

CoP PHASE 2 ALCOP MEETING

Initial research findings on institutionalising the CoP

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What do we mean by ‘institutionalising’ the CoP?

“The idea is to build a system around you [teacher] and the child so that we could better see to all the needs of the children that we were speaking to. How do you think we can take this and make it a bigger programme in the school and also outside of the school?” Prof Sadiyya Haffejee addressing the focus groups

Introduction

- **Three factors support the adoption of a CoP approach**
 - 1. Clear evidence of need for psychosocial support to support children's learning**
 - Most groups prioritised the need for a full-time social worker in the school
 - 2. The policy framework has already in place for some years**
 - SBSTs already in place – can create a home for CoP
 - Policy for screening, identification, assessment and support (SIAS) (2014)
 - Guidelines for Learner Support Agents on providing psychosocial support to learners (2019)
 - Integrated school health policy
 - School nutrition policy
 - 3. Positive uptake in all five schools**
- **The evidence shows that without a consistent professional social work presence, psychosocial support is at risk:**
 - complex parent/school relationships
 - traumatic social contexts impacting on learners and teachers
 - schools focus on learning without the ability to manage how children's circumstances impact on their ability to learn
- The current research shows the need to **distinguish between crisis management and systemic support:**
 - Move away from an “ambulances and firefighters” approach to embedding a proactive, effective support system in the school community

Evidence of need for psychosocial support for children's learning

Teacher: *"Because some of our problems ... we cannot handle. We cannot handle them, you know. They need professionals, social workers, because already we are having a lot on our plate. So maybe, if we can have someone like N who can stay permanently in our school, that would be better."* Doornkop focus group

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Social worker: *"We are only seven social workers for 300 and what, what schools...so we can't do preventative work, we can't... we only respond. ... I call us fire fighters and ambulances."* Alexandra focus group

Evidence of positive uptake in all five schools

"I've seen it contributing in positively to our kids... and to our school community in a sense that it had also that element of parental involvement. You were able to reach out to those parents. I've always seen it, and Bongzi [CoP appointed social worker] would always give me the summary of what she found there. To say she's been out there, and I was also able to assist her in her protection out there [linking her with their Adopt-a-cop], because she needed also to be safe...when she visited the households out there. And I've seen it making a huge difference, in the sense that you reach out there and make it a point that you go to the bottom of the situation. Because you know, as an institution we deal with things at a face value. But we would not go the bottom of the situation that these children find themselves in. So, I give this programme a tick when it comes to that." Principal, Meadowlands focus group

Pic

"And even the programme itself, we wanted it to go on and on and on. So, when it ended, it was like, jo [what am I going to do?] So maybe next time, if you extend your time, just to come and support us."

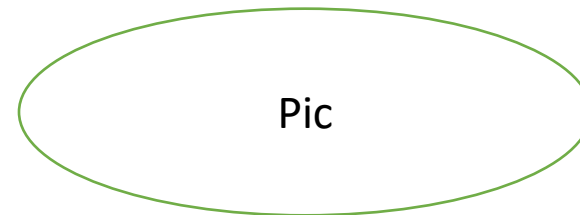
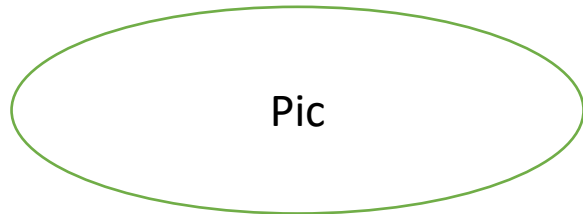
Teacher, Doornkop focus group

Mechanisms associated with systems strengthening

1. Key providers (purveyors) are effectively capacitated – *training & support is provided; attitudes fostered that disrupt and embrace new practices & behaviours; adequately resourced i.e. funding, people & infrastructure*
 - Policy assumes teachers are able to identify vulnerable children. This research shows that overcrowding, heavy workloads and a focus on curriculum priorities make this challenging.
 - Teachers want to identify vulnerable learners but don't feel equipped to deal with psychosocial issues: *“There is that child who needs whatever, but because there's so many classes and that child is quiet, I miss on identifying that child. Teachers are not fully psychologists.”* Alexandra focus group
 - SBSTs aren't equipped – teachers want training for SBST positions and need roles clarified; time constraints make them reluctant to volunteer Social workers are needed to play the professional role in the SBST to provide psychosocial support.
 - There is an appetite for change in all the schools, but this requires professional resources in place e.g. social workers – at minimum.
 - UJ CoP provided the funding, people & infrastructure: personnel with dedicated time; carefully designed programmes (e.g. for parents, teachers & children); financial resources

2. Variations of implementing agencies *in terms of values, resources, degree to which work force is capacitated needs to be taken into account (no one size fits all)*

- Some schools have stronger relationships with external stakeholder than others e.g. with clinics, NGOs, remedial school in the community
- Schools differed in awareness of what the school could/should do to strengthen psychosocial support (personnel, facilities, programmes). Some were so focused on the curriculum that it was difficult to think of anything else
- A CoP approach allows for variations across the SBST members to complement each other & help fill in the gaps for each other



3. Enabling organisational level factors *such as values, cultures, shared mission and vision; monitoring & evaluation systems; data-driven decision making; learning environment; performance management systems in place with feedback loops leading to continuous improvement*

- The CoP provides shared vision across stakeholders; SBSTs are potential enabling organisational level structures, but the evidence shows additional professional support is required
- Screening used in the CoP model is appreciated as providing a holistic picture of the learners
- Screening creates a data-driven basis for supporting them: *“Screening the uniform only doesn't tell you exactly what is happening behind.”* Source
- Feedback loops critical for supporting teachers to help learners identified as vulnerable: *“Have a full-time social worker, who can help counsel children with behavioural problems. Have the social worker interact and provide feedback to teachers regarding the learner(s).”*

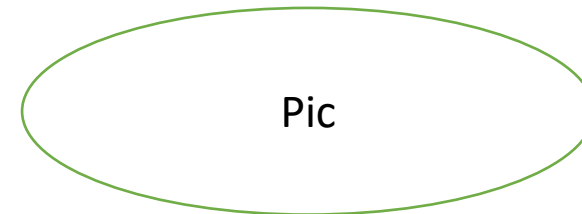
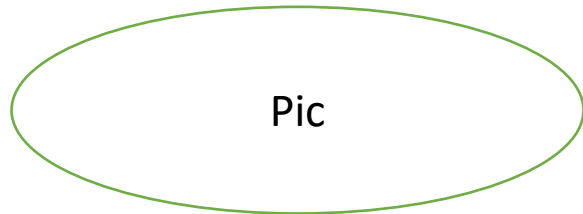
Alexandra focus group discussion reportback

4. Stakeholder engagement & commitment to collaboration: *buy-in of key partners; user feedback loops are in place and inform implementation; clear definition of roles and responsibilities of partners*

- Teachers recognise the need for stakeholder support: *“Okay. We have three healthcare workers here. We've got the clinics... Inter-departmental collaboration. Community involvement.”* Alexandra focus group
- Clear desire to for greater engagement with and involvement of parents + community that the schools serve
- Strengthen existing services e.g. health:
 - *“...Expand the health care services, like ...asking for health talks, which is sexual education, HIV and AIDS awareness, substance abuse, vaccinations, vision and hearing screening.”* Malvern focus group
 - *“It's like Mam said, I only saw the health department for measles. I never saw them to come and give our kids information, any information. The clinics for the girls, teaching birds and bees. I never saw them here.* Malvern focus group
- Educators don't always know whom to approach and how.
 - *“I asked for a resource list where I can stick on my wall that shows me what NGOs is in our area ... to show me what does Kensington have for the parents, for the teachers, for the families.”* Malvern focus group

5. Support from leaders

- Principals/HoDs in the five schools are supportive of the CoP approach: they can see and speak to the difference made, and how things regress once the social worker is no longer involved
- So the CoP approach needs to be operationalised by dedicated professional personnel (a social worker) who works with school leadership to create a more holistic culture of learner support.



6. Bottom-up learning creating transformation zones/spaces where innovation can flourish

- Running the school-based focus groups, giving them feedback on the research results, and getting their suggestions for scaling up is a first bottom-up step in creating space for innovation.

“Tania: what we were wanting to see was what happens when we place a social worker in a school, and we work as a community...

...And we're here today just to see how this has actually worked, how this project has worked for teachers. Have you seen a benefit or not? If you've seen a benefit, how are we going to now upscale this? How are we going to actually get the GDE to try and roll out a project like this in other schools? ” Alexandra focus group

- Teachers want capacity building, but work in a social/economic/community context that heightens their own vulnerability. How will innovation flourish in this very complex multi-layered context in and out of school, and engagement between the two?

7. Enabling institutional frameworks in place composed of

- ***Norms and standards, policies and procedures, protocols to guide practitioners***

- Learner Support Agents policy & guidelines;
- DBE's Screening, identification, assessment & support (SIAS) policy.
- The CoP intervention provided evidence of the need for:
 - health screening in addition to vaccinations
 - Sihlengimizi provided valued skills development among parents and carers
 - This contrasts with schools receiving only partial and irregular support from GDE (educational psychologists) DSD and DoH

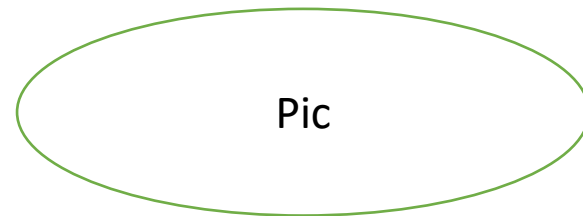
- ***Funding, adequate staffing levels and infrastructure***

The CoP provided **funding** for the intervention, **personnel with dedicated time**, & **carefully designed programmes** eg. for parents, resilience workshops for teachers & children

“One of the weaknesses is that the learners that B [social worker] dealt with, so far since B left, they, they are regressing...Those anger issues are now surfacing again. It's like they are not being taken care of.” Principal, Meadowlands focus group

8. Alignment of organizational mandates of agencies: *setting of achievable targets; identification of the lead agency; context in which the scale up of interventions are being implemented including social, economic, political and other contextual factors must be considered.*

- The CoP approach strengthened the alignment of mandates
- The three-year CoP study outlines the contextual factors at work. These are confirmed by the focus group participants.
- The implementation strategy will depend on further research and interviews with key informants in government early in 2024.



Thank you!