



Knowledge hub
-
Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

Journeys

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Uganda and (partially) Tanzania

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

RTI international

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

(1) School Climate/Learning Environment (Primary Schools, mostly rural or peri-urban); (2) SRGBV Prevention (e.g., bullying, corporal punishment, sexual violence in and around schools); (3) Gender Discrimination Norms; (4) Power Relations; (5) Explicit Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Programming; (6) Teacher SEL; (7) Complex Adaptive Systems Framework; (8) Awareness-Based Systems Change; (9) Reflective Approaches; (10) School Staff Advocacy during Journeys Meetings; (11) Community Dialogue; (12) Explicit SEL Programming; (13) Collective Action Research (staff, community groups, student groups); (14) Reporting, Referral and Response (Village Child Case Management Committee); (15) Government Ownership and Policy established to make Journeys mandatory in all primary schools

6. What makes it a best practice? *

From a longitudinal mixed methods research trial (after one year) with controls provide evidence for (1) reduced corporal punishment; (2) reduced multiple times bullying prevalence for boys; (3) emerging evidence of SEL improvement when combining quantitative results (higher gains in SEL but very slow effect size and no statistical significant (>.10) differences) and qualitative findings (very strong and consistent comments from teachers and learners on improved relational dynamics in schools, more student participation, more reporting, and many other qualitative findings related to SE competencies, kindness, friendliness, mutual support etc.; Also see Georgetown Case Study on Journeys Process for improving Gender Norms

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

The Journeys Program focuses on improving the learning environment as a pathway for enhancing social and emotional and academic learning and eliminating violence against children in schools (VACiS). Co-designed with a broad base of Ugandan educators, Journeys was developed under the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (2015-2021) in partnership with the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and was implemented by RTI International. The goal of this partnership was to achieve systemwide improvements in early reading outcomes and to eliminate violence against children in primary schools. With this dual purpose, the Activity placed the school climate in a central position for achieving these goals, which is communicated in the Activity's theory of change:

"If life at school is characterized by a violence-free, positive, and supportive school climate and has effective instruction, then students will enjoy learning and participate in class without fear of humiliation or punishment, remain in school throughout the primary cycle and succeed in their schoolwork."

The theory of change highlights the bi-directional relationships between key aspects of the learning ecosystem and the desired attributes of a positive school and classroom climate, which come together to support student wellbeing and learning. These are: school culture and climate; the instructional culture and classroom climate; and an engaged and connected community. When the influences of the social eco-system are positive, children feel safe from physical or psychological harm in their schools and the patterns of interactions and relationships in the school provide ample opportunity for social and emotional learning (SEL). In the classroom, all children feel included and supported by their teachers. When school and classroom life echo these characteristics, children have a sense of wellbeing at school and in their classrooms and social, emotional, and academic learning flourish.

The Journeys approach consists of awareness-building activities that are centered around four social themes: positive and supportive schools; physical and emotional safety; social norms and inclusion; and social and emotional learning. School staff, students, or community members are involved in a variety of activities that build awareness about these social themes through guided reflections and dialogue, a variety of interactive games, storytelling, visual arts, and drama. Results after one year of exposure showed statistically significant results in reducing corporal punishment and reduced multiple-times bullying prevalence. Qualitative findings supported improved relational dynamics between and among teachers and pupils; more participation; and pro-social behavior.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?

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Based on an Awareness-Based Systems Change model, the Journeys activities engage school staff, students, and community members in a variety of activities including guided reflections and dialogue, a variety of interactive games, storytelling, visual arts, and drama, and group projects. The activities are led by school-based or community based facilitators in weekly staff meetings, extracurricular student team meetings, and community dialogues. Targeted groups work through 35-38 activities focusing on each of the themes: positive and supportive schools; physical and emotional safety; social norms and inclusion; and social and emotional learning. These are all available online in separate Activity Handbooks for Staff, Students, and Community Members. (See <https://shared.rti.org>).

Key to the success of the program are the Journeys Facilitation Principles:

- Listen to the voices of participants and avoid talking too much and lecturing
- Understand the attitudes, behaviors, and perspectives of others, without judging
- Allow staff, student, and community members to make meaning from the activities and discussions themselves rather than telling them what they should know, think, and do.
- Encourage shared responsibility in establishing a safe and positive school rather than transferring the responsibility to others or blaming.

Teacher facilitators or “school change agents” facilitate the school staff Journeys meetings. All staff are expected to participate in the weekly or twice-monthly meetings, which are placed on the school timetable.

Students are assigned to one of about 25 teams (Uganda Kids Unite or “UKU” teams) in each school and are facilitated by a “teacher patron”. All teachers in a school receive a total of six days of training (staggered across the school year) on the Journeys facilitation methods and the role of the UKU Teacher Patron. Each teacher hosts one of the UKU teams in the school, as the team’s Teacher Patron. The UKU teams consist of a mix of 25 students, including a mix of boys and girls from Grades 3 - 7. The student program integrates social and emotional learning into each activity.

Approximately 20-30 community members meet weekly in community dialogues hosted by community leaders or “community change agents” who have also received a week-long training on the Journeys facilitation methods and community activities.

Journeys was implemented in partnership with the MOES in 2,869 primary schools in 43 districts from 2016 – 2021 (under the USAID funded LARA project).

Budget costs include: training, printing of the activity handbooks, and consumables for schools and communities (flipchart, markers...)

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

The project was transformative in that it became policy and a mandatory program for all primary schools in Uganda under the Ministry mandate. Qualitative findings - structured qualitative research in schools and informal feedback from higher level officers - suggest the transformative potential of this project in shifting priorities to include the learning environment and social and emotional learning alongside academic learning outcomes. The Journeys Case Study from Georgetown University speaks to the processes of transformation related to enhanced understanding about gender norms and demonstrated shifts in thinking about this. See <https://irh.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Passages-LARA-Case-Study.pdf>. Formal qualitative findings in a mixed model study longitudinal trial of the program after one year underscored that in many schools there had been a transformation of the social dynamics in the school (between and among students, teachers, and parents) described with some of the following (abbreviated) comments, "friendlier, kinder, more teamwork, helping each other, new brighter relationships between older and younger students, boys and girls, and teachers across grades. Corporal punishment prevalence was reduced compared to control schools and statistically significant and (only boys') experience of "multiple-times bullying prevalence" was reduced compared to controls. Yes, assessment completed through a longitudinal case control trial but unfortunately, had to be discontinued after one year due to COVID. Program is still ongoing as it is a MOES activity.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

(1) The approach leverages core aspects of any complex adaptive social system to establish a positive shift in the school environment. Personal reflection of past experience in each of the content areas followed by discussion with peers and a variety of interactive games and art provide the catalyst for change (2) In violence prevention, one cannot "teach" or "train". Adults and children - through reflection, discussion, games, and art - discover the basis for and impact of violence against children themselves and develop the courage to change their beliefs and behavior, influence others to do the same, and navigate their world everyday to prevent violence. (3) We learned that the concept and practice of "facilitation" does not come natural to teachers and key facilitative principles given by Journeys takes care, support, and practice to develop during TOTs. (4) The core objectives/messages of each activity need to be understood and reinforced during TOT and local facilitation, allowing some flexibility and autonomy among local facilitators. The goal is that the principles underlying Journeys become the normal way of being and doing at the school to shift the social dynamics of the school toward interactions that are caring. This involves enabling school change to happen and be maintained through the emergent change that takes place during frequent opportunities for social networking around the thematic content; for example, the structuring of no-cost and regular opportunities for interactions about the social content and new practices (e.g., meetings, communities of learning, community dialogues, and learner support groups). (5) Measurement is usually inadequate to surface the nuances of social interaction that lead to change. Conventional analyses such as mean group comparisons fail to surface the nature of change among agent interactions that are required to understand and catalyze change in the school and instructional culture.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

The Journeys program teaches us how powerful it is to help teachers see the impact that cross-generational beliefs and practices have on the wellbeing and learning of students. The sensitivity of individuals to past events and the evolution of culture is one core principle of any complex adaptive social system that can be leveraged to prevent violence. Making this a deliberate leverage of the intervention can powerfully support participants’ understanding of violence and how to prevent it. Most violence prevention programs involve a strong element of peer discussion and interactive processes, but these opportunities (e.g., in a single static training program) may fail to establish the school structures that keep these interactions alive (i.e., school structures for regular staff, teacher-student, community, and student peer interactions). This is a necessary aspect of social behavior and norm change. Journeys established a minimum of one full year of staff meetings, student support team meetings, and community dialogues (often spread out over two years). This enabled the establishment of social networks and ongoing interactions that are needed to allow school change to emerge organically through individual interaction and self-organization. This element of the intervention also helped establish the empirical and social expectations needed for shifting norms. As individuals interact with each other and their environment, they continuously change and adapt their beliefs and behaviors as a result. This is a core principle of any complex adaptive system, and it can be leveraged for social change. Finally, as this important field of work evolves, better measurement and analyses need to also evolve. New methods such as agent-based-modeling (ABM) and social network analysis (SNA) can be used in conjunction with conventional linear approaches that focus on aggregate population measures that fail to detect the lower-level interactions that give meaning to systems change.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

<https://ierc-publicfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/public/resources/Journeys%20is%20policy-%20%20Mandatory%20circular.pdf> ; https://ierc-publicfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/public/resources/Journeys%20for%20Pupils%2093_Print_4_3_shared.pdf ; <https://shared.rti.org/content/journeys-activity-handbook-community-members> ; https://ierc-publicfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/public/resources/Schools_EXPORT_53_NO_STAMP.pdf ; <http://bit.ly/nissembrief11> ; <https://irh.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Passages-LARA-Case-Study.pdf> ; https://ierc-publicfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/public/resources/Longitudinal%20Baseline%20Report%20Occasion%20001_November%201_2019_0.pdf : <https://shared.rti.org/content/literacy-achievement-and-retention-activity-uganda-school-related-gender-based-violence> ; <https://shared.rti.org/content/longitudinal-briefer> Note: Draft of Journeys White Paper and Methodological Framework is in draft and would be happy to share if desiired at erandolph@rti.org (Elizabeth Randolph, RTI International)