BRIDGE
LINKING INNOVATORS IN EDUCATION

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FOCUS AREA:
EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Joint Early Childhood Development and Early Grade Reading Community of Practice

MEETING HIGHLIGHTS 28 May 2020

Virtual Meeting

WELCOME AND PURPOSE

This was the first joint Early Childhood Development and Early Grade Reading Community of Practice that BRIDGE has hosted. Nalinee Soobramoney (National ECD CoP facilitator) facilitated the meeting. Covid-19 has disrupted our sense of normality; with this in mind, the purpose of this meeting was to look at how organisations are supporting caregivers and caregivers' responsiveness. It was an opportunity to speak about what support CoP members need and what support can be offered. This led to the sharing of a number of resources; links to these resources can be found in this document.

NTATAISE NETWORK: ENGAGING WITH PARENTS AND ECD PRACTITIONERS IN TIMES OF COVID-19 (KALEY LE MOTTEE)

Ntataise is an independent not-for-profit organisation which was founded in 1980 and has for the past 40 years been instrumental in supporting the provision of quality ECD programmes in marginalised communities across South Africa.

Overview of Ntataise Programmes
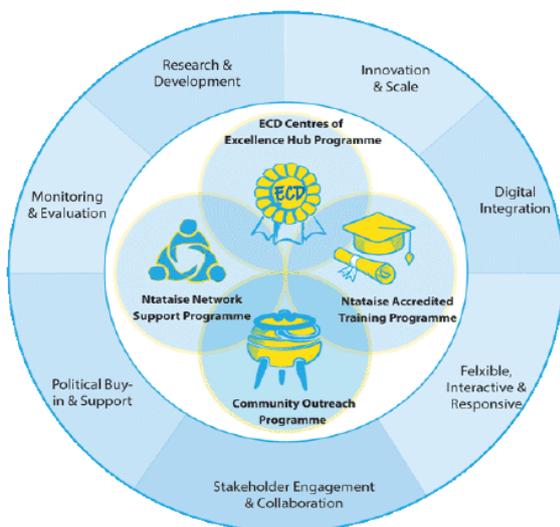
Ntataise's vision is to increase access to quality ECD opportunities for children living in disadvantaged communities in South Africa.

Ntataise usually conducts its work through engagements with parents and practitioners; this has had to be put on hold due to Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown. There is a lot of uncertainty as to when ECD programmes will re-open and under what circumstances. Many practitioners are not earning an income and the future of their centres remains uncertain. Ntataise's main focus during this time has been to keep practitioners engaged and motivated.

During lockdown Ntataise has implemented the following:

Dissemination of home learning activities. These consist of short video clips targeted towards practitioners and their interaction with children; they have been repackaged into text and explain how to use items found in the home for learning. Activities are shared through WhatsApp, the Ntataise network and social media.

Activities on educational games, movement etc. This is done in order to keep children having fun and playing. The activities also help parents connect with their children through play.

Kaley then shared with the CoP what has worked well, and the challenges and lessons learned:

What worked well?

Click here to view the full presentation.

- Making use of WhatsApp as a primary communication tool. There was also the introduction of a WhatsApp champion to facilitate keeping in contact.
- A translating initiative of Ntataise's resources in order to give their work more reach.
- Keeping resources simple, visual, practical and engaging.
- The distribution of food parcels has provided the opportunity to drop off books and print versions of activities at the same time.
- Two way interaction by encouraging feedback on the activities from parents through WhatsApp and phone calls etc.
- Harnessing the existing partnerships that Ntataise has, for example with UNICEF, SAIDE and African Story Book.
- Making use of main stream media such as TV and community radio, for example Sikhaba iCovid which is run by the Department of Health.

Challenges and possible solutions

- The high cost of data and poor connectivity – Ntataise has tried where possible to provide data by sending airtime directly to practitioners' cell phone numbers.
- Feedback from parents can be difficult to receive especially if they are field workers and unable to take phone calls during work hours. Ntataise has since sought to get face-to-face feedback and is using the occasion of food deliveries to ask if the activities are being used and if they are useful.

- The overload of information and activities being sent out leads to a lack of interest and uptake. Ntataise is using a dedicated person to provide constant communication via WhatsApp, and is linking activities to other resources that are already out there.
- Monitoring and evaluation in terms of tracking reach and the use of activities has had to be reworked – for example, the export function on WhatsApp is being used so that chats can be analysed.

Engaging with ECD Practitioners using digital platforms: Tools and Resources

Ntataise typically has face-to-face workshops and is now having to make use of digital tools such as:

- **WhatsApp** is being used as the primary communication platform. It is used to send video clips etc., facilitate small group discussions, and to submit activities; more specifically, trainers are able to monitor across groups and instantly respond. WhatsApp is also useful for practitioners as they have access to the content and can go back at any time to read over it.
- **Google Meet** is being used to introduce topics and have interactive conversations. It is good for psychosocial support of practitioners as they connect with peers.
- **Google Forms** is being used for monitoring (asking for feedback on activities) and to submit activities and host surveys.

Challenges and possible solutions

- Trainers have had to adapt quickly and luckily going digital was already on the cards. Digital orientation sessions have been helpful in order to understand these online platforms. This was time consuming but has paid off.
- The high cost of data and lack of access to smart phones has been somewhat combatted by making use of WhatsApp and Google Meet as these are less data heavy.
- Training in this way has proven to be more time consuming; however, trainers are energized and excited to be experimenting with new ways of doing things. Trainers need to embrace flexibility and share in a collaborative way. A lot of organisations are facing the same issues and it's important to share and take lessons from other organisations where some things are working well.
- Not all practitioners are able to connect at once and trainers have had to find other ways to engage with practitioners such as dividing them into smaller groups to improve call quality.
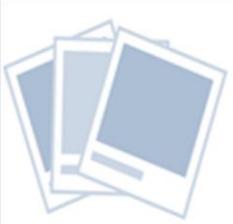
SHINE LITERACY (VUYELWA MBALEKWA)

The aim of Shine Literacy is to encourage a culture of reading by supporting schools to become hubs, creating reading opportunities for children and supporting families through the school and surrounding community.

Shine Literacy works with the teachers and the programme is volunteer based. They have 1500 volunteers in 73 schools in the Eastern Cape, the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.

Shine Literacy has four Programmes

1. **Shine Literacy Hour** – initially English moving into other languages which consists of one-on-one targeted reading support. Shine is branching out into other languages now.
2. **Book Buddies** – children reading with and to each other in the school day. It can be a whole-school programme where children can partner up with each other and share stories.
3. **Family Literacy Workshop** – conducted through schools. Grade R and Grade 1 parents are invited into the programme and given an introductory feel of what the expectations are when it comes to supporting early literacy for their children. This is conducted in the home language and is a foundation phase programme but can be adapted for other grades.
4. **Youth in Schools** – in partnership with a pool of volunteers who receive stipends. Volunteers live in the surrounding communities and are supported and trained, and then work in the nearby schools.

WHO ARE WE

Shine Literacy is a non-profit organisation that seeks to create a culture of reading in South African schools, homes, workplaces and communities, thereby improving literacy outcomes for young children from low-income communities.

Working in partnership with educators, volunteers and parents, our award winning, evidence-based programmes provide effective and sustained support to children as they learn to read and write, helping to foster a life-long love of books and learning.

This is what the original programme looks like:

MORNING TRAINING
Shine facilitates a workshop for parents / caregivers half a day
Introductory session where awareness and interest is generated

BENEFICIARIES
Parents of learners we work with, Grades R & 1;
Parents / caregivers sponsored by their organizations

CONTENT
Home – school link and importance thereof
Why reading and literacy matters?
What language is important?

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CONTENT
Shared & Paired reading methodology
Introductory Phonics and rhyme
Resources available to use

SHINE ETHOS & VALUES
Shine Literacy Ethos and values & how that links with the home
Emotional support for children in the home
Practice sessions with others

The Family Literacy Workshop has been re-worked during the lockdown in order to still provide resources. This is what they have had to implement:

Shine Literacy has not been able to have access to the schools and has had to get permission from Principals in order to contact parents.

- Initially, Shine would have a morning training session which would facilitate awareness for parents. Parents would be asked to think about what children are learning, how they are learning and in what environment etc. Parents usually reflect on their own schooling and way of learning and project that onto their children, not taking into account the new ways of doing things. This session was initially for Grade R and Grade 1 parents, but has since been made broader to incorporate the whole Foundation Phase.
- Shine Literacy at times conducts paid-for workshops/staff development – the content is the home/school link and the importance of constant communication with the school in support of the learners and why literacy, reading and language matter. The methodologies for reading are shared reading/shared story time and paired reading. Everything is embedded in the Shine ethos so that the emotional "container" is kept for parents to realise that a conducive environment is a good start.

Covid- 19 support through Family Literacy:

- Designing a train-the-trainer module where the teachers will be trained to facilitate the module while Shine takes on a supportive role so that teachers have that agency.
- When schools are back every child should receive their own DBE book as well as Nal'ibali books. Shine Literacy may purchase books from Book Dash, depending on funding, in an effort to get more resources into homes.
- Shine Literacy doesn't want to work in isolation from educators, but wants to support them. Shine aims to help them roll out resources to the children and parents.
- Shine Literacy has realised that they cannot just send content home without support – centre managers in the schools need to provide this link through phone calls and WhatsApp etc. ("We would like your child to read this story ...") to facilitate accountability.
- Shine Literacy is looking into bulk SMS packages in order to distribute information.
- They want to make sure to direct parents to any online materials to support physical activities etc. and intend to communicate the links to this through the WhatsApp and now SMS channels they have established.
- They want to properly reach all children at home through the provision of these resources.
- They want schools and teachers to feel supported in these uncertain times.
- Schools are the beneficiaries. Through the schools Shine Literacy is able to access the children's homes while building solid relationships with principals,

teachers and parents. School centre managers are vital in this whole process.

Questions & Answers

Shine Literacy was asked if their stories include IKS (indigenous knowledge stories); Vuyelwa provided clarity in saying that Shine does not create the content, they just distribute it.

Ntataise was asked how they went about providing data to practitioners. Kaley responded that they collected all the cell phone numbers of the practitioners and sent data to those numbers but that there had been some mistakes with numbers being incorrect and some practitioners having two cell phone numbers etc. To combat this, they first sent a small amount of R5 to check that it went through correctly before sending larger amounts of data. There is a platform that can help to manage this process. Contact Kaley for more information regarding this at kaley@ntataise.org.

A CoP member asked if the resources were getting to deep rural areas. Ntataise has networks in Mpumalanga which reach some deep rural areas. Shine Literacy is only available in the WC, EC, KZN and Gauteng.

We need to think about ways to increase the uptake of all the resources available. People far and wide need to be informed about all the resources available to them.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Break-away groups were established via Zoom to discuss the following:

What strategies have you employed?

- Using social media tools WhatsApp and Google Meet to communicate with parents.
- Parents and communities are helping each other with printing etc. and dropping the material off to each other.
- Using field work such as food dropping points to gather information on what parents' needs are in terms of the learning materials being used at home.
- Count Family Maths (a Co-operative Organisation for the Upgrading of Numeracy Training) is working to repackage manuals that include activities. This involves simplifying the language, translating into local languages and adding cards and dice to the pack to send into the home. Parents can facilitate the activities, but children can play some on their own.
- Parents are being pro-active, asking for activities and wanting to be involved and engaged.
- Online messaging to different stakeholders (practitioners and parents) though WhatsApp groups, social media and bulk SMS.
- Creating different resources such as podcasts, making recycled toys, toy packs and weekly programmes to assist with ideas.

- Dropping off kits and showing participants how to use these kits.
- Providing psychosocial support.

Share your organisation's challenges

> "We shouldn't assume that communities are helpless; there is a positive response where practitioners are making a plan to get to meetings etc. This speaks to having a collaborative mind set when dealing with different communities. [CoP Member]

- Parents are not always able to engage – they are out in the field working and not able to help.
- More concerned with welfare needs so educational needs are not a priority.
- Lack of parental engagement.
- Lack of access to data/ the cost of data/ poor connectivity.
- Translation issues in instances where organisations are translating their documents; it is taking a long time to translate.
- Not being able to use new technologies such as Zoom etc. as caregivers are unfamiliar with them.
- A lot of parents are working and cannot home school as much as they should be.
- Difficult to get feedback at times, specifically on WhatsApp and SMS.
- Practitioners and parents are focussed on getting food and keeping their jobs, and children's education comes after that – it's not that they don't want to engage, but that they have a lot on their plates.

What strategies are you taking forward post Covid- 19?

- Lockdown has highlighted the need for family to be involved as most learning happens at home. For example, COUNT will launch a home-based programme to maintain learning.
- COUNT could partner with African Story Books to create maths books for children.
- Continue online learning as we go into 4IR and build capabilities around this.
- Continue with radio shows and WhatsApp platforms.

UPDATE

The ECD CoP has been speaking on the reopening of ECD and has had a meeting with DSD. An update has been provided electronically.

RESOURCES SHARED

We are finding a new normal that could work for everyone and this is an opportunity for collaboration in the sector. We need to share as much information with each other as possible. Below are the resources that were shared in this meeting.

Sikhaba icovid-19 Radio Series https://sacoronavirus.co.za/2020/05/19/sikhaba-icovid-19-radio-series-18th-may/

Free to all community-based radio stations – Ilifa Labantwana 'LOVE, PLAY, TALK' 1/2 hour radio programmes for parents on every possible aspect of early childhood development. These scripts have been aired in all national languages on all national SABC radio stations over a 2 year period. Now they are available free for community radio stations found on the Ilifa Labantwana website: www.ilifalabantwana.co.za

Ntataise resources https://www.ntataise.org/Resources-Ntataise/

Shine Literacy resources http://www.shineliteracy.org.za/

Used to allocate bulk data and tracking to practitioners www.myairtime.co.za

COUNT Family Maths Grade 1-7 Material is available on their website as an open resource www.countafrica.org

To advocate for zero- rating education websites: https://dgmt.co.za/zero-rating/ and https://www.change.org/p/telkom-south-africa-zero-rate-mobile-data-now-so-that-education-can-continue?recruiter=1056882313&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=copylink&utm_campaign=share_petition&utm_term=petition_dashboard

The Department of Social Development and the Nelson Mandela Foundation partner to improve conditions of unregistered early childhood development centres: https://www.gov.za/speeches/social-development-and-nelson-mandela-foundation-partner-improve-conditions-unregistered

The newly launched Alchemy Trusts integrated Community Wifi Development Portals and websites: http://dikuno.org.za/   http://rcdt.org.za/ http://bohwabjarena.org.za/index http://ditholwana.org.za/welcome   http://zenzeleitereleng.org.za/

FREE messaging app much like WhatsApp called Moya https://www.datafree.co/moya-messenger-app

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