



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

GREEK Piloting Report

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Introduction

On Wednesday 17th of February, an online focus group was implemented for the preparation of the Deliverable 2.4: Piloting Reports for SWPBS Tiers 1, 2 and 3 training manuals. The focus group was organized with the participation of 8 persons. The AUTH scientific host, 1 teacher, 2 school principals, 3 AUTH external coaches and 1 school counselor.

The overall duration of the focus group was 1,5 hours. This report describes in brief the main arguments of all participants for each one of the discussed questions.

Questions to teachers / School Leaders

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

Nikos Petrakidis main arguments:

- Positive reaction and engagement of students. They participate enthusiastically and with great seriousness in the positive reward system, which in turn results in an important change and improvement of their behaviors in the classroom.
- These positive results are encouraging the teachers of the school to expand the implementation of the PBS approach in the rest of the school premises (e.g. schoolyard, corridors) as well.
- The teachers are seeing the children, after they were taught the lesson plans for the specific social behaviors to “filter” and to self-regulate their actions and their behaviors much more. Something that had never seen till then. This applies especially for the 3rd and 4th grade and less in the 1st and 2nd grade. In the last two grades the level of internalization of the procedure is much slower and with greater resistance.

- The systematic implementation of the positive reward system from all the teachers it is helping significantly the individual behavior of students, even the more “difficult to cope with” ones.
- The teachers are attesting that the positive shift and change of individual behaviors in most children is resulting in improved classroom climates overall for almost all the school classrooms.
- They are also mentioning that they are experiencing a “clearer” and more uninterrupted “teaching time” since they have to deal less frequently with behavioral issues.
- For the students of fifth grade some teachers reported that children seem to internalize the procedures and even act as facilitators or trainers in some occasions. For example, they are seeing children encourage their classmates to positive behaviors, something the teachers had not seen before.
- Another thing that worked well is the shift from individual teachers’ practices to a common framework and way of coping with behaviors and with rewarding specific behaviors. The adaptation on behalf of teachers of a common approach is happening for the first time and it is helping both the teachers and the school unit overall.
- A very important positive outcome is that instead of only talking and dealing with teaching specific cognitive domains, now the teachers are also focusing on teaching social skills and social behaviors. Social behaviors are now the content of teaching and teachers are training children on them and so they can achieve much more positive outcomes on this issue.

Anastasia Kafetzopoulou main arguments:

- One immediate positive result is the improvement of cooperation among the whole teaching staff or with specific colleagues.
- We saw very impressive results and mature behaviors in the small grades, first and second. For example children are applauding and cheering for their classmates when they display positive behaviors and they get a positive reward.
- The vision that the school adopted seems to function as a positive motivator for the children, even more than external and materialistic rewards.
- All the participating teachers are reporting positive results, some to a large extend and some to a lesser.

- Apart from the improved classroom management, I have noticed (especially for my classroom which is the first grade) that children seem to have a much-improved integration and adaptation to the school environment and life.
- At an individual level we see older children redefining their relationships and adopt also behavioral criteria regarding the social and positive behaviors of the children.
- We see more introvert and difficult children finding a way to engage and contribute to the group positive reward goals.
- The majority of the teachers seem to comprehend what a positive influence the collective implementation of the PBS approach can have.
- We are also learning to cooperate and work together in a much more effective way.

Kostas Psychloudis main arguments:

- All schools have an internal regulation for behavior problems, but the implementation of the regulation was individualized and was being made in an informal way. The implementation of the manuals and the project helped significantly in the homogenization of the way teachers cope with the behavior problems. The PBS approach functions as a compass for all the teachers, we discuss the various issues altogether and even exchange strategies on what to do. So all this is significantly boosting the overall school climate.
- Despite the gradual level of acceptance of the approach, nowadays both teachers and students are more pleased because there is an immediate and direct feedback and positive reward system for each effort and behavior.
- We were not expecting that children would react like this and enjoy it so much and this reflects also in the overall school community. It is already being acknowledged by the teachers too.
- We are slowly adding the second and third values to increase the positive results even more.

QUESTION 2: Please name at least 2 challenges that you faced during the project development and implementation (excluding COVID-19)

Nikos Petrakidis main arguments:

-The first important challenge relates with the slow reaction/acceptance rhythms of teaching staff in the rural schools. In these small schools the staff is usually permanent and very few changes occur in the staff roster. This eventually creates a stagnation with the staff having difficulties in adopting easily changes or new approaches. Stereotypes, practices and attitudes are formed and not easily flipped. And suddenly the PBS project arrives placing the teaching of social skills in the epicenter of attention. This created a turbulence and some teachers displayed resistance in accepting to adopt a new approach.

-Our educational system and the teaching staff is accustomed in changes only occurring from the top hierarchy, directly from the ministry. In our occasion, the project arrived and gave the freedom and the autonomy to teach social skills and to have the teaching staff decide autonomously about the school vision and the values.

-The collective change in a school unit starts from the individual change of the teacher. Such a change is not easy and does not occur immediately. It requires discussion, time, persuasion and training. This was an important challenge we faced.

-This change also meant that practically teachers had to take time from teaching the various domains and devote it to the teaching of social skills. This is rather unusual for teachers who are not accustomed to such a practice. There were reactions and resistance from teachers and slowly with discussion, cooperation we succeeded to initiate the gradual change.

-Regarding the students' part, another difficulty was the active engagement of students of fifth and especially sixth grade in the PBS approach. In the older students we expect at least a partial improvement and not an overall change of behavior. It takes more time for older children for change to occur. But the other grades are already showing impressive results.

-Another challenge for teachers is to continue to implement the PBS approach and enhance it in the years to follow, after the completion of the project. The knowledge that is acquired, to continue to utilize it in our teaching practices. This would be the most impressive result to have in the future.

-I would like to give an example for a specific student who was always a target of negative comments and observations. With the beginning of the PBS project, like a magic touch, he changed and is trying to get a

positive reward and to follow the specific behaviors. It is like it became clearer to him what is expected of him and what he should do. The stopping of negative comments and rewards and the systematic positive support helped this student to find a way for getting positive attention.

Anastasia Kafetzopoulou main arguments:

-An important challenge we faced in our school was the retirement of our school principal who was the heart of the project's implementation. The role of the principal, especially for the first steps of introducing the project and encouraging the teaching staff, is considered very important and this change of school principal rocked our boat a little. We had to swim in deep waters in this transition.

-Another important challenge is the active and systematic engagement of all the members of the school leadership team throughout the project's implementation. It is a collective project and the members of the leadership team can contribute immensely by talking with the colleagues and assisting them.

-In relation with this challenge, some specialty teachers who arrived this year in the school did not participate in the project, based on the argument that they move around different schools (to complete their teaching hours) and they can't implement the approach effectively.

-I will agree with the difficulty in the implementation of the PBS approach in the older students. Results are more limited in the older students. The two most common behavior problems was impulsive behaviors and not listening to the teacher.

-In addition, some teachers were hesitating to adopt materialistic positive rewards, so they cooperated and adopted nonmaterialistic rewards, that they feel they work much better.

-Another issue for discussion is the procedure we follow to give the positive rewards. Some teachers prefer to distribute them in the end of the teaching hour and they feel this decreases the interruptions of the teaching.

Kostas Psychloudis main arguments:

-The main problem was that some teachers were cautious in the beginning to accept the PBS project because they are not eager to adopt changes and also they are thinking if the additional workload would be excessive.

- Another difficulty was to manage to sync all teachers to meet and discuss our progress. This is a practical difficulty, that we managed to face with teleconferences during the covid-19 lockdown.
- In our school we have 29 teachers and only half of them is permanent in the school. The other 15 are coming on an annual basis and the homogeneity of the staff is rather low.
- A challenge we faced was the exaggerating enthusiasm of some students who were so actively engaged with the PBS and positive rewards that for example they cleaned their desk (keeping my desk and classroom clean is one value for this school) 3 to 4 times the day. On the other hand, I confirm that the older children are more difficult engaged in the PBS approach.

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

Nikos Petrakidis main arguments:

-We feel that the use of stamps as positive rewards instead of tokens, and their administration at the end of the teaching hour are more effective for the PBS approach. We propose to include this practice in the implementation procedure. This way no teacher can claim that the tokens exchange is “stealing” teaching time and adds more workload.

Anastasia Kafetzopoulou main arguments:

-For the first grades I think the use of tokens is equally effective. We have envelopes on the wall and we place them there and the children always have their mind on their progress by checking on their envelope. In addition, we practiced using the hands sterilization liquid and cleaning our hands each time we touch and use the tokens, so in a way it worked as a hygiene routine too.

Kostas Psychloudis main arguments:

-One suggestion is to propose the use of stamps as rewards from the beginning and not only due to the covid 19 restrictions. We have seen that it is easier to apply, more practical and easy to measure and does not interrupt the teaching procedure, when you administer a quick stamp. It is easier to measure at the end of the day and the week the student’s card with the stamps.

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

Nikos Petrakidis main arguments:

- We would like to hear more things about the second level prevention in order to be prepared for it.
- Another materialistic support would be to be able to purchase an A3 printer so that we could print the project's materials on our own.
- We would also welcome a wider training, not only for the project's scope, but for the overall classroom management techniques as well.

Anastasia Kafetzopoulou main arguments:

- One proposal would be to expand the implementation of the PBS approach in the full-day school program as well.
- We would like too to have additional trainings regarding the overall behavior problems issues. The project indeed gave us ample information and a framework, but teachers tend to wait simple information and not read the accompanying materials.
- We would like to have additional lesson plans in our disposal so that teachers could select prepared lesson plans.
- We would like to have access to software licenses that we need in teaching (e.g. software to create cartoons).

Kostas Psychloudis main arguments:

- We would like to have a wider range of prepared lesson plans so that teachers can choose what is more suitable to the needs and characteristics of their classrooms. And also lesson plans that would be differentiated according to the age of students. A lesson plan could be created at two levels. One for the first grades and one for the last ones.

Questions to external coaches

QUESTION 1: Please name at least 2 things that worked well during the project implementation with the schools you worked with

Argyris Theodosiou main arguments:

-I have a 20-year experience in public primary schools and I was really impressed with the interest of the teachers and their mood for cooperation and to learn about the project and how to implement the PBS approach. I didn't expect such a positive acceptance of the project.

Nikos Tsigilis main arguments:

-I confirm what Argyris Theodosiou is saying. Teachers have worked with creativity and energy in the preparation and the implementation of the PBS approach. To be honest, I expected a bigger teachers' percentage who would be hesitant and resistant to apply the PBS approach. It is relatively expected that initially they would be hesitant, but the results on the contrary are very impressive.

Thodoros Goutas main arguments:

-I agree with what the colleagues have mentioned. I also want to stress the positive level of cooperation among the teachers and the special domains staff (e.g. special education, foreign languages, physical education teachers). In some schools the special domains teachers have contributed significantly in the production of the educational materials and in the implementation of the project.

-Even an initial hesitance regarding the positive rewards system, after we explained that it is a reward and not a "bribe" or a "buy out", it was easily adopted by the teachers.

-Another positive issues is the impressive variety and quality of the means used to produce the educational materials for the intervention. Both teachers and children are cooperating with a great creativity in the production of the materials to upload in the project's website.

Ioannis Trikkaliotis main arguments:

-A very important thing to mention is that we focused in the training procedure and in the initial contacts with the schools to the adequate understanding on behalf of the school principals of the goals and the

rationale of the PBS approach. The manual and the presentations helped significantly to enhance the principals' understanding and acceptance of the project. This worked as the initial spark for the persuasion of the rest of the teaching staff and the leadership teams. I think this is a critical point that facilitates the decrease of resistance from the teachers in the implementation of the project.

-In a way, the PBS approach creates a paradigm shift in the schools and the contribution of the school principals is significant towards this direction.

QUESTION 2: Please name at least 2 challenges that you faced during the project implementation with the schools you worked with

Argyris Theodosiou main arguments:

-There are two main challenges for the implementation of the project. (a) The first has to do with the required change of perspective and readiness on behalf of the teachers to observe and detect the positive behaviors. We are more used and accustomed to negative comments and observations and this attention shift is not easy to occur. Focusing on positive behaviors and supporting them with positive rewards is a procedure that requires focus and energy on behalf of the teacher to implement it correctly. This was a challenge both for me to convince and train the teachers and also for the teachers to transfer it to the actual educational practices in the classroom. (b) The second challenge is the autonomy and the levels of "freedom" in teaching practices that the PBS project grants to the teachers. This was, initially, a fear of mine, regarding how the teachers would manage to cope with such a level of autonomy, that they are not used at. However, on the long run, I noticed that it helps them internalize the rationale and the goals of the project easier and faster.

Nikos Tsigilis main arguments:

-One important challenge is how the implementation of the intervention will function, when we add more values and behaviors and attempt to expand it. For such an expansion to work, it is important to empower teachers and reconfirm their full comprehension of the project's rationale and methods.

- Another challenge that I am expecting, and we still haven't met, is the expected slowing down of the effective results we are all witnessing now in classrooms. As the intervention will continue, the results will

start to slow their rhythm and teachers must be prepared to rejuvenate the children's interest in the whole procedure. For example, small groups support and individualized support could also prove to be valuable aids for the teachers.

Thodoros Goutas main arguments:

- An important challenge is the resistance we found, especially in some rural schools, from the parents of children regarding their participation in the project and the pre and post measures. Additional attention must be spent to the way that the project's goals, content and rationale is communicated to the parents.
- The other important challenge is to protect the "heritage" of the project and to help teaching staff that is new to understand the benefits of the PBS approach.

QUESTION 3: What other aspects/issues do you believe should be covered by the training manual?

Argyris Theodosiou main arguments:

- An additional issue that could be covered in the trainings would be how teachers can cope when problem behaviors or difficult incidents occur.

Nikos Tsigilis main arguments:

- If the time and resources were available we could add more trainings regarding difficult students and how to deal with them.

Ioannis Trikkaliotis main arguments:

- The cooperation with schools to continue the enhancement of a classroom management framework in the schools would be a very useful addition in the training.

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

Thodoros Goutas main arguments:

- It is important to have a mechanism prepared for bridging the gap in the years to follow among the staff that is already trained and have knowledge of the PBS approach, and the colleagues that will arrive afresh in the schools and will not know about it.

Ioannis Trikkaliotis main arguments:

-It is pretty clear that the PBS approach constitutes a “paradigm shift” for the schools and the attitudes of teachers. So this means that each teacher needs to reflect on their priorities and their teaching goals. An additional support to more individualized way of implementing the PBS approach could prove to be useful.

-Regarding the tokens and the stamps, I would like to highlight the need to provide the positive rewards immediate after a positive behavior and with an adequate explanation about the “why”.

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

Nikos Tsigilis main arguments:

-Since we are implementing Tier 1, one possible issue could be that some children will not adapt and engage fully in the PBS approach. Both trainers and teaches must be prepared to support these children at the second and third level of support and prevention.

Thodoros Goutas main arguments:

-I would like to mention again the additional support that is required regarding the effective briefing of parents about the PBS project’s content and goals. This would result in parents accepting more easily their child’s participation in it.

Summary

The focus group with the eight participants of the project (teachers, school principals, external coaches, school counselor) was very fruitful and revealed various significant issues for discussion.

Among the various positive points that were mentioned, participants focused mainly on the significant results that teachers are already describing in the classrooms of schools from the experimental group (Group A) and the improvement of cooperation among teachers.

From the various challenges described during the discussion, two points were the most central. The first related to the difficulty to engage more actively the older students of sixth grade. The second that there were some teachers who were cautious in the adoption of the PBS approach and displayed resistance in participating.

Regarding additional support several issues were mentioned. Some of the focused on the need to further expand the trainings to additional topics about classroom management issues and to provide extra practices for dealing with negative behaviors.

Suggestions were also made for the inclusion of the use of stamps as positive rewards system, not only for the covid 19 era, but in general for the SWPBS training manuals.