



Basic Concepts
Building Thinking - Harnessing Potential
foundation

Report on the Ikamva Labantu Mediation Teaching Programme

Final Reflections and Participant Feedback – 11-Week Programme, 2026

1. Introduction

The Basic Concepts Foundation (BCF) conducted an 11-week Mediation Teaching Programme with staff from Ikamva Labantu. The programme introduced participants to the principles of mediated learning and their application in working with young children, with particular emphasis on language development, concept development, cognitive tools and mediating through play and everyday interactions.

The programme combined theoretical input, practical sessions, reflection, planning and opportunities for participants to apply the approach in their own settings. The final session provided an opportunity for participants to present and reflect on activities they had implemented.

The final evaluation included written feedback from 12 participants, together with observations made by the BCF facilitators during the programme and, in particular, during the final practical session.

Overall, the findings are strongly positive. Participants reported high levels of usefulness and relevance, while their written comments and final presentations provided encouraging evidence that they were beginning to apply the principles of mediation in their everyday work with children and, in some cases, with the practitioners they support.

2. Key quantitative findings

The three overall ratings in the final questionnaire were remarkably consistent.

Evaluation area	Rating 5	Rating 4	Rating 1–3
Usefulness of course components	11/12 (91.7%)	1/12 (8.3%)	0
Helpfulness of practical sessions	10/12 (83.3%)	2/12 (16.7%)	0
Overall relevance and usefulness	11/12 (91.7%)	1/12 (8.3%)	0

Across all three questions, 100% of respondents rated the programme either 4 or 5 out of 5, with approximately 89% of all individual ratings being a 5.

The overall mean across the three questions was approximately 4.89/5.

These results indicate a very high level of perceived relevance, usefulness and satisfaction with the programme. They are particularly encouraging because the practical sessions received similarly strong ratings to the programme as a whole.

The quantitative findings should not, on their own, be interpreted as evidence of impact on children's learning. However, they become considerably more meaningful when considered alongside the qualitative feedback and observations of participants applying the approach.

3. Main findings from the teacher feedback

3.1 A shift from teaching to mediating

The strongest and most consistent theme across the feedback was a developing understanding that mediating is different from simply teaching or telling.

Participants repeatedly described a change from giving children information or instructions towards asking questions, listening and facilitating children's thinking.

One participant expressed this particularly clearly:

“Teaching and mediating is not the same.”

Another said:

“I facilitate now... ask open ended question to uncover the richness of language.”

And another described the change simply as:

“Mediation with children more than teaching.”

This was strongly supported by the final practical session. Teachers spontaneously described how they were now more likely to ask questions and wait for children's responses rather than immediately provide answers.

This appears to be one of the most significant changes emerging from the programme.

3.2 Increased use of language and dialogue

Language development was another very strong theme.

Participants described becoming more conscious of the need to use language throughout the day, introduce new vocabulary, ask children to explain their thinking and encourage them to answer in full sentences.

One participant wrote:

“Language is used all day long to teach children more concepts. Always use the correct words and ask reasons about their answers.”

Another described speaking to children even when they could not yet respond:

“Speak with a child even if they can't reply to you but they kept that in their minds.”

This was reflected in the final session. One teacher explained that she now deliberately engages children in conversation even during routine activities such as toileting and changing.

This suggests that participants were beginning to understand that language mediation is not restricted to a formal learning activity but can occur throughout the child's day.

3.3 More active listening and participation by children

Participants also described changes in the way they listen to children and create opportunities for children to express themselves.

They referred to:

- asking children what they know;
- listening to their views and opinions;
- giving children enough time to respond;
- asking open-ended questions;
- encouraging children to ask questions themselves; and
- encouraging children to become “critical learners”.

One participant wrote:

“Trying to encourage them to be critical learners not just accept everything but to pose questions.”

This represents an important shift from seeing young children primarily as recipients of information towards seeing them as active participants in their own learning.

3.4 Stronger relationships between teachers and children

A further theme was the importance of the relationship between mediator and child.

Participants referred to being:

“friendly, sensitive, guide, scaffolding”

and to the importance of:

“love, kindness and empathy.”

One teacher reflected that the more friendly she became, the more freely children expressed their thoughts.

Particularly interesting were comments from teachers working with babies. One participant noted that she had previously focused primarily on planned activities but was now much more involved with the children during free play and had developed:

“a better relationship with them not just a teacher relationship.”

This corresponds closely with the observed changes during the final session and suggests that the programme was beginning to influence not only teaching techniques but teachers' understanding of their role and relationship with children.

4. Developing understanding of concepts and cognitive tools

The feedback also indicates a growing understanding of the relationship between concept development, language and cognitive tools.

Participants referred specifically to *concentration, comparison, cognitive tools, concept development and developing children's thinking*.

One participant wrote:

"I am most proud that I can now mediate with confidence building thinking tool concentration and comparison on my babies."

Another said:

"I am proud now that I know exactly what I am meditating to children."

The final practical presentations provided supporting evidence. Teachers were generally able to identify the concepts and cognitive processes embedded in their activities, and these were often appropriately linked.

For example, one activity involving local plants and food used classification of fruits and vegetables and introduced the process of growth from seed to harvest.

This suggests that participants were beginning to move beyond simply planning an activity and were thinking about what concept and thinking process the activity was intended to develop.

5. Practical application

The practical component was particularly well received, with 83.3% of respondents rating the practical sessions 5/5 and the remaining 16.7% rating them 4/5.

This was supported by what was observed during the final session. Teachers had implemented the activities they were asked to undertake and had prepared presentations and, in many cases, photographs or other visual evidence of their work.

The presentations generally demonstrated:

- preparation and implementation;
- an awareness of language development;
- identification of concepts;
- use of cognitive tools;
- use of concrete materials; and
- reflection on the strengths and limitations of the activity.

Some teachers had also begun using a simple structure of Language – Concepts – Cognitive Tools to reflect on their work. This is significant because the structure was not simply imposed during the final presentation; some teachers had started using it independently.

6. Areas requiring further development

The final session also identified some areas where further support would be useful.

Focus and purpose

Many activities were too ambitious for a single session. Teachers often began with an appropriate focus but then introduced several additional, related concepts. The additional content was generally relevant, but there was sometimes too much of it.

There were also examples where the purpose of an activity could have been more sharply defined. Only one activity observed appeared to lack a clear purpose altogether.

This suggests that teachers are developing their conceptual understanding but still need support in translating this into focused planning: What exactly do I want the child to learn or develop through this activity?

Mediated Learning Planner

The MLP was useful but was completed inconsistently. Some teachers used it effectively, while others completed only parts of it.

This finding contributed to the development of a revised and shortened Mediated Learning Planner (MLP-R), with greater space devoted to the purpose of the activity. This should help address one of the areas in which teachers appear to need the most support.

Organisational conditions

The programme was also affected on several occasions by the broader organisational environment at the centre. The final session, for example, was delayed by approximately 30 minutes because another major event was taking place in the main hall, with some staff required to move between activities. On the final day, some participants also had competing organisational commitments, including a first-aid course.

The involvement of senior management in the final session was limited, with some key staff unable to attend.

These issues did not appear to reflect negatively on the commitment of the teachers who participated, who were generally well prepared and positive. Nevertheless, the experience suggests that future training would benefit from clearer organisational protection of training time, particularly where the intention is to embed a new approach across an organisation.

7. An important opportunity for Ikamva Labantu

One of the most encouraging findings is that participants themselves began to see Mediation Teaching as something that could become part of Ikamva Labantu's broader practitioner-development approach, rather than as a once-off training programme.

One participant specifically recommended:

“I would recommend that the Mediation Teaching Training Programme be incorporated into the Practitioners’ Persona Doll training.”

Other participants who support practitioners indicated that they intended to use what they had learnt during their practitioner support visits.

This is an important finding. It suggests that the programme has potential to move beyond the initial group of participants and become part of the way in which Ikamva supports practitioners and develops practice across its ECD network.

The opportunity is therefore not simply to repeat the 11-week course, but to **consider how the principles of mediation could be embedded into existing Ikamva programmes**, practitioner support and mentoring.

8. Recommendations

Based on the final evaluation and observations, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Explore integration into Ikamva's existing practitioner-development programmes

The suggestion to integrate Mediation Teaching with Persona Doll training should be explored further. The approach could also be incorporated into practitioner support visits and other professional-development activities.

2. Provide a period of follow-up mentoring

The next stage should focus less on introducing new theory and more on automatizing practice. Short mentoring or observation sessions could help teachers strengthen questioning, language mediation, conceptual focus and the use of cognitive tools.

3. Use the revised Mediated Learning Planner

The new, shorter MLP-R should be introduced as a practical planning and reflection tool, with particular emphasis on answering one question:

“What do I want the child to achieve or develop through this activity?”

4. Strengthen teachers' ability to focus activities

Future support should help teachers select a small number of core concepts and cognitive processes rather than attempting to address too many things in one activity.

5. Protect training and mentoring time organisationally

If Ikamva decides to continue with the approach, training and mentoring sessions should be protected from competing activities wherever possible. Greater involvement from programme management would also help ensure that the approach becomes an organisational priority rather than remaining dependent on individual participants.

6. Conduct a follow-up evaluation

A follow-up observation after several months would be valuable. This would allow BCF and Ikamva to assess whether the changes reported by teachers have become established practice and whether the approach is being transferred to other practitioners.

9. Conclusion

The 11-week Mediation Teaching Programme **produced very strong participant feedback**, with all respondents rating the programme and its components either 4 or 5 out of 5. More importantly, the quantitative findings are supported by a consistent pattern in the teachers' written comments and their final practical presentations.

The clearest emerging change is a shift from “telling” towards “asking”, from teaching towards mediating, and from activity-based instruction towards more deliberate interaction, language and thinking.

Teachers described becoming more involved with children, particularly during play and everyday routines, using more language, asking more open-ended questions, listening to children's ideas and seeing themselves increasingly as facilitators of learning.

There is still work to be done, particularly in helping teachers to define a clear purpose for activities, limit the number of concepts addressed at one time and use planning tools consistently. These are appropriate next-stage developmental needs rather than indications that the core approach has not been understood.

Most importantly, the evaluation suggests that the programme has created an opportunity for something broader than a successful training course. **Participants themselves have begun to see Mediation Teaching as an approach that could be incorporated into Ikamva Labantu's ongoing practitioner-development work.** This provides a promising basis for exploring how the approach might be embedded within existing Ikamva programmes and support structures, thereby extending its potential reach beyond the original group of trainees.