

Bridge School Leadership Community for Effective Practice
Record of the meeting of the mentorship focus group task team
Bridge Offices, Parktown, Johannesburg
1 March 2012
09h00-11h00

Present:

Alan Clarke (School Management and Leadership, on Skype)

Barbara Dale-Jones (Bridge)

David Wylde (Penreach)

Giles Gillett (New Leaders Foundation)

Linda Vilakazi-Tselane (Wits)

Martin Prew (CEPD)

Joanne Brink (Foundation for Professional Learning)

Geoff Schriener (PS Africa, on Skype)

Following the initial task team meeting of 27 January 2012, a further meeting of the task team was held at the Bridge offices on 1 March 2012. The agreements at the previous meeting had been that the following actions would be carried out:

1. The task team should present research that looks at best practice, how it has been implemented, and that draws links between interventions and student results. There may be useful lessons from outside education that should be brought into the debate. Jo Brink will provide resources for researching what works and what does not work. Her team will collect data and carry out interviews. (Jo and Martin)
2. Geoff and Giles will develop a draft technical model. (Geoff and Giles)
3. The group should link this to the DBSA national partnership process. (Bridge)
4. The group should link this to the DBE Conference in April. (Jo)
5. A meeting will be set up with Palesa Tyobeka for the end of March 2012. (Linda)

Consequently, the meeting began with feedback from Jo Brink, who presented an outline of the research into district interventions that is currently being carried out by FPD and CEPD. She began with the hypothesis of the research, namely that districts are an effective and efficient channel to facilitate and monitor a holistic and sustainable learner performance improvement in schools. She went on to outline the research that is being carried out,

including the details of the local and international case studies that are being researched, as well as a draft set of characteristics of effective districts in education. She and Martin Prew commented that the research team is deliberately looking at quite old case studies as, once an intervention unsettles a system, there can be an initial destabilising and dip in performance that belies the ultimate success of the intervention. Martin went on to say that the case studies involve good district interventions, and describes what characterises them. He added that there was a need for long-term and longitudinal studies as interventions are often abandoned early on. After discussion, the following were agreed:

1. The framework is missing examples of districts that have not had external interventions.
2. The research should state whether a partner organisation did the work or the district did the work.
3. Parenting and community engagement should be listed under “School Support” in the case study grid.
4. The research team will keep the task team periodically updated over the course of the next month.

The meeting then engaged with the work done by Giles and Geoff to sketch the basic principles of district intervention and outline a district schools improvement initiative. This initiative has the following features:

1. It aims to strengthen the internal capacities of districts.
2. It will help the districts with a framework to focus on delivering on their mandate, being functional and sustaining progress made.
3. It will improve the ability of districts to take on interventions and to function well as entities.
4. It describes how consistently to work with schools and how comprehensively to support them.
5. It focuses on two key outcomes – learner retention and learner achievement.
6. It describes a common approach, potentially a national intervention, but one which allows for provincial variation.
7. The overriding criterion for participation by the district is a willingness to participate.
8. It relies on partnerships.

After discussion, the following refinements to the document were agreed on:

- Martin said that this methodology, using a range of partnerships, has been the basis of many projects. They failed, partly because of involving a number of NGOs with different methodologies, which tended to lead to confusion at school level. He stressed the need to adopt a common approach. It was agreed that this point would be included in the document.
- The document needs to state, and unpack, what we mean by co-ordination.

- The document should include a paragraph about a methodology and rationale that sees the creation of internal capacity and the building of a project office. This will take longer, but it builds district capacity and means less reliance on NGOs.
- Principals should be included and the initiative should be integrated into the day-to-day running of both schools and districts.
- An omission in the document is any reference to a community of schools. How schools fit together and work together should be addressed. If we do not build collaboration and engage the community, there will be no sustainability. The document should have a strong emphasis on community, and community involvement should be a basic principle in the initiative.
- A needs analysis should be included.
- Selection criteria for programmes should be included.
- It was noted that our premise is that there is a willingness at a national level to drive this. Our document should emphasise that the initiative includes a range of things. We should state that we believe key improvement programmes are x, y and z, but that these are not exclusive of the needs of particular communities.
- Curriculum management, and the leading of teaching and learning, is core to the initiative and should be seen as the driver of the intervention.
- The different and often conflicting management styles and time trajectories of, on the one hand, the bureaucratic, hierarchical system of the district and, on the other, the decentralised, collaborative system of the school, should be noted.
- The initiative should stress that there should be an allowance that districts can take risks, which will allow for the devolving of responsibility to districts.
- The document is missing a key point about management.

The following actions were agreed on (person/people responsible noted in brackets):

1. The meeting with Palesa Tyobeka on 20 March 2012 will proceed in spite of the recent transfer of Palesa away from her current role. (Linda, Giles and Martin will attend.)
2. There will be a meeting of Giles, Jo, Martin and Linda on 8 March 2012 at 15h30 at Bridge. The purpose of the meeting will be to review the revised documents and to prepare for the meeting with Palesa. (Giles, Jo, Martin and Linda)
3. The research document will be updated and refined and a process diagram will be developed to show the links among this, the DBE conference and the DBSA's national partnership. The research will be updated as much as possible by 8 March. Thereafter, it will continue to be updated. (Jo)
4. The district schools improvement initiative will be updated as much as possible by 8 March. Thereafter, it will continue to be updated. (Giles and Geoff)
5. The next meeting of the task team will take place at Bridge on Friday 23 March from 09h00-11h00.