

Title: The Infant Room Focused Coaching Programme

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Summary

In the third quarter of 2023, the Infant Room Focused Coaching Programme was initiated as a strategic initiative aimed at providing targeted support to selected infant rooms identified with high and moderate needs. Recognising the unique challenges faced by infant care teachers, the programme was designed to be comprehensive, with Curriculum Specialists conducting five visits to each selected infant room across ten weeks. The overarching goal was to improve the planning and execution of developmentally appropriate activities, to ensure that the physical environment aligns with these planned activities, and enhance the quality of interactions between teachers and infants, ultimately fostering a nurturing atmosphere conducive to holistic infant development. A total of 9 infant rooms have been supported to date.

The coaching programme is particularly notable for its structured approach, which includes systematic observation of infants to inform planning, as well as the integration of feedback from previous reviews of the Bi-Weekly Planned Activities (BPAs)¹. This feedback loop has proven critical in helping teachers develop a more organised and responsive approach to lesson planning, ensuring that the activities are not only age-appropriate but also reflective of the infants' observed needs and behaviours. The programme also emphasises the importance of collaboration among teachers, encouraging them to work together in planning, reviewing, and preparing materials, thus promoting continuity and coherence in the learning environment.

Feedback from the programme's participants, which includes both teachers and principals, has been positive. Participants appreciated the professional development and support in their job areas. They also valued the coaches (Curriculum Specialists) in their guidance and words of encouragement. Teachers highlighted the programme's role in clarifying and improving their approach to writing BPAs. Teachers also reported increased confidence in their ability to plan and execute activities, set up learning environments that enhance learning, and engage infants effectively during routine and small group activities. Principals, on the other hand, appreciated the coaching model for its focus on practical application and its capacity to support the professional growth of their staff. Both groups valued the in-person guidance provided by the coaches, noting that it led to better engagement, understanding, and retention of the training materials compared to virtual sessions.

A key outcome of the programme has been the creation of a strong sense of community among the participants. The coaching sessions not only provided direct support but also fostered ongoing communication between teachers and coaches (Curriculum Specialists). This community of practice has been instrumental in ensuring that the knowledge and skills gained during the coaching sessions are sustained and applied consistently in the infant care room.

Participants also offered constructive feedback on how the programme could be further improved. A number of participants suggested extending the duration of the coaching sessions to allow for deeper exploration of topics and more thorough follow-up on the implementation of learned strategies.

¹ Bi-weekly Planned Activities refer to programme / activity plans developed by teachers for infants over a period of two weeks. These plans ensure that activities support three domains of development: psycho-social, physical and thinking and communicating.

Additionally, a number of participants suggested incorporating more opportunities for teachers to observe and learn from peers in other centres, such as through organised learning journeys or peer observations. This would enable them to see different approaches in action and gain new insights into best practices. Participants also suggested continuing the community of practice which will help to build a network of support that extends beyond the duration of the programme.

In conclusion, the Infant Room Focused Coaching Programme has been effective in addressing the needs of infant rooms through a combination of structured support, professional development, and community building. The programme's emphasis on hands-on, in-person coaching, combined with its focus on systematic planning and collaborative practice, has resulted in tangible improvements in the quality of care provided in the infant care rooms. The feedback and insights gained from this initial implementation will be invaluable in refining and enhancing the support offered to infant rooms, ensuring that the quality of support can be scaled to more infant rooms so that the standards of care for infants can be sustained.

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