



# Deliverable 2.4: Piloting Reports for SWPBS Tiers 1, 2 and 3 training manuals

Cyprus

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## Introduction

The focus group in Cyprus was conducted on Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021 via ZOOM. The online conversation was organised for the purposes of Deliverable 2.4: Piloting Reports for SWPBS Tiers 1, 2 and 3 training manuals, with the participation of 6 educators / Head Teachers and 2 External Coaches. Eliza Theofanous from CARDET hosted the discussion and acquired a rich overview on their opinions and experiences regarding implementation from the first and second year. The focus group discussion lasted for more than 1 hour and CARDET had the opportunity to gain a very interesting insight on the participants' views. The present report describes the main points, as extracted from the discussion with participants. The findings are divided per theme, as per the questions identified.

## Findings from educators / Head Teachers

### Question 1: Please name at least 2 things that worked well during the project implementation in your school

The most important things mentioned by the educators / Head Teachers with regards to project implementation are the following:

- The cards of rewarding students are very helpful
- Other rewards that we provide to students are very beneficial to cultivate/maintain social behaviours
- We have surely realised a positive difference in students' behaviours, but also on our (teachers') behaviours. The project helped us change a bit our approach and focus more on the positive aspect, which is significant. As our effort focuses on rewarding, teachers have to identify to positive aspect of things, since it helps children to feel better. For example, when we praise children by telling them 'Bravo', this helps them to show their best behaviour.
- Among the things that worked particularly well, collaboration of school staff was a significant part of them, due to the fact that we have engaged all members of school staff in the lesson plans' development, as we have been divided into groups and each one group was assigned with the teaching material of a certain behaviour. All teachers were engaged in teaching the social behaviours,

even the people who only taught 1 or 2 days per week at our school. It was clear that ideas exchanged and interest was sparked.

- It was a surprise for us that students demonstrated a great interest to this project and its implementation. Especially on the part of rewarding their behaviour, acquiring a star or a bon-bon for the whole class. It was a surprise for us as well, because we thought that older children may not respond to such a great extent, showing that much interest, but they did.
- As almost 50% of school staff members were new at the school, the SWPBS project helped us in promoting a common culture and school values, and then connect them to our desired social behaviours. So, the project has provided us with a common framework. In addition, it also motivated us to put our common policy for dealing with behaviours in writing, to decide and set a rewarding policy, but also how to handle inappropriate behaviours
- The thing that also worked extremely well was the fact that all teachers, regardless of their status, were engaged in teaching behaviours, so everyone was aware of what we were commonly trying to do. In addition, all students were aware of our common efforts and all teachers were acting in a common way in each classroom. Through the holistic approach we adopted, it helped us to realise the change in students' behaviours.
- The funding you provided to schools was a great factor to support us, as implementation might cost. Therefore, it helped us to get a professional work by a graphic designer in order to create good quality material for our school values and post them around our school.
- The Whole Staff Trainings and School Leadership Team Trainings was an immense help for us. The truth is that teachers need a background, something to start with implementing the project and support colleagues.
- Through the project, our staff worked collectively in order to create a vision, philosophy of discipline and school values. At the same time, our staff worked in an excellent manner through small teams and that was visible from the lesson plans and visual aids created.
- The Training Manual was considered a great asset for the newly arrived staff during the second year of implementation.
- Measures of discipline were established in a very positive manner. Especially during the change of a didactical period or from the break to students moving into the classroom. With the SWPBS project

team's help, teachers taught some routines and social behaviours, which were then rewarded, and teachers could realise a difference from just some days after. This was a very positive element.

- An individual can now enter the school and see a very nice picture with certain routines that all members of school follow effortlessly. Teachers consider this as a great win, since it is something that was missing from the school during last year. The routines that we taught have yielded a robust result, for which teachers feel grateful.
- Teachers that teach subjects such as Music, Science etc. have been benefited greatly by the project implementation. They were always searching for ways to maintain the class' discipline, as the main teacher of the class does, but there was always a gap. With the SWPBS project, all teachers know which methods to use and they are now effective, so things work smoothly.
- A common policy established with the contribution of all school staff members was essential for the schools, which realised a great improvement from the first days of implementation
- Especially the group rewarding has been identified to be working the most.
- Teachers found it very beneficial to have a readily made sample by CARDET and only change
- The Teacher Manual contains a variety of useful information, however personal contact would benefit people the most. Especially newly arrived staff needed personal conversations on the lesson plans developed and whole process followed. It works great as a reference point, followed by conversations.

## Question 2: Please name at least 2 challenges that you faced during the project implementation in your school

The most important challenges mentioned by the educators / Head Teachers with regards to project implementation are the following:

- A big percentage of the school staff swapped to other schools, therefore the new members of the school staff for the second year had to be re-informed on the project and explain them everything. A suggestion was made to repeat the trainings for the second year of implementation to new school staff by the Project Team.

- A considerable challenge was the teachers that substituted other teachers for a certain period of time and Had Teachers had to secure enough time to inform him/her on the project implementation and catch up.
- Teachers are sometimes not very consistent, when they reward students and the teacher responsible for the class has to solve all issues that arise in relation to this (e.g. students might complain). The issue with non-consistent rewarding has been identified for mostly in teachers that visit the schools once or twice a week.
- Not all students like the same rewards after a period of time, so teachers have to change them. This can sometimes cause a small conflict in the classroom.
- Auxiliary staff is sometimes reluctant to participate in any form of educational activities, such as the implementation of the SWPBS project.
- School Leadership Teams met during school time and for some schools, this was a great challenge, since no common free didactical period could be found for all members of the team to meet with the external coach.

### Question 3: What other aspects/issues should be covered by the training manual?

- Maybe a section of questions and answers can be added, which refers to the issues identified by schools during implementation and the proposed solutions they implemented in order to resolve them.
- A shorter version can also be created for the first time one reader gets it in order to find the key things and read the longer version at a second stage.
- A bullet point list that is easy to read could be of excellent use as an introduction.

### Question 4: What additional support do you need, beyond the training manual?

- As implementation goes on, it is pivotal for a school to have an external coach to guide them and provide constant support. Remind the school what needs to be delivered, by when etc. The manual solely is likely not to be a sufficient tool for schools to implement SWPBS.

- The training manual alone, without the opportunity to discuss with other team members, a solid School Leadership Team to coordinate and an external coach available to resolve any issues that arise, are essential.
- Exchanging opinions among colleagues is vital for the project's effectiveness. An online forum for teachers of different schools to exchange their opinions and have open discussions might be a good idea.
- An external coach can provide feedback to teachers and maybe additional recommendations, which is sometimes not very convenient to be done so by other colleagues of the school.
- Teachers cannot always maintain self-control to review unexpected behaviours and plan accordingly for each one, always supported by empirical data and research, together with some practical advice from an external collaborator that supervises the process.
- A prominent answer was that schools need more funding in order to implement more activities widely, design more high-quality material to post around school, invite even more experts to talk and in general, feel more free to invest on the project implementation.
- Teachers mentioned that a better coordination by the school authorities can be a great help for them to work without stress and within the limits of school time.

## Findings from External Coaches

### Question 1: Please name at least 2 things that worked well during the project implementation in your school

The things identified by external coaches that worked well during project implementation are the following:

- The School Team Leadership Team Trainings and Whole School Staff Trainings were essential to guide teachers in implementing SWPBS project in each school.
- The School Leadership Teams acted as a great focal point at schools in order to provide instructions and advice to the rest of the school staff, as well as motivating them and inspiring them.

- During the Whole School Staff Trainings, a lot of clarifying questions were posed by the whole staff and it was very easy and motivating to get aligned.
- Monthly meetings of external coaches and School Leadership Teams were very helpful in coordinating with the team and then think of new ways together to approach an issue.
- The majority of teachers were excited to be participating and implementing the project in their schools. External coaches received a lot of personal messages from teachers that the project had a great impact on the whole school and students' social behaviours.
- There was a great level of collaboration among the external coaches and school teams. Teachers were often eager to hear more about recommendations and instructions. Everything coaches provided to schools was received in a good spirit and followed exactly.
- We realised that, indeed, the SWPBS project yielded positive results in a short period of time.

## Question 2: Please name at least 2 challenges that you faced during the project implementation in your school

The most important challenges mentioned by External Coaches with regards to project implementation are the following:

- A challenge was that there was not a pre-existing good level of collaboration among teachers in schools, when coaches started implementing the approach with them.
- Sometimes the Management Teams of schools were not very present in this effort, resulting in having not so high results as schools that had supportive Management Teams.
- Sometimes, not all teachers believed in this project and participated the least.
- Some school staff members were hesitant for the results and needed more research findings to be convinced on its effectiveness.
- Innovative ways of engaging all members of school staff had to be constantly found, so that the project was implemented in a systemic and systematic way.
- Some cases of teachers wanting to improvise or implement the basic elements of the project 'in their own way' was sometimes a challenge for its effectiveness

- Some teachers with a lot of years of experience are less likely to embrace the project immediately and more likely to be resistant, as they want to follow a more traditional effective way.

### Question 3: What other aspects/issues should be covered by the training manual?

- The training manual contains all information needed. Maybe a more practical version of it would serve teachers more. Specifically, a version with practical tips of how we provide rewards for example, how many etc.

### Question 4: What additional support do you believe that schools need, beyond the training manual?

- The brief practical guide can be provided to auxiliary staff of the school to introduce them to the project smoothly.

### Question 5: What additional support do you believe you need, as an external coach?

- External coaches felt that belong in a team, which provides them with the support they need the most. In addition, they have the opportunity to exchange ideas, resolve concerns and express themselves. Maybe a forum for schools that coaches have access to can help in a smoother implementation, as coaches can have weekly discussions based on the things schools express as concerns. Future coaches can also be trained through that forum.

## Summary

The focus group discussion with a total of 8 educators, Head Teachers and external coaches, was very interesting, yielding a variety of useful conclusions. The conclusions and most important points extracted from the conversation will help the Research Team and External Coaches to improve implementation efforts, together with the schools.

With regards to the most important points that worked well in schools were the great interest shown by students and their great responsiveness to the approach, the way that school staff collaborated together and acted as a team towards achieving a common, the development of a common language and positive school climate, teachers' satisfaction by the external coaches support and guidance, together with the Teacher Manual. Among the most prominent challenges were the limited funding provided, the fact that not all teachers were interested equally in the project implementation and therefore not facilitated the overall process, together with the time required to work on implementing the project. The issue of having an external coach was emphasised a lot by the Head Teachers as a pivotal factor for the implementation's effectiveness in the second year (Group A is not receiving monthly support in Year 2). Two helpful suggestions were to provide additional trainings for the new staff every other year and a more practical form of Teacher Manual, such as formed in bullet points and very brief for a first introduction to the system.