach came to the classroom every 2 weeks and observed Ellen's implementation of practices that were the focus of the action plan during activities, routines, or transitions. Sometimes the coach would model how a practice would be implemented or would bring materials

or resources to support Ellen's implementation of practices. The coach and Ellen had a "debrief" meeting after every observation. The debrief meeting always included reflection as well as supportive and constructive feedback about practice implementation. The action plan was used in each debrief meeting and new goals were added to the action plan when appropriate (e.g., goal was achieved, new goal identified). The coach kept what she described as a "running TPOT" each time she observed in Ellen's class. A running TPOT refers to keeping notes on Ellen's progress with practice implementation by looking at TPOT items and indicators and noting what practices were and were not being implemented. The running TPOT provided data that was used to inform the supportive and constructive feedback provided during the debrief meeting.

In late spring, Ellen's coach conducted another TPOT observation and interview. She brought the data (see Figure 6.3 below) to her next coaching session to share with Ellen to demonstrate her progress with the implementation of *Pyramid Model* practices. The TPOT scores showed growth from the initial TPOT administration for all key practice items and no red flags. There was only one incident of challenging behavior, and Ellen used all of the essential strategies in her response. Ellen was very pleased to see her focused effort to implement *Pyramid Model* practices with the support of her coach reflected in her TPOT scores. She reflected that addressing transitions, teaching children behavior expectations, and teaching children social and emotional skills had been pivotal in reducing many of the challenging behaviors in the classroom. She noted that children initiated positive social interactions more often with peers and adults, were helping each other to solve social problems, and were using words or appropriate gestures to express emotions rather than hitting or crying. Ellen asked the coach what she might do to boost her score in teaching friendship skills and supporting family use of *Pyramid Model* practices. The coach identified practices that related to each of these key practice items. She and Ellen discussed which of these practices Ellen wanted to prioritize and together they developed new goals and updated the action plan to reflect these goals.

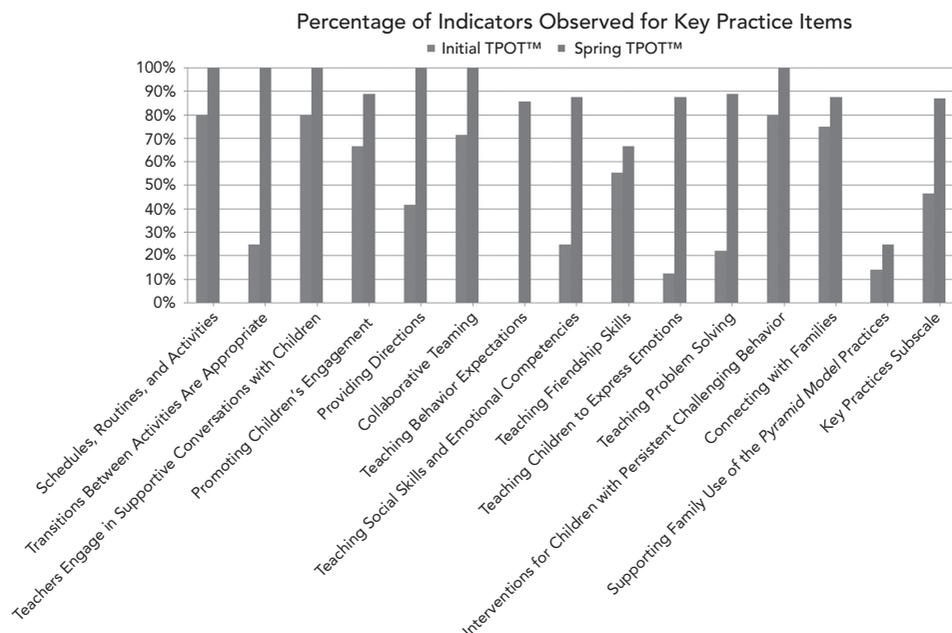


Figure 6.3. Ellen's spring Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT™) key practice item scores.

GREEN HILLS CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER: USING THE TPOT TO PLAN PROGRAM-WIDE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PYRAMID MODEL

The Green Hills Child Development Center (GHCDC) is a child care program for children 2 to 5 years of age with and without disabilities. They serve 96 children in eight classrooms that are generally grouped by the age of the child. The program contracts with the local education agency to provide services to children with disabilities, including related services such as speech therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy. They also enroll children whose families pay tuition and children whose families receive child care subsidies. All lead teachers have at least an associate's degree and several have bachelor's degrees in early childhood education. Each classroom is taught by a lead teacher and an assistant teacher. GHCDC is led by a director and an associate director. The associate director is responsible for family engagement activities and for supporting and coaching teachers.

The GHCDC is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the director is committed to providing ongoing professional development to program staff. In the spring of each school year, the director conducts a survey of all teachers to identify professional development needs for the following year. When she received the spring survey data, she noted that the top training need identified by the teachers was related to addressing children's challenging behavior. This identified need was not a surprise to the director and associate director. Over the past year, they had grown increasingly concerned about the number of times they were called to classrooms to help teachers resolve issues related to children's challenging behavior. They also noted that parents were raising concerns about children's challenging behavior at home and in the community. In addition to professional development on the new literacy curriculum they were adopting, they identified a priority need for professional development to improve teachers' competence in addressing challenging behavior.

The director contacted a colleague who worked at a local university to discuss the program's concerns about challenging behavior and asked for suggestions about potential models and professional development strategies for addressing this issue. The colleague mentioned some work that was occurring at the state level around the *Pyramid Model*. The director remembered hearing about the *Pyramid Model* at a meeting but wanted to learn more about it. She was reluctant to begin any new professional development initiative without researching the practices that would be the focus of the professional development (i.e., *Pyramid Model* practices). After learning that there was promising evidence that adopting the *Pyramid Model* and that supporting implementation of *Pyramid Model* practices could address their identified need, she asked her colleague for more information. After receiving information about the *Pyramid Model*, associated practices, and recommendations for supporting practice implementation through professional development, the director shared it with the associate director and the teaching staff. The associate director and many of the teachers were excited about the potential for implementing the *Pyramid Model* program-wide. After reading the materials on the *Pyramid Model* and hearing the associate director and the teachers' enthusiasm about the model, the director called her colleague to determine who could assist the program in implementing the *Pyramid Model*. The colleague connected her to a state technical assistance professional who invited the GHCDC to bring a leadership team to a workshop series on *Pyramid Model* implementation.

The leadership team included the director, associate director, a teacher, a teaching assistant, the speech-language pathologist, and two parents. At the workshop series, the team learned about the critical elements for implementing the *Pyramid Model* program

wide and developed a blueprint for implementation. One key component of the blueprint was to develop a professional development plan for supporting teachers in implementation of *Pyramid Model* practices in the classrooms. The team began by planning an overview workshop of the *Pyramid Model* and associated practices for all staff in the program. The goal of this workshop was to introduce all staff to the program-wide *Pyramid Model* that was going to be adopted and to describe what implementation supports would be available. The next step of the blueprint was to identify professional development needs related to program-wide implementation. The associate director attended a TPOT training event and met established interrater agreement criteria. She conducted three TPOT practice administrations with the university colleague who was a certified TPOT trainer and her agreement with the university colleague for each TPOT administration met or exceeded 80% for the Key Practices subscale and Red Flags. She also met agreement standards for the challenging-behavior item. After her training and practice administrations, she administered a TPOT in each classroom. She used a graphing program provided with the TPOT manual to summarize and average key practice item implementation data across teachers. A summary of the TPOT data averaged across the eight GHDCD classrooms is shown in Figure 6.4.

Based on the program-wide TPOT data, the leadership team determined the common areas of need related to implementation of practices associated with each level of the *Pyramid Model*. They decided to focus on the two bottom tiers of the *Pyramid Model*: nurturing and responsive relationships and high-quality supportive environments. They identified three key areas of need that were consistent across most classrooms: 1) difficulty with transitions, 2) nonengagement during large-group activities, and 3) lack of behavior expectations. The program was not able to hold full-day workshops, so the leadership team planned 2-hour workshops on each of these three topics and conducted each workshop twice during naptimes so all teaching teams could attend.

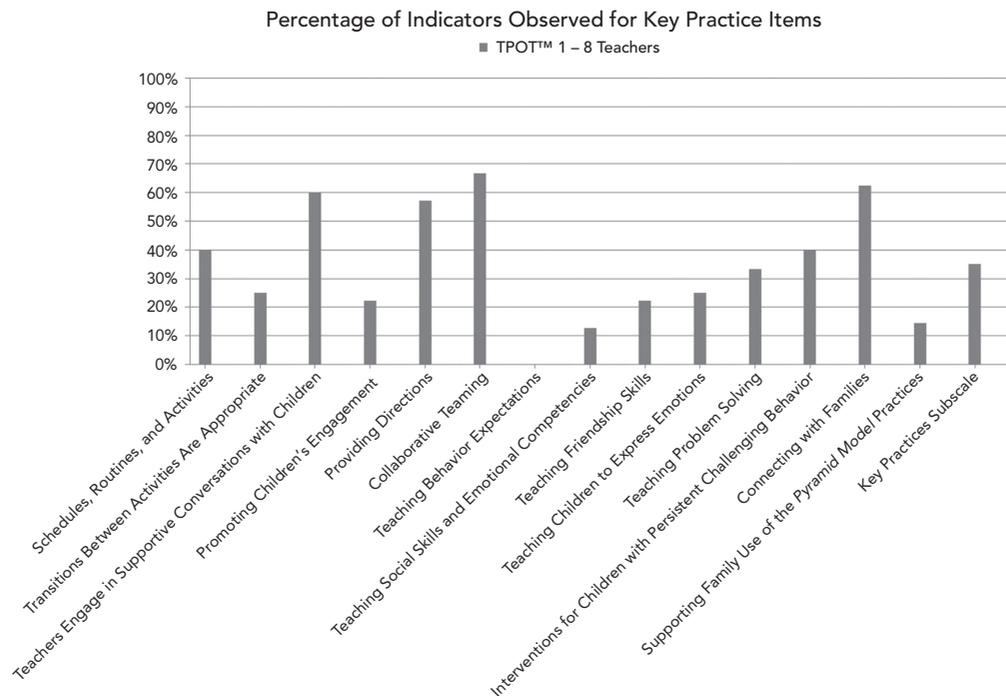


Figure 6.4. Initial Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT™) key practice item scores averaged across eight classrooms at Green Hills Child Development Center.

In addition to these common areas of need, the leadership team identified two classrooms and teaching teams (teams 2 and 6) that had additional support needs related to the bottom tiers of the *Pyramid Model*. These teams needed support related to their schedules and the way they provided directions to children. The associate director conducted individual workshops for these teams in addition to the workshops that were being conducted program-wide.

Along with the group trainings, the associate director provided coaching to each teaching team every other week. Coaching was implemented using the processes described above for Ellen. The leadership team decided workshops and coaching would occur during the first 2 months of school, and then they would determine how much progress in practice implementation was being made in the program and in each classroom. In late November, the associate director completed TPOTs in all classrooms. The TPOT data were again summarized and averaged across teachers (see Figure 6.5).

During a December leadership meeting, the team reviewed the TPOT data and determined that, as a whole, the program had made progress on the areas that they had been focused on for the last 2 months. Based on these data, the team determined that they would next focus on the following areas for all teaching teams: 1) teaching friendship skills and emotional literacy and 2) supporting family use of *Pyramid Model* practices. To address these goals, the leadership team provided two additional 2-hour workshops for teachers and a six-session parent group focused on the *Pyramid Model* practices.

The leadership team also analyzed individual teaching team scores. These data indicated the two teams that had received targeted support on specific areas during the preceding few months were doing significantly better in these areas. The associate director continued coaching all teams around the common goals (friendship skills, emotional literacy, supporting family use of *Pyramid Model* practices) and also focused on the areas of need for each teaching team. They also held biweekly teacher meetings to share ideas

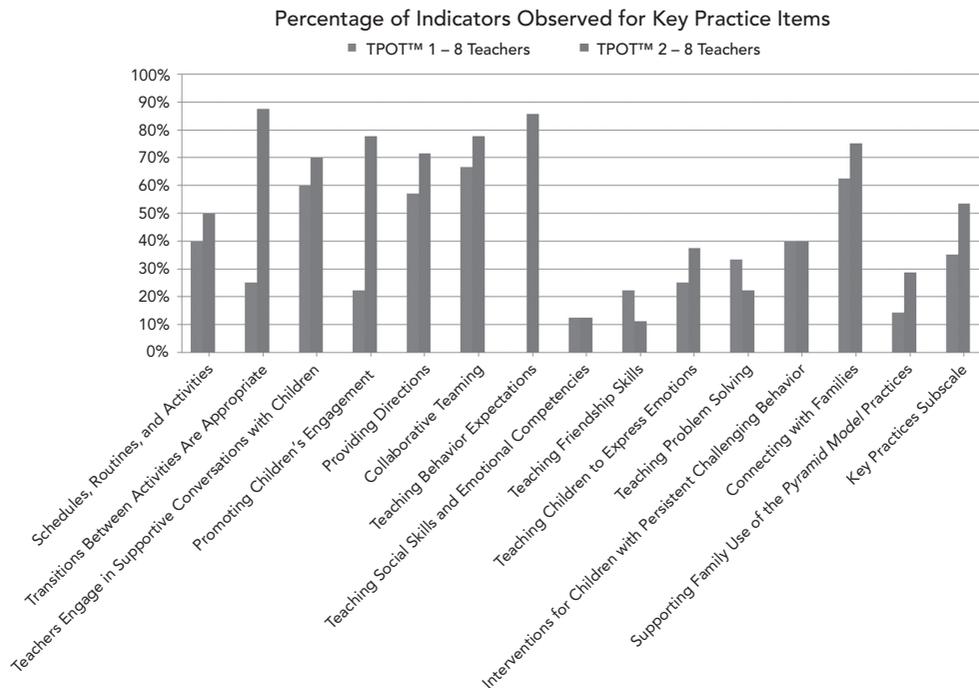


Figure 6.5. November Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT™) key practice item scores averaged across eight classrooms at Green Hills Child Development Center.

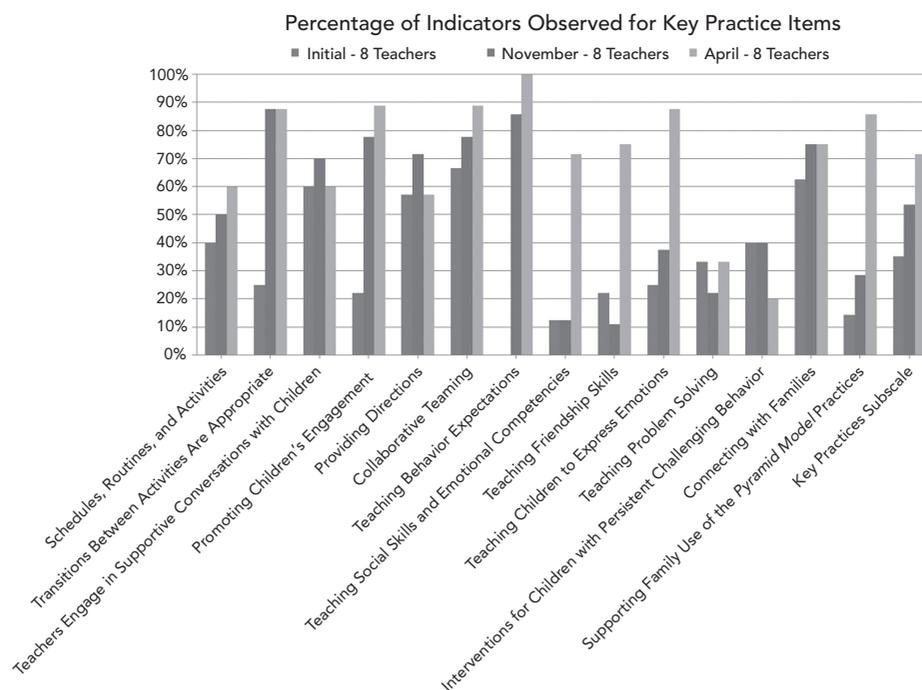


Figure 6.6. April Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT™) key practice item scores averaged across eight classrooms at Green Hills Child Development Center.

and engage in problem solving around issues related to *Pyramid Model* implementation. These meetings were voluntary. In April, the associate director once again completed the TPOT in all eight classrooms and summarized the data (see Figure 6.6).

When the leadership team reviewed the April data, they noted the teaching teams made significant progress in the areas that they focused on, particularly around promoting engagement in large-group activities, teaching friendship skills, and supporting family use of *Pyramid Model* practices. Several teams continued to have some difficulty in being systematic about teaching and reinforcing the behavior expectations. They also noted that most of the teams continued to have individual areas where they needed additional support. In addition, they continued to have some children whose behavior was persistent and who needed more individualized support. Although they had supported teachers for these children as needed, they wanted to have a more systematic approach to developing individualized supports. Based on these data, the leadership team developed the following plan for the provision of professional development:

1. The team planned to provide a booster session on teaching and promoting behavior expectations because this was an area of need for most of the teaching teams.
2. The team planned to continue coaching with each teaching team, including identifying two goals that each teaching team wanted to work on during the subsequent 3 months. The leadership team would review the goals identified by each teaching team to determine if there were common areas of need identified for which additional workshops for all teachers could be planned.
3. The team decided to plan a 2-day professional development activity for the week the program would be closed in late summer. During these 2 days, they planned to 1) review the *Pyramid Model* practices they had focused on to date, 2) provide time for teaching teams to reflect on their progress toward implementing *Pyramid Model*

practices, 3) conduct workshops on teaching problem solving and anger management because the TPOT data indicated most teaching teams were not implementing these practices, 4) provide time for teachers to make materials for implementing these practices, and 5) provide time for teachers to discuss ideas for activities and books they could use to teach problem solving and emotional literacy.

4. The leadership team also determined that they wanted to build their capacity to develop individualized behavior support plans for children who needed them. The leadership team made a commitment to hire a consultant to help them design the process, train the associate director to support the process, and provide workshops and coaching for teachers about their role in the process.