Teachers’ and HoDs’ accountability on curriculum coverage: PILO’s contribution to the theory of change in education

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Introduction to PILO and its Theory of Change

The Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes (PILO hereafter), an education NGO, started the Jika iMfundo improvement campaign in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) in 2014 as a large-scale provincial educational intervention whose form and focus were rather different from those of other Provincial Departments. Jika iMfundo is holistic in its targets – to improve the work of districts, Principals, School Management Teams (SMTs), Heads of Department (HoDs) and teachers in more than 1000 primary schools in two KZN districts. It aims at improving the curriculum coverage in these schools and is based on the belief that such long-term sustainable intervention requires the development of a collegial professional culture in the education system.

PILO’s philosophy is to encourage all stakeholders at school and district level to work together more professionally, to develop new relationships and practices which will assist in improving coverage of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS). PILO is committed to providing capacity building to shift the practices of these stakeholders and make them accountable to each other to foster reciprocal accountability.

This chapter examines one part of the program that focuses on HoDs and teachers. In particular, we examine how the forms of internal reciprocal accountability expected from HoDs and teachers take shape on the ground in a selection of primary schools in the King Cetshwayo rural district of KZN. We unpack the conceptualisation of this
part of the program and analyse the perceptions of HoDs and teachers (who are the core stakeholders in this model of change) regarding the components of the Jika iMfundo Campaign that address their professional relationships and practices: the professional form of HoD monitoring; teachers’ use of curriculum planners and trackers; teachers’ mandated reflections; and the nature of the professional conversations between HoDs and teachers leading to professional development (PD) actions.

Our hypothesis is that there is a challenging tension in the conceptualisation of this part of the program that focuses on HoDs and teachers with the aim of promoting internal reciprocal accountability in a thousand schools in contexts where expertise is lacking and resources are constrained. This tension arises because the programme expects to develop a new monitoring process for developmental purposes which is fair, transparent and effective and to build a supportive collegial and professional culture in schools with teachers and HoDs who have not yet themselves mastered a certain degree of organisational and professional capacity. How can HoDs, who have insufficient professional knowledge, quickly adopt a totally new supportive monitoring role and have collegial professional conversations with their teachers to understand the professional development that is needed to improve curriculum coverage? Conversely, how can teachers start to reflect professionally on their teaching strengths and weaknesses without direct training and capacity-building exercises from knowledge experts? We suggest that this tension is structural – it is built into the conceptualisation of this part of the program – and will play out in specific ways when implemented in a poor social school context. This tension is exacerbated by the scope and scale of the Jika iMfundo intervention, mobilised by PILO, which targets the institutional culture and practices of HoDs and teachers in a thousand schools in two KZN districts with rather limited resources.

In this chapter, we explore how this structural tension has played out, drawing on PILO data from a sample of primary schools in one of the two districts involved in the Jika iMfundo intervention. Our analysis suggests that HoDs in the research sample managed the structural tension by providing supportive monitoring which was broad and generic at the expense of providing specific instructional support targeted at the level of teacher practices; whereas teachers managed the tension by complying with what they saw as the main expectation which is better curriculum coverage. The chapter shows that, at this stage of the Jika iMfundo intervention, structural constraints, as well as the magnitude of the scope of the Jika iMfundo project, have tended to give rise to compliant behaviour at the expense of deep reflection on what learners find difficult and why and what support teachers need in order to support learners.

**Research processes**

The data used in this chapter were collected by PILO from 100 sampled schools in the King Cetshwayo KZN district where PILO worked. PILO conducted a school review with HoDs and teachers in November 2015 and a school survey of curriculum coverage.
in August 2016. The 2015 school reviews were based on interviews with teachers and HoDs about the teachers’ use of the trackers and the relationships of HoDs and the Deputy Principal, while the 2016 curriculum coverage surveys consisted of interviews with HoDs on the teachers’ use of trackers as well as their improved curriculum coverage. For our analysis, we used the PILO data from the 40 primary schools in the King Cetshwayo district. There were some similar questions in these two school surveys about the use of trackers, although the 2016 curriculum coverage surveys also included questions on curriculum coverage. This means that, at the time of writing, there were only two sets of large-scale school data that were partly comparable over time. The PILO data were mainly about the perceptions of HoDs and teachers and that, even though they had to substantiate them with some hard evidence, survey responses depended on HoDs’ interpretation of the evidence they saw.

To supplement this perceptual data, we collected some “hard evidence” from a sample of six primary schools in one of the rural districts of KZN, representative of PILO’s grading system: one “green” school (schools that work well); three “amber” schools (schools that are progressing gradually) and two “red” schools (schools that are not progressing much). We asked each of the PILO coaches of these six schools to collect documents from two teachers teaching Grade 3 English Literacy as FAL, since this is a key subject at Grade 3 given that English becomes the LoLT by Grade 4. We received a large set of curriculum planners and trackers from 2015, 2016 and term one of 2017 (covering nine school terms), filled in by 12 Grade 3 teachers of English as FAL from the six sampled schools (around 150 filled pages with teacher reflections at the bottom). Our analysis focused mainly on the complete set of nine terms of planners and trackers filled in by eight teachers only, because we wanted to understand the change in teachers’ reflections over these nine terms and the materials provided by the other four teachers did not cover all nine terms. PILO also provided another piece of scanned written evidence: four completed HoD forms of “the tool 2” from our six sampled schools which asked about HoD monitoring and reflections on their conversations with teachers. Requests for permission to use the PILO data, as well as collect new documents from the six sampled schools, were authorised by the KZN Education Department and Wits University approved the ethics application for this research study.

Before expanding on our research findings, we provide a brief discussion of theories of change and accountability in education change management and how these are developed in PILO’s Theory of Change and the activities of Jika iMfundo.

**Theories of Change**

When conceptualising a large-scale intervention in the education system, whether of thousands of schools and/or of a few district offices, the change management model used explicitly or implicitly has to be studied. To have a Theory of Change is crucial to guide the selection of change tools used to move institutions and individuals from
where they are to where they need to be. The change management literature debates various theories of change to identify the most useful change tools. Since the late 1980s, McLaughlin and Fullan have studied the change process in organisations like schools. Broadly speaking, the debate revolves around the balance between demand and supply, or what others (McLaughlin, 1987; Fullan, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Elmore, 2004) call “accountability” and “support” which is differently applied in the institutions, depending on the kind of change and the nature of the institutions to change.

Educational accountabilities take different forms depending on the developmental capacity of schools. They are:

- bureaucratic – accounting to the line of authority, by following policy, rules and procedures;
- political – accounting to the politically elected bodies;
- professional – accounting to the specialised knowledge of the profession, by making appropriate judgements; and
- performance-based – accounting for results to the superior line of authority.

Accountabilities may also operate internally and externally. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009, p. 110) define internal accountability as “when individuals and groups willingly take on personal, professional and collective responsibility for continuous improvement and success for all students.” External accountability is about making schools or other institutions account to the department and the public for their performance, often measured in terms of learners’ results.

It is easy to imagine that tensions can emerge from a combination of different accountabilities as they have slightly different goals. According to Elmore (2004), external accountability will not have much positive impact on learners’ results without the prior existence of some organisational capacity in the school or some internal accountability. Therefore, external accountability has to work, support and be aligned with internal accountability. O’Day (2004) argues that the best accountability impact comes from the combination of bureaucratic and professional modes of regulation because of their complementary foci and aims. Barber and Phillips (2000) believe that the best influence of the change tools occurs when pressure and support are fused in one tool, even if the calibration of pressure versus support has to change according to the capacity of the institutions or schools. This form of accountability is particularly appropriate for schools which have achieved certain organisational capacity. Internal accountability, particularly for schools with poorer organisational capacity, should be combined with what Elmore (2004, pp. 244–245) calls “reciprocal accountability” which means “For each unit of performance I demand of you, I have equal and reciprocal responsibility to provide you with a unit of capacity to produce that performance, if you do not already have that capacity.” This suggests that internal reciprocal accountability differs in terms of the kind of support and accountability mix that different school contexts require.
There are various forms of support for schools, ranging from better resources, improved working conditions, quality teacher development, support to improve the schools’ professional culture or other forms of support which focus on teachers' professional knowledge. There is a debate about quality support, addressing the kind of support most urgently needed and how to ensure that it is effective in its impact on what it is intended to improve, as well as its sustainability over the long term. Guskey (1986) argues that, contrary to previous models of teacher change and development, which first focused on the need to change teachers' cognitive beliefs, the changing of teachers' behaviours and practices is firstly needed to impact on and change teachers' cognitive beliefs. This would mean engaging teachers in their context, with activities and teaching materials which are required for their practice. Clarke and Hollingworth (2002) have developed a more sophisticated model of teacher change by showing that change is a circular process that involves the constant dynamic interaction involving teachers’ changing practices, beliefs and outcomes. In broad terms, the literature on teacher development calls for a shift from a cognitive model in which teachers learn new professional knowledge in a decontextualised form (course or workshops) to a situated learning model which, according to the social-cultural perspective, suggests that “learning needs to take place in the same context in which it needs to be used” (Bertram, 2014, p. 94). Research that we conducted in Gauteng schools raises questions as to whether the situated model can explicate the formal knowledge which informs the activities teachers are expected to master (De Clercq & Shalem, 2014; Shalem et al., 2016; Shalem, 2018).

The Jika iMfundo Campaign is based on PILO’s notion that it is best to start from where teachers (and school management) are in terms of their practices and gradually build their professional capacity while making school personnel account for and improve on their professional practice of curriculum coverage. PILO intends to change the behaviours, routine practices and working relationships between district and school personnel, HoDs and teachers, through a multi-faceted support and training intervention which aims to generate reciprocal and internal accountability among and between district and school personnel. This, PILO hopes, can be achieved by mobilising all stakeholders to work towards the common goal of external accountability in the form of better curriculum coverage.

Curriculum coverage is endorsed by some school effectiveness research as an important contributory improvement factor in South African schools because it provides learners with better time-on-task or better opportunities to learn (Taylor, 2011). PILO (Metcalfe, 2015) relies on a multi-faceted capacity-building exercise of district and school personnel by encouraging, through the use of many innovative and valuable tools, a change in their professional culture and capacity to impact on some of the practices, beliefs and performance of district and school personnel (SMTs, HoDs and the teachers) in the medium term. Drawing on Fullan, Rincón-Gallardo and Hargreaves (2015), we would define PILO’s notion of professional culture as a collaborative culture.
that combines individual responsibility, collective expectations and corrective action. It also aims to build professional capacity as a step towards greater internal accountability. The challenge in PILO’s Theory of Change is that it is rooted in accountability norms which are not often found in poorly resourced schools, namely, “coherence in the organization around norms, values, expectations and processes for getting the work done ...” (Elmore 2006, p. 7).

Conceptualisation of the Jika iMfundo campaign
There are three main components to the Jika iMfundo program which target teachers and HoDs:

- curriculum planners and trackers
- teachers’ weekly reflections on their lessons
- professional conversations between HoDs and teachers to identify areas for assistance and supportive developmental actions.

Each of the components, as mentioned earlier, intends to achieve a fusion of pressure/accountability and support and each contains some assumptions which cause tensions, especially given the schools’ context and the amount of support and human resources that PILO can mobilise. Below is a brief presentation of the tensions and/or challenges embedded in these components.

The program components and their assumptions
The first main component, the curriculum planners and trackers, is intended to help teachers plan and deliver the CAPS curriculum at the required (faster) pace and set a basis for the work of tracking and monitoring teachers’ work by HoDs. This component is intended to develop better mutual trust and respect between teachers and their HoDs and create a basis for a form of professional (and not bureaucratic) reciprocal accountability between teachers and HoDs, first, by making the monitoring process more transparent and, second, by using the curriculum planners and trackers to identify the support needed by teachers. Opening up and developing trust and respect between teachers and their HoDs is a specialised professional activity that relies on HoDs’, as well as teachers’ professional knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy, without which HoDs’ monitoring and teachers’ tracking could remain unspecific and somewhat constrained (see below).

Beyond the planners and trackers, Foundation Phase (FP) teachers were provided with textbooks and standardised scripted lesson plans (LPS) designed to assist “what to teach” (as the trackers do), as well as “how to teach and assess.” These scripted lesson plans are intended to encourage teacher reflections and were seen as helpful and motivating. As one HoD from an “amber” school explained:

Teachers are happy and fulfilled as the lesson plans make their preparation easier
and less time consuming. Teachers state that contents are well clarified and easily understood (2015 PILO school reviews).

We decided not to analyse the LPs in this research study partly because of the limited scope of our research but also because the planners and trackers represent a major innovation and are distributed to all grade teachers, whereas scripted lesson plans are distributed only to FP teachers.

The second component consists of teachers’ reflections on their lessons on a weekly basis to identify what went well and what did not go well. Teachers’ reflections are intended to develop in teachers the capacity to monitor what and how their learners are learning. Teachers are expected to identify which learners struggle or need extra help in understanding key concepts being taught. In the planners and trackers, PILO provides standardised questions about the various grade activities, as well as about learners and curriculum coverage. On the front page of the planners and trackers, some notes are provided to teachers. Under “Weekly reflection”, the following is found:

Was your preparation for the lesson adequate? For instance, did you have the necessary resources? Had you thought through the content so that you understood it fully and so could you teach it effectively?

At the end of the weekly page, only two sets of questions are found about learners’ learning, leaving out any reflections on the teacher’s preparation. The two sets are:

What went well? What did not go well? What did learners find difficult or easy to understand? Did you complete all the work set for the week? If not, how will you get back on track?

What will you change next time? Why?

These questions focus on learners’ understanding of what was covered, inviting teachers’ reflection on a specific plan or strategy.

The Jika iMfundo program values teachers’ weekly reflections as these are intended to inform HoDs about teachers’ curriculum coverage, the kind of support teachers need and be a basis for professionally informed discussions on how to improve teachers’ performance. Professional reflections are intended to encourage the kind of habits that teachers should acquire with the view to reflecting, on a regular basis, on the success or failure of each of their lessons. Ideally, critical reflections could develop teachers’ capacity to plan, improve their teaching and encourage innovation and strategies to improve learners’ learning approaches. However, there lies the tension: teachers need to have some basic professional knowledge and attitudes to make this exercise productive. As Elmore (2006, p. 7) argues, internal accountability requires some prior capacity in terms of having sufficient skills and knowledge.
The third component consists of professional conversations between HoDs and teachers which aim to identify areas requiring supportive actions to improve teachers’ curriculum coverage. To achieve this, PILO introduced a toolkit for HoDs consisting of three sets of questions which are intended to guide HoDs’ monitoring and support activities. HoDs are asked to answer questions about: 1) teachers’ curriculum planning and their use of the trackers; 2) HoDs’ monthly conversations with teachers about planning, lesson preparation, assessment and their class visits, as well as the actions they plan to support the teacher; and 3) curriculum management checklist.

To enhance their professional capacity and ability to supervise and assist teachers to cover more of the curriculum, the HoDs are expected to be trained by the district advisers. The HoDs are expected to learn how to assist teachers with professional problem-solving conversations (what PILO calls a “how can I help you?” response) and with decisions about the support needed to improve their curriculum coverage. To enhance their professional capacity and ability to supervise and assist teachers to cover more of the curriculum, the HoDs are supported by two forms of training (communication with PILO Director of Education Change, Mary Metcalfe).

The SMT training focuses on management and is delivered by the PILO coaches with the support of the Circuit Managers. It is followed by on-site coaching in schools needing assistance that have a strong capacity to absorb the intervention. This training includes how to assist teachers with professional problem-solving conversations (what PILO calls a “how can I help you?” response) and with decisions about the support needed to improve their curriculum coverage. This focus is on the role of the HoD as the curriculum manager. HoDs are expected to use what they have learnt to assist their teachers to improve their curriculum pacing which happens during their grade meetings, as well as their required one-on-one, once a month, professional conversations with teachers. HoDs received training about how to conduct conversations for supportive actions.

The delivery of the Foundation-Phase “Just-in-Time” Training is the responsibility of the Foundation Phase subject advisers. This is consistent with the intention of the pilot-at-scale which is to demonstrate that change is possible on scale within the existing capacity of the department. The PILO foundation phase team responsible for the development of the lesson plans worked closely with the subject advisers on developing the training material which focuses on the pedagogy underlying the lesson plans and their alignment to CAPS. This was done by bringing all the subject advisers into one venue for two or three days to work through the material and improve it where necessary before the subject advisers proceeded with the training. The PILO experts were seen as a resource for the advisers and worked under their authority. Where the ratio of subject advisers to schools means that a subject adviser cannot reach all her schools, additional trainers are provided by PILO. This training is intended to assist the HoD in her role as pedagogical leader. The HoD and a lead teacher from the school in the subject (languages or maths) attend the training in three sessions of five
hours duration three times a year (or a total of 45 hours per year for three years). The school representatives use the facilitators and participants’ packs to report back to the foundation phase teachers as part of their leadership work.

While not called “cascade training” by PILO, this training of trainers resembles it strongly and can be explained by the fact that PILO employs relatively few content experts for each school phase to teach mathematics, EFAL or an African language to district officials or coaches. This indirect training process may reflect the conditions under which PILO works and the lack of available training experts with sufficient knowledge to reach all of the HoDs directly, the majority of whom may suffer from a lack of content knowledge or pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). HoDs receive training about how to conduct conversations for supportive actions. It is a huge challenge to develop professionally so many HoDs of different phases from 1000 schools in a variety of districts. In this regard, both Fullan (2016) and Elmore (2016) suspect that going to scale is not a viable model for education:

The pilots are not typically replicable for one or more of the following reasons: the first users are more motivated; there are not enough resources; solutions in each new situation are not exactly the same; the program loses momentum as key sponsors move on, or new ideas come along (Fullan, 2016, p. 540).

The final component, which could be combined with the third component, consists of the **supportive guiding PD actions** that have been identified during the conversations. This requires HoDs to play a new PD role at a time that they may not have developed sufficient understanding of how to have supportive professional conversations with teachers. They are expected to identify viable strategies of support to build the capacity of their teachers to address their main challenges in improving curriculum coverage. To develop this new role whilst, at the same time, applying it to support teachers is a huge challenge for HoDs. It requires sustainable support in the forms of meaningful opportunities to learn (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Borko, 2004), as well as ideas and practices which are fully transparent to the acquirer. Elmore speaks about powerful practices (e.g. pedagogies) “that seem to spread with relative ease in highly challenged settings” (2016, p. 534) but notes the importance of transparency for this to happen. The recent attempt by a few education departments and the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) to use standardised LPs for teachers to follow the new preferred practices has still to yield long term results while LPs supplemented by coaches who assist teachers on-site seem to have a better impact on teachers’ practices than a whole group training once a term or so (Fleisch, 2016).

To sum up, we have examined the main tensions which exist in the conceptualisation of the components of a part of the Jika iMfundo program targeting the capacity, attitudes and practices of teachers and HoDs and the relationships between them. We have identified severe structural constraints and challenges for PILO’s model of change.
which are likely to constrain it from playing out as intended. We have shown how PILO’s ambitious aims and assumptions around the building up of internal reciprocal accountability in more than a thousand schools in KZN give rise to structural tensions which we uncover in the next section, using our available data on each of the program’s components. Before doing this, we look briefly at the relationship between the Jika iMfundo teacher materials and CAPS.

Curriculum planners and trackers vs CAPS
The planners and trackers for Grade 3 EFAL differ in some interesting ways from the CAPS Grade 3 EFAL. The planners and trackers break down the CAPS weekly activities by specifying the activities that need to be completed each day. They are intended to regulate consistency and pacing and also to make teachers aware of exactly which activities to do each day, in relation to what they have taught. Each page contains the sequencing of activities for the five days of the week. In CAPS, the implicit design of activities appears to give teachers some discretion to choose the activities they want to do which might influence consistency and pacing, thus curriculum coverage.

The planners and trackers change the sequence of some of the CAPS activities to allow for more practice. For example, in Grade 3 EFAL Term 1, the trackers introduce Group Guided Reading (GGR) in weeks 3–5, while in CAPS GGR is dominantly promoted in weeks 6–10. Shared reading is foregrounded in CAPS for weeks 1–5 in all four terms, while the trackers encourage shared reading as early as Term 1 week 3. We also noticed that reading of one’s own and of others does not feature in the trackers, even though CAPS Grade 3 Terms 3 and 4 promote such skills development. This could be influenced by the targeted schools’ contexts and, instead of generalising tasks, the planners and trackers design them to suit the nature of these schools, teachers and learners. The planners and trackers are also used to simplify activities, for example, in Grade 3 Term 1 (2017) on p. 4 (as well as in Term 2), CAPS introduces the identification of letter-sound relationships of double letters whereas the trackers introduce them in Term 2, after the single letters (in CAPS in Terms 3–4). Regarding assessment, CAPS specifies informal assessment activities only for weeks 1–5, whereas the planners and trackers introduce formal assessments from week 2 (and more in Terms 2, 3 and 4). Introducing formal assessment as early as week 2 allows PILO to have a picture of teachers’ usage and understanding of the trackers, as well as their content. In addition, formal assessment is also introduced early to monitor learners’ understanding or lack thereof and to inform teachers of what to do next.

However, some instructions are not as specific as in CAPS, for instance, in Term 1, week 6, (day 4 and activity 1), the planners and trackers mention “writing paragraph about School poster” but do not specify the usage of the writing process as does CAPS.

In conclusion, the planners and trackers clarify and simplify certain activities, sequencing some in a sharper manner, omitting a few others and introducing formal assessments earlier. There are no great substantive differences between CAPS and the
planners and trackers, but the latter are more teacher-friendly in sequencing all the activities on a daily basis (which CAPS does not), while also simplifying or specifying them more concretely. These differences appear to come from a concern for making them more contextually relevant to the type of under-resourced schools and poor learners targeted in Jika iMfundo.

Perceptions and experiences of the PILO program and its three components
We begin our analysis of internal reciprocal accountability by looking at the take-up and use of the planners and trackers over time as perceived by teachers and their HoDs in two sources of data – the 2015 PILO school reviews and the 2016 PILO curriculum coverage surveys. First, we examine the ways in which the planners and trackers are perceived to function as support for teachers, but also the points of pressure they impose on teacher practice, specifically in relation to coverage. Second, we examine HoDs’ perceptions of teachers’ reflections: whether they thought that the reflections were of high quality; what problems teachers raised; and whether or not HoDs felt that they could draw on teachers’ reflections to support and monitor teachers’ coverage of the curriculum. We supplement the analysis with a few examples which we selected from the eight trackers we collected from the six schools. Third, to understand what kind of relationships, organisational capacity and internal accountability are being built in these primary schools in the KZN rural district, we examined HoDs’ and teachers’ perceptions of the “professional conversation”. We also look at whether these conversations are empowering teachers and HoDs to forge a form of internal reciprocal accountability. It is important to emphasise that, except for samples of teachers’ reflections, all the claims made are based on perceived and not actual practice.

Curriculum planners and trackers: Enablers?
How helpful do teachers find the curriculum planners and trackers?

The 2015 and 2016 PILO school surveys’ data suggest that the teachers and HoDs in the sampled schools believe there is a good take-up of the curriculum planners and trackers by teachers. Teachers and HoDs who filled in the 2015 survey believed that the average rating of the teachers’ use of curriculum planners and trackers was 3,8 on a range of 1 (no use) to 4 (regular use). This means that 95% of teachers reported routinely using the planners and trackers. According to this survey, within a year of their introduction in November 2015, the planners and trackers, by breaking down and clarifying the sequencing of CAPS activities on a daily basis, were used to guide and enable teachers to improve the sequencing and pacing of the curriculum activities specified by CAPS.

A HoD from an “amber” school explained:

The tracker has enabled us to follow the syllabus logically and sequentially. It is mistake-free and allows for review and self-reflection. ... The sequencing of
the content in line with the CAPS policy has made life easier (2015 PILO school reviews’ data).

Other HoDs and teachers from “amber” and “red” schools said that, despite the fact that the planners and trackers include times for repetition of activities, teachers still struggled with the pace and congestion of activities in a day or week. Two HoDs from different “amber” schools explained that the trackers do not suit their “slow learners”:

... the tracker has too many activities to do in a single day which becomes a challenge to struggling learners who happen to be a majority in this context. The different topics in a day make it impossible to do in one day and one hour lesson, e.g. counting ordering, division and multiplication at the same time. There is no time to recap on the following day; learners are left behind (2015 PILO school reviews’ data).

The tracker gives instructions on what should be covered in each lesson and informs the teacher on what needs to be improved and all the steps to be covered in delivering a lesson. The tracker also gives guidance on pacing and alerts the teacher if she is falling behind. But the tracker could be improved to accommodate all different levels of learners. At the moment it is perceived as designed for the bright learner (2015 PILO school reviews’ data).

Teachers reported struggling with covering all the activities, especially in EFAL, as the following quote illustrates:

The pace of learning by learners is a challenge ... Learners struggle to conceptualise some of the topics, which creates a backlog of other topics as the teacher tries to ensure that previous topics are covered (2016 PILO curriculum coverage data).

Some teachers seemed to prioritise being on par with the trackers’ activities rather than waiting for recap opportunities. This explains the following request by this teacher from an “amber” primary school:

The issue of the fast pace of the trackers and the lots of homework and class activities was raised and teachers admitted that they do not have enough time to check and mark learners’ work, they think it is too much. Can Jika iMfundo assist with grouping the common topics together and make one unit/topic? We are unable to keep up with the pace of the tracker as we are required to teach the topic once and move on to the next topic. Some learners learn easily if we drill the lesson (2015 PILO school reviews’ data).
Finally, some resistance linked to the school micro-politics was also mentioned. The HoD of a “red” school explained:

... teachers see no point in submitting their curriculum planners and trackers to HoDs for monitoring. The HoD blamed this behaviour to union influence. He reported that there are silos in this school and everyone works in their corner and rarely talks (2015 PILO school reviews’ data).

One may conclude from the 2015 PILO school reviews’ data that “red” schools struggled most in using the innovative planners and trackers, suggesting that these schools lacked the basic organisational capacity for trying out different ways of coverage, for example, that are indirectly assumed to exist by PILO for its model of change.

The August 2016 PILO curriculum coverage surveys’ data show that 36 HoDs (or 90%) in the sampled schools confirmed again that teachers regularly use the trackers to plan and cover more of the curriculum than in previous years. HoDs mentioned teachers’ appreciative use of the trackers. Teachers, according to this survey, felt more familiar with the trackers and used them routinely. Resistance to using trackers appeared to have waned somewhat.

As a HoD of an “amber” school said:

... teachers are now so used to the trackers to cover their work accordingly and they are up-to-date. They are able to see if they fall behind and especially if they were absent from school. They are able to make means to cover the work to be on track (2016 PILO curriculum coverage survey’s data).

Despite the difficulties expressed above by HoDs and teachers, the perceptual data in the two surveys seem to indicate an improvement in curriculum coverage. The 2016 PILO school surveys’ data asked HoDs for their views on how much of the curriculum was covered by teachers. The figure is, on average, 75% of curriculum in mathematics, 70% in isiZulu and 68% in EFAL. Many HoDs agreed that more of the curriculum was covered than before. A pleased HoD commented:

This can be attributed to the routine use of trackers to track themselves and I have been able to support them more in 2016 because of one-on-one discussion I hold with them (2016 PILO data).

Another HoD confirmed this by noting that teachers now cover “all the concepts in listening and speaking, phonics and the writing of paragraphs every week and, as a result, learners are improving in speaking the language.” This could mean that teachers have become more familiar with the trackers and work better with them.
**Teachers’ reflections: A facilitating stepping stone?**

Beyond assisting teachers to cover the curriculum, curriculum planners and trackers are meant to generate teachers’ weekly reflections. According to the 2015 PILO school reviews’ data, the average rating of the reflections being filled in, on a range of 1 (no filling of reflections) to 4 (regular filling of reflections) was 3.35 (or 80%). When asked about the nature of teacher reflections, HoDs said that the reflections tend to be thin and vague, focusing on “slow learners” not understanding or mastering the taught concepts. HoDs complained that teachers were not always frank and honest or aware of how to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. Teachers, according to HoDs, tend to transport the blame of the poor curriculum coverage onto the school conditions, the curriculum (“too many activities”) or the “slow learners” who need more time.

Only a few HoDs from “green” and “amber” schools saw the positive potential of teachers’ reflections: “... an opportunity to bounce ideas about what worked well, what did not work well – as well as sharing ideas about what to improve.” A HoD in an “amber” school praised the benefits of reflections:

> Reflection helps in identifying learners who have grasped the concept and also those who need more time or more help. It helps the teacher to plan for remedial lessons for the latter and also to devise strategies to enhance the teaching-learning environment. It also helps the HoD to make note of teachers who are on track and those who are not (2015 PILO school reviews’ data).

Another HoD noted that teachers were not willing to share the problems experienced in class; they were not at ease or were scared of revealing their weaknesses, making them compliant with reflections rather than being honest:

> Teachers kind of hid their weaknesses. They did not want to come out and there were some ‘contradictions’ between what teachers write down on reflection part of the trackers and what they say verbally when they talk informally and during departmental meetings (2015 PILO school reviews’ data).

A HoD stated that teachers were “not entirely sure what to write on the first section while the second part on what might need to change was even more difficult to fill because they were not certain what exactly is required.” The HoD of an “amber” school confirmed this, saying that, “to avoid lengthy statements, they just stated that all went well when this did not actually happen.” This HoD added that more space for reflection (than the 5 to 10 cm gap at the bottom of each page of the trackers) should be provided by giving one rubric at the beginning of the tracker and not weekly as it is currently, reflecting a poor understanding by the HoD of the purpose of the reflections.

HoDs were also asked what they did about teacher compliance, but many could not give a clear response as “they too had their own weaknesses and did not know what
to do with these reflections.” Some HoDs did not even check what the teachers wrote because, as they said, “during training, the issue of how to value teachers’ reflections was not sufficiently emphasised nor was the value of a culture of having professional conversations with the teachers on the basis of these reflections.” Thus, there seems to be the beginning of a pattern with “red” schools struggling much more with teachers’ reflections than “amber”, let alone, “green” schools.

By 2016, the PILO curriculum coverage surveys’ data did not show much change in HoDs’ perceptions. According to some HoDs, teachers continued to mention similar problems which they felt were out of their control: “Common challenges are: not coping with pace, overcrowding in some grades (63 learners), individual attention is not possible.” Others noted the continuously thin nature of the reflections, such as: “they don’t answer the question: ‘What will you change next time? Why?’ In fact, they often said there is ‘nothing’ they will change, even if the lesson did not go well.”

Our written evidence from the six sampled schools and the eight teachers’ sets of trackers confirm the PILO-collected data: that the weekly reflections were unspecific and focused mainly on “slow learners” and the difficulties of completing the required tasks and activities. In describing his/her challenges, a teacher in a “green” school stated: “Learners are unable to read and write sentences … fail to follow simple instructions … and fail to participate in simple conversations.” Under “What would you change next time and why?”, the teacher noted: “we need more time for reading.” The two-week reflections of a teacher in a “red” school noted: “Lessons went well; all activities for the week are covered and well understood by the learners.” Nothing is mentioned under the rubric “What would you change next time and why?” These remarks from two teachers from differently graded schools suggest again that teachers in schools that are progressing further may have more capacity to change and learn from the habit of reflecting on their work than those in other schools. But, on the whole, the eight sets of trackers from our sampled schools reveal how teachers’ reflections did not often focus on their teaching or on what could be improved to increase learners’ learning. Some teachers wrote that they covered the various activities specified in the trackers – with some brief reflection notes that certain phonics, reading and writing activities could “not always be completed or were not understood by some learners but that teachers were committed to find time to go over these sometimes during that week.” This suggests that teachers assisted learners by leaving to their discretion when to introduce certain activities which learners struggled to master.

Professional conversations and support between teachers and HoDs: How productive?
HoDs are supposed to use the planners and trackers to monitor teachers’ curriculum coverage as evidence which, together with teacher reflections, aims to provide HoDs with a stepping stone to identify, during their professional conversations with teachers, the strategies to support teachers to face up to their challenges. HoDs are to be guided by a supportive toolkit (tool 2) to assist with questions on the structuring and recording
of the professional conversations with their teachers. Tool 2 consists of HoDs ticking three prescribed questions about what is working or what needs work in relation to teachers’ planning and tracking, lesson preparation and assessment. The last part of the tool requires teachers to agree with the HoD on actions teachers can take to improve their work, as well as on the supportive role the HoD can play in that respect. The 2015 PILO school reviews’ data suggest that the HoDs’ tool 2 use for professional conversations was, on average, 3.35 or 80% (with 1 being no use and 4 being regular use). Limited evidence is found in the PILO tool 2 information filled by four HoDs from our sampled “amber” schools. This source of data, which structures the HoDs’ reports on their professional conversations with teachers and necessary actions to strengthen their teachers, is rather thin.

Brief references are made about the need for extra classes and individual attention for “slow learners” and for the HoDs to convene a parents’ meeting to encourage them to assist with homework. This limited evidence confirms the trend that came out of the 2015 PILO school reviews’ data, according to which the way to improve curriculum coverage was for teachers to give extra classes for slow learners with no reference to the need to examine how teachers could improve their teaching practices. While some of these comments may be correct, they are rather basic, common-sense and vague – they do not refer to specific teachers’ practices.

The 2016 PILO curriculum coverage surveys do not gather data specifically about the aspects of teacher work that require development. The data are thin and do not reveal much about the kinds of teacher support identified. The only thing two HoDs agreed with is that differentiated and specific support is needed for individual teachers. A typical answer from a HoD from an “amber” school is:

The conversations enable the teacher to be conscious of his/her weaknesses with a view of improving on those identified areas. The HoD tool helps in providing differentiated assistance for the different teachers depending on the specific needs of each teacher.

Two other HoDs noted, in a rather general and abstract manner, the need “to discuss with teachers the way forward” or “set up a developmental workshop” while another two HoDs felt that the best source of support is “peer learning” or “discussions among teachers”, implying that the best way forward is for teachers of the same school to discuss their issues. One HoD asserted that the support comes from the supportive nature of their conversations with teachers.

This relatively light touch or understanding around teacher support or development could be taken as evidence that PILO has not yet sufficiently engaged with the broader issues of what effective foci and forms of professional development are for these teachers and what they achieve.

The data also reveal that these conversations did not occur in all schools, either
because the HoDs did not have time or because of school environments which did not provide the safe space required for these kinds of conversations. In a “red” school, where relations were bad and trust did not exist, the HoD referred to monitoring rather than to conversations: “Everyone in this school tries to put a mistake on one another and use that negatively against them. So it is not easy to monitor, plan and supervise teachers’ work.”

In a “green” school, the experience was different, suggesting again that, the better the school capacity, the more benefits to be gained from the intervention. A HoD explained the usefulness of the conversations in terms of making his/her role more legitimate:

The HoD tool is helpful in planning class visits and other supervisory duties for the HoD. ... The ensuing conversations are easier than before, being more supportive and also enables the teacher to be conscious of his/her weaknesses with a view to improving on those identified areas. Where there are glaring weaknesses, it is easier to open up on a one-to-one basis, especially since some teachers remain silent during departmental meetings even if they need help (2015 PILO school reviews’ data).

Another HoD from an “amber” school noted that the tool “facilitates class visits which was not the case in the past and professional conversations can then support the teacher.” Interestingly, a HoD from another “amber” school remarked that these conversations were doubling-up on the IQMS exercise as teachers’ reflections are used to advance a development plan for the school. These were also easy to have “because teachers and HoD were aware of what was expected of them.”

The above responses from the 2015 PILO school reviews’ data need to be borne in mind as they do not support the enthusiasm expressed by HoDs in both the 2015 and the 2016 surveys (80% and 75% respectively) with regard to Tool 2 assisting them to have supportive professional conversations about curriculum coverage. What is evident, however, is that, like the planners and the trackers, Tool 2 makes the HoD monitoring more transparent, something that teachers and HoDs welcome. This is an important achievement which needs to be noted in view of the overall aim of the Jika imfundo improvement campaign. It is also important to note that HoDs do not seem to be often resisted or resented by teachers; the conversations are perceived as supportive and framed within a transparent authoritative framework. However, while this was the case, we noticed, also from the 2016 PILO data, that some HoDs did not always manage to have productive professional discussions because of the superficial nature of teachers’ reflections and the HoDs’ superficial use of Tool 2. This was said, in the data, to be linked to various reasons such as the power relationship between HoDs and teachers, lack of organisational capacity in the school and because teachers have not engaged with the reflections and appeared “unwilling” to write much.
Jika iMfundo program and its promotion of internal reciprocal accountability

The planners and trackers, which mediate CAPS, aim at empowering teachers to cover more of the curriculum while framing their reflections on how the learning went. Our analysis shows that these trackers were perceived as helpful by most teachers and HoDs in these under-resourced schools because they clarify, simplify and facilitate the sequencing and pacing of the CAPS content on a daily basis. In that sense, this component is perceived to assist the majority of the Jika iMfundo schoolteachers. The trackers also assisted HoDs to monitor what teachers managed to cover, helping HoDs to make their monitoring work easier and more consistent, while helping teachers feel more comfortable about this transparent monitoring tool.

However, we have shown that the planners and trackers’ prompts for teachers’ weekly reflections focused only on the learners’ learning and the extent of the curriculum coverage and not on the equally important issue of teaching and teachers’ improvement of their practices. This indicates that an opportunity is being missed to make teachers look at their work and improve their practices or their professional ability to reflect fully on the specific reasons for learners’ poor performance. So the planners and trackers are experienced as supportive, but their questions regarding teachers’ reflections are not directed at how to improve teachers’ practices.

This is the nub: If PILO emphasises the importance of better curriculum coverage, it is not clear why it does not explicitly foreground that the curriculum has to be covered more effectively and in specific ways to improve learners’ learning. This omission is serious since some PILO documents and presentations (Metcalfe, 2015) recognise the importance of enhancing the instructional core. Yet, improving learners’ learning involves more than improving the curriculum coverage or the pacing and sequencing of teachers’ teaching. We argue that learners’ learning will only occur when teachers acquire more professional knowledge to make better professional decisions about their teaching and assessment practices.

On the second component of teachers’ reflections, where our findings show that reflections were, on the whole, rather thin and superficial, it is clear from two years of reflecting that this is not easy for teachers of “amber” and “red” schools, especially since they were not taught how to identify all the main problems in their own practices which could undermine their curriculum coverage. An exercise or habitus of weekly reflection is something that demands a certain level of professional knowledge, as well as mutual trust between teachers and HoDs. With incomplete prompts on the reflection question and by not focusing directly on teachers’ competences and knowledge to make their reflections more informed and specific, PILO indirectly encourages struggling teachers (those in “red” and some “amber” schools) to export the blame on “slow learners”, the overambitious curriculum and challenging school circumstances.

So, the challenges of generating valuable reflections from all teachers, most of whom are not yet sufficiently familiar with the importance of substantive reflections and not yet professional at producing them, has resulted in thin reflections which could not
productively inform the conversations that teachers had to have with HoDs (the third component). Instead, the planners and trackers only helped HoDs to report on the monitoring aspect of their job, but did not manage to prise open teachers’ practices to the gaze of a significant other – their potential mentor, their HoD. Yet these conversations are, rightly, an essential cornerstone of the PILO intent of creating a favourable terrain for greater professionalism and internal reciprocal accountability. To generate professional conversations amounts to a bigger challenge than what PILO committed itself to, namely, providing HoDs with a toolkit detailing the kind of questions to use to structure their conversations with teachers and to report on. It also calls for much more than the training in deeper content knowledge and PCK provided indirectly to HoDs from the districts. To assist teachers and HoDs to identify how to keep at par with the weekly expectations of CAPS and the trackers, it is necessary to place less emphasis on regulative practices (compliance rules of pacing, for example, embedded in trackers and HoD toolkits); it requires engagement with the instructional practices (weak teaching practices, specifically, the new ones required by CAPS).

We argue here that professional conversations are likely to emerge more strongly once collegial working cultures of trust and respect have been established in schools. It is true that PILO is gradually building up such professional collegial practices by strengthening their educational authority and promoting professional working relationships between teachers and HoDs, even if mainly in “green” and some “amber” schools where it was easier to build on these characteristics. We suggest that the strengthening of collegial professional cultures in schools will take more time and effort before it can foster effective internal reciprocal accountability and greater knowledge and competences of school personnel.

With respect to the conversations identifying the actions needed and other supportive roles HoDs could play for teachers (or the promotion of reciprocal accountability between HoDs and teachers), one has to note that HoDs, let alone teachers, were not trained to identify weak teaching practices or provide the kind of development needed to improve teachers’ practices. Our findings suggest that HoDs engaged with this exercise in a rather abstract and non-specialised manner and that these conversations were supportive mainly over regulative practices (such as monitoring the pacing and coverage in a supportive manner) but were unable to engage with the instructional core, or to determine the foci or forms of support needed by different teachers in relation to specialised practices (such as how to diagnose reading levels in the classroom or how to address learners’ common errors).

To develop the HoDs’ capacity to make decisions about how to improve curriculum coverage in practice requires, not only that the direct instructional training of HoDs on this be improved, but that PILO also needs to engage with and contribute to a discussion of what constitutes support for the improvement of specific teacher practices (such as Group Guided Reading, for example). This is essential because of the legacy of poor teacher support and, more recently, with the IQMS exercise where many teachers
questioned the point of evaluating their performance since there was rarely quality appropriate development to support them (De Clercq, 2013).

It is interesting to note that, in PILO documents, mention is rarely made of direct assistance to HoDs over the difficult instructional challenge of identifying teachers’ support needs and the appropriate foci and forms of support that improve teacher practices.

**Conclusion**
This chapter focused on the relationship between HoDs and teachers in the Jika iMfundo Campaign and has unpacked what we identify as the central tension existing in this part of the program’s conceptualisation and its manifestations in HoDs’ and teachers’ perceptions and experiences. The idea was to understand how a terrain of internal reciprocal accountability between HoDs and teachers was facilitated in the different PILO schools and whether such accountability was affecting curriculum coverage.

PILO’s focus on developing a collegial professional working culture in the school system is important in turning around schools’ performance. The work towards this aim appears to have made the relationship between HoDs and teachers more supportive over the past three years, due to the various transparent monitoring tools and professional capacity building exercises aimed at changing the practices and roles of HoDs. There is no doubt that the development of collegial professional practices and conduct in these schools will differ as schools with weaker capacities are likely to meet more obstacles and require more time, training and the acquisition of greater professional knowledge and competences. Some may go as far as questioning the promise of developing a more collegial school culture as an attempt to obfuscate or ignore the existing power relationships embedded in the essentially hierarchical relationships and structures existing across the education system.

For these practices to form a conducive terrain for stronger internal reciprocal accountability, the professional support and development of the new practices that the CAPS curriculum requires will have to be well differentiated and strengthened to lead to better teaching practices for better learners’ learning in schools with different capacities. By targeting and improving the regulative mode but underplaying the instructional mode, PILO could be accused of omitting a significant link in the chain of school improvement.

Internal reciprocal accountability is associated with better professional relationships for better curriculum coverage. But, to attest to PILO’s success in promoting internal accountability for more effective curriculum coverage and learners’ learning, one needs to understand internal accountability in the same way as Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) or how Fullan et al. (2015, p. 4) define it, namely, that it is about promoting “collective responsibility for the continuous improvement and success for all students.” This continuous improvement in learners’ results will give an indication of how these schools
have truly developed an internal accountability for better school performance. For this, it is imperative that PILO collects data on learners’ learning which goes beyond the opinions of HoDs or findings on teachers’ learner tests. We suggest that this would best be done through independent quantitative research to test learners’ results over time through standardised cognitive tests.

References


