

COP MEETING 6 NOVEMBER 2019 PHILIPPI VILLAGE

LEARNING BRIEF: COMMUNICATING THE COLLECTIVE IMPACT OF AFTER SCHOOL

This learning brief was produced by The Learning Trust in partnership with the After School Programme Office, which drives After School programming as a priority project of the Western Cape Government. The brief emerged following the last Community of Practice (CoP) meeting held in 2019, which marked the 12th CoP organized by the partners, since they started in 2016.

Active story-telling and sharing in various mediums, environments, and online platforms has been frequently upheld as the best method to communicate the value of the After School sector. This rhetoric has been popularised alongside the quantitative evidence that would support the sector in building a stronger case.

As a follow-up to the previous CoP (21 Aug '19) that focused on the importance of Monitoring & Evaluation systems for After School Programmes (ASPs), this CoP looked to explore the different ways that organisations could make use of their M&E data and results to communicate the collective impact of ASPs on learner development and education outcomes. This collective effort would then contribute to making the case for investment into the After School sector and better leveraging resources.



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One of the overarching aims of the CoP meetings has been to create an open space of networking, sharing and rich learning for the community of organisations involved in extended learning programmes. Recognising that we all fall under the umbrella of After School and share common goals around success and development that drive our work, it becomes easier to envision how such a community can build a collective case for the impact of its long-term work and efforts.

A BUILDING THE CASE

With over 120 000 NGOs operating across the country, the network of organisations running extended learning programmes continues to grow. There has been a number of efforts to ‘map’ these initiatives working in education (e.g. EduCollaborate, the CEI, etc.). Most recently, the National Association for Social Change Entities in Education (NASCEE) has indicated an effort to ‘build the database’, and Rand Merchant Bank is currently building a platform to match education non-profits with donors. To match these efforts, it’s important for us to be aware of the networks within our own local contexts, by performing a mapping exercise to better understand how our work fits into the bigger picture. A simple mapping exercise can help your organisation to identify;

- Who else is working in and around the communities where you run your ASPs?
- What kind of intervention or support do they provide?
- Who benefits from their programmes?
- Are there links or correlations between your organisation’s programme area and target groups, and the others operating in your community?

The value of this information is to better coordinate efforts towards data collection. That is, because building a case is usually strengthened by quantity and scale, having a network of organisations tracking the performance of overlapping target groups within one large community makes a stronger case for impact than the singular results of your organisation’s M&E. The easiest and best indicator to monitor is ‘learner attendance’ which informs participation rates and can be extrapolated to indicate whether a programme is;

- 1 Creating a safe space;
- 2 Achieving its intended outcomes; and
- 3 Meeting learners’ developmental needs.

When we begin to intentionally coordinate our data collection efforts by monitoring and collecting the same indicators and data, we can begin to conduct a sector-wide analysis. This would

- inform the development of best-practice,
- improve our programme design,
- enhance the impact of After School,
- strengthen the case for the sector, and ultimately,
- drive further investment into the sector

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Some ASP outcomes are easier to measure than others (e.g. passing matric vs increased creative expression), but indicators such as staying in school and passing a grade can be proxies for objectives such as increased self-knowledge, confidence, or resilience. The ASP sector comprises many different initiatives working to achieve a range of objectives for learners across all grades in extremely varied ways. However, it can be argued that for a sector aiming to enrich learners’ educational experience, inspiring and supporting learners to stay in school and pass each grade is an overarching goal.

B SUPPORTING THE CASE

While we raise awareness of the impact of After School Programmes, it's equally important that we are aware of the external efforts that exist on a regional and national scale. Staying abreast of the research work around the Education and After School sector allows us to better understand the broader outcomes that our work feeds into, and strengthens the case of our impact on a national scale. For instance, **DG Murray Trust** has done extensive research into the increased level of drop-out rates in our education system. The results are startling, as they show that “for every 100 learners who start Grade 1, about 40 drop out of the school system before reaching Grade 12”. This research has informed their **Zero DropOut** initiative that is working in partnership with various organisations across the country to implement interventions that essentially result in Zero Dropout figures over a period of time.

Thanks to initiatives like the **New Leaders Foundation's Early Warning System**, it is possible to identify learners at risk of dropping out, and track their enrolment over time. The Early Warning System categorises learners into three groups, indicating the urgency with which they need an intervention in order to keep them in school. This is an important first step towards a much-needed tool that can identify learners needing particular kinds of interventions. On the one hand, this information can be

used to inform which learners would most benefit from various kinds of ASP offerings. On the other hand, it can support the case for the ways in which your organisation's ASPs contribute to reducing this number, if you have the collective attendance data that speaks to this impact.

Local organisations such as **IkamvaYouth** and **OLICO**, running ASPs that focus on academic support, are great examples of organisations that have taken advantage of using existing data to support the impact of their work. Both have done comparative assessments between the matric learners attending their ASPs and the average matric results from quintiles 1-3, revealing major differences in favour of ASP interventions. That is, the learners that had attended the ASPs outperformed those that did not receive such interventions by large margins. This speaks volumes of the efforts that can go into quantifying the time and money it takes for ASPs to work with learners in direct and tailored ways.

The key take-away here is that our sector is large and continues to grow, and so is the advocacy around its impact. With that comes the opportunity to see how your ASP goals best align with the issues in the spotlight of advocacy, in order to support the case of your organisation's broader impact.



C**MAKING THE CASE**

Just as the main funders of the ASP sector – mainly foundations and corporates – are currently fragmented in their areas of support, so too is our sector’s efforts in making the collective impact case on a national scale. Once we can agree on common impact goals – that ties to national priorities, spans different ASP pillars and grades, and requires minimal data collection and capacity – then we can make a case that can attract public and private investment. Grade repetition costs the system at least R20bn, with school-drop out costing another R4bn. By collecting large attendance data sets through our ASP networks and using SA-SAMS and the **DDD** (Data Driven Districts) dashboard to track learner profile, attendance and performance at school, it is possible to measure the impact of ASPs on grade repetition and drop-out.

Once such data is collated by our sector, a communications strategy and stakeholder mapping become key in raising the visibility of ASPs impact. This begins with building a common language and culture around the After School sector, one that is recognisable and understood by all stakeholders, from parents to foundations, corporates and government. The **Afterschool Alliance** in the U.S. is a great example of an entity that has managed to enhance the visibility and understanding of the After School space and its purpose. Through their partnership with the Mott Foundation, the Alliance captures the work, framework and methodologies used by ASPs for broader sharing and advocacy efforts.

Along with this, the Alliance launched Lights On After School in October of 2000, to bring awareness to the importance of ASPs in the U.S. This has drawn attention to the many ways ASPs support students by offering them opportunities to learn new things. The effort generates media coverage across the country each year, with the campaigns sending a powerful message that millions of more kids need quality ASPs. The magnitude of the efforts, spanning over two decades and culminating in the grand country-wide celebrations, has done a lot to prove that #AfterSchoolWorks!

The Learning Trust has adopted this AfterSchoolWorks hashtag to begin driving social media campaigns that will increase awareness of After School opportunities and their impact. To support this effort, After School organisations are encouraged to participate in the campaign by using the hashtag on social media platforms to promote their work and share results from their evaluations.



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CONCLUSION

The After School Sector is a bridge to networks, opportunity and access for learners in our country who need it the most. But above all, by engaging diverse learner needs, After School contributes to reducing drop-out and absenteeism rates, keeping children and youth at school. Sadly, given the lack of coherence and collaboration in data availability and collection, it is almost impossible to know how many learners attending quintile 1 to 3 schools currently have access to and are enrolled in ASPs. If we are to raise awareness and advocate for resource investment into this underfunded sector, we must begin to collectively prioritise the attendance data we collect in our programmes to strengthen the evidence of our impact.

RESOURCES AND LINKS

- **Educollaborate: Mapping of schools, resources, ASPs, and CEMIS**
- **New Leaders Foundation: DDD Tool for NGOs and schools**
- **DGMT: Research on school drop out and the ZeroDropOut Campaign**
- **Afterschool Alliance: Resources and Tools for Advocacy**
- **The Learning Trust: Access to previous Learning Briefs**

