

## LEADERSHIP INSIGHT

## A STORY OF A PRINCIPALS' COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE THAT IS IMPACTING ON THE WIDER EDUCATION SYSTEM

By Barbara Dale-Jones, CEO, BRIDGE



Bringing together school principals in communities of practice is part of BRIDGE's on-going belief in the value of supporting school principals to work together to become empowered and central agents of change in school performance.

**Experience and research emphasise that the principal, more than any other role player, holds the keys to school improvement and is the key lever of change.**

Communities of practice provide opportunities for the sharing of vision and the growth of collective problem-solving approaches, both of which are greatly beneficial. The focus of BRIDGE's community of practice methodology is enhancing schooling, and at the centre is the principal, who needs to feel confident in his or her power to initiate, manage, evaluate and sustain improvement action. Principals' communities of practice give principals the opportunity to engage in many types of issues and to influence the system in which they work.

One of BRIDGE's principals' communities of practice is in the Ekurhuleni North district of Gauteng. Seven primary school principals make up this community, and over three years

they have built up trust, peer support and a sense of common purpose. They primarily focus on issues to do with teaching and learning but they also carry out joint fund-raising initiatives, attend district meetings as

a collective and engage about issues that affect their immediate communities. They are committed to sharing resources across their schools and to bringing the district on board in the work they do. The district has in turn always supported them.

The community of practice has made remarkable progress. So, for example, in 2013 the principals took collective action and engaged with provincial government representatives on issues relating to the Gauteng Primary Language and Mathematics Strategy (GPLMS) curriculum.

The GPLMS curriculum had been introduced to five out of the seven schools in 2012 and the principals agreed in community of practice meetings that they thought the GPLMS curriculum was problematic in terms of language, that it needed to be revised with respect to pace, that the lesson plans given were too long, that it had an inadequate depth of content and that there was no provision



for teachers to adapt the material to the individual needs of their learners, which was undermining the ability of teachers.

The principals decided to take collective action and invited two GPLMS representatives to a meeting. This meeting resulted in the GPLMS representatives giving permission to the principals for teachers to change the pace and order of the curriculum to suit their learners' particular needs. The principals' growing confidence had engendered collective action and supported their ability to engage with the system and to alter policy directives effectively.

The community's current focus is on testing Grade 8 maths learners in the area's secondary schools so that the principals can assess the weaknesses and gaps in their primary schools' maths provision. Their collaboration is changing not only their immediate schools but also their larger setting.

## THE POWER OF PARENTAL SUPPORT

"We would like to pay special tribute to a person who has lived the words of Tata Madiba – she has taken care of one of our top learners, since he turned six years old. Her dedication and support of this fine young man has enabled him to compete with all other young South African learners to emerge as one of our top students".

**- The Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, January 2014.**

His grandmother, Mrs Rita Ngiba, says she hasn't stopped crying since she was told that **Qhiniso Ngiba** was nominated as one of the top learners for achieving a Bachelor's pass with the following subject results:

- Zulu - 90%,
- English as a First Additional Language - 92%,
- Mathematics - 92%,
- Life Orientation - 95%,
- Physical Science - 96%,
- Life Sciences - 97%,
- Accounting - 100%".

These results are made possible by the sacrifices and strength of his granny, which highlights the power of parental/family support.

Source: [www.education.gov.za](http://www.education.gov.za)