

Communities of Practice



What is the Communities of Practice project?

In South Africa 12.8 million children live in income poverty which compromises their well-being specifically in health, nutrition, education, safety and security and psycho-social areas. These vulnerabilities often require urgent intervention but due to fragmented services, these vulnerable children slip through the cracks

The CSDA's Communities of Practice(CoP) Project convenes communities of practice that include teachers, nurses, social workers and educational psychologists to support children and families and refer them to support services where necessary.

Who is involved in the project?

- Prof Leila Patel, South African Research Chair in Welfare and Social Development based at the Centre for Social Development in Africa (CSDA) – Primary investigator
- Prof Jace Pillay, South African Research Chair in Education and Care in Childhood – CO PI
- Prof Elizabeth Henning, South African Research Chair in Integrated Studies of Learning Language, Mathematics and Science in the Primary School – CO PI
- Collaborators: Prof Shane Norris, Director at the Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Human Development, Prof Lauren Graham CSDA, Dr. Wanga Zembe Mkabile (MRC), Dr. Alida Du Plessis-Faurie, Dr. Mpumi Ntshingila, Prof. Arnesh Telukdarie.
- External collaborating partners include UNICEF, the City of Johannesburg, the Gauteng Department of Education, Department of Basic Education, and the Department of Health.

The aim of the study, which is funded by the National Research Foundation, is to establish a CoP to integrate various systems of support to meet children's needs in the early years.

About the research

162 children participated in the first wave of research and the findings highlights that many children live in precarious environments.



65%
of primary caregivers
are unemployed



36%
had no other source of
income aside from the CSG



35%
did not have enough money
to buy the things they need

Education



96%
of children attend
school regularly



16%
of children are not
progressing with
their school work



36%
of children are
afraid to go to
school



33%
of children have
difficulty learning



21,5%
have difficulty
sitting long enough
to learn

Nutrition



33%
of children
sometimes or
often go to bed
hungry



37%
of children live
in homes where
sometimes or often
there isn't enough
food to eat



17%
of children have
health concerns
that sometimes
or often prevent
them from going to
school regularly



96%
Although 96% of
children have a 'road
to health' vaccination
card, 33% of children's
vaccinations are not
up to date



67%
67% had been
exposed to some form
of violence at home or
in the community.
75% have safety
concerns and 8% are
victims of abuse.

Understanding learner's competencies in reading, numeracy and vocabulary

Researchers also want to understand learner's competence in three components of the first-grade curriculum, namely reading, numeracy and mathematics-specific vocabulary.

131 children in five participating schools were assessed at the beginning of their first school year and will be tested again one year later.

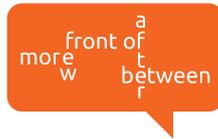
What instruments were used?

Numeracy



MARKO-D SA assesses early number concept development.

Mathematics-specific vocabulary



Meerkat Maths Language Test (**MMLT**) assesses mathematics specific vocabulary required for mathematics learning.

Reading



Early Grades Reading Assessment (**EGRA**) assesses children's first steps into literacy.

What were the results?

Although the low scores are concerning, it is in line with other studies findings that indicate that many children in South Africa find it difficult to learn mathematics and to read.



Vocabulary and syntax of the MARKO-D SA require sufficient language competence. Low achievement on the standardised number concept test (MARKO-D SA) is likely limited by lack of early childhood learning opportunities.



Young learners assessed don't appear to be ready for the school curriculum



Children tested in an additional language (i.e. English) achieved higher scores than those assessed in their home language. This finding contradicts findings in previous studies. Explanations will be investigated when the educational dataset is merged with the social- and emotional wellbeing components.



One of the five schools achieved significantly lower scores. This finding will also be explored during further analyses.

The importance of providing psychosocial support to learners

Researchers also wanted to understand levels of awareness among school staff of the psychosocial support available as per the Integrated School Health Policy (ISHP) in South Africa. Researchers interviewed 50 school staff members from five under-resourced primary schools participating in the pilot.

Who did they sample?



50 school staff members from 5 schools interviewed, 82% of these were teachers.

What did they find?



42% of respondents received additional training on psychosocial services offered at schools



0% of schools believe that the Department of Basic Education is responsible for psychosocial support in schools

The research showed that although some staff recognise the importance of caring for learner mental health, greater emphasis is given to physical health concerns relating to the learners' feeding schemes and medical health.

This points to the need for more training which acknowledges the variety of organisations involved in providing counselling support, as well as the importance of caring for learner mental health and associated red flags.