

**Bridge School Leadership Community for Effective Practice**

**Record of the meeting of the mentorship sub-group**

**VIP Boardroom, Sci-Bono Discovery Centre**

**Cnr Miriam Makeba and President Street, Newtown, Johannesburg**

**26 May 2011**

**09h00-12h30**

Present:

Centre for Education Policy Development	Uchenna Ihunwo
Clutterbuck Associates	Penny Abbott
Department of Basic Education	Palesa Tyobeka
Education Management Association of SA	Muavia Gallie
Foundation for Professional Development	Joanne Brink
Gauteng City Region Academy	Sibusiso Mpungose
Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership	Anusha Naidu
Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership	Thabi Molete
New Leaders Foundation	Giles Gillett
New Leaders Foundation	Adelaide Fyffe
Penreach	David Wylde
Procoaching	John Paisley
PS Africa	Barbara Njapha
SA Democratic Teachers' Union	Renny Somnath
School Management & Leadership	Alan Clarke
Sasol Inzalo Foundation	Cynthia Malinga
University of Johannesburg	Lloyd Conley
Bridge	Linda Vilakazi-Tselane
Bridge	Barbara Dale-Jones

The 26 May 2011 meeting of the Bridge School Leadership Community for Effective Practice sub-group focusing on mentorship for school principals was a follow-on from the national dialogue session on school leadership that was held in Johannesburg in August 2010. At that dialogue, the Bridge community agreed that it was necessary to form sub-groups to work collaboratively on both principal mentorship and monitoring and evaluation.

The mentorship sub-group began its engagement by agreeing that South Africa has been good at criticising leaders and yet not capacitating or developing them and that it is important that we harness the know-how and practice of this group of leaders and drivers to collaborate and share successful practice around the mentorship of school principals.

The group was made up of stakeholders and innovators from civil society, the academy, schools (including school principals), research organisations, business, funders and government. Palesa Tyobeka, DDG Teachers, Education Human Resources and Institutional Development, Department of Basic Education, represented national government and spoke about her concern regarding what is happening in our schools and her desire to turn the system around. She acknowledged that the type of principal mentorship that government would like to see is one which dedicates time to individual principals as well as to the individual challenges and contexts of a mentee. She said that government hopes to have a national mentorship programme start this year, that it has identified schools with particular challenges, but that the intervention is a pilot and that government feels it can learn from this multi-stakeholder engagement, where instances of working practice can be shared.

The sub-group members discussed a range of issues, including:

- The availability of a cohort of retired principals who could mentor other principals now. However, while it was acknowledged that there is a body of evidence from various countries to show that this approach works, it was noted that a lot of our good principals struggle to mentor effectively when they encounter contextual conditions that they do not understand.
- Mentorship relationships are very individual and none is alike.
- A mentorship relationship must be a two or three year relationship if it is going to work.
- Establishing common procedures for this is something we have not worked on enough as a country and we need to shift our investment to training and human resource development.

The group felt that it would be important to collaboratively decide on:

- The definition of functionality in a school.
- The definitions of and distinction between mentorship and coaching.
- The profile of an effective school principal.
- How to tap into the work being done by other sectors.
- How to identify candidates for mentorship.
- The definition of a good mentor.
- How to develop a database and stakeholder map of existing providers.

When sharing stories of their experiences of what has worked, the group articulated the following:

- People support what they create, so you need to involve people in the solution they are creating and be inclusive.
- It is important to become a mechanism of support to the broader community.
- Partnerships are important, with both government and business. Public-private partnerships were emphasised.

- Mentorship should be a relationship of equals. The person who is going to be mentored or coached needs to be prepared for the process, and equally mentors need to be prepared so they know how to support without being patronising and so they have a thorough understanding of the needs of their mentee.
- The education department is huge, much bigger than a corporate, and thus difficult to change. We must not be naïve and think we will fix an education department in one year – however, we can make a difference in a few schools, and that can and will gather momentum.
- It is important to include the ward manager, district official or inspector in the process of mentoring principals. If you work only with principals, change is hard. It is important that ward managers, district officials and inspectors have outputs in the process.
- The school management team needs to be part of the mentorship and coaching process.
- It is vital to link mentorship issues into the improvement plan of the school involved.
- A longitudinal study across school management and leadership projects that exist would demonstrate whether there is an impact on the schools, on teaching and learning and the quality of the results. This should be encouraged.
- Line function clarity is important, and the district is an important lever in this chain. This involves capacitating the district, especially the people working with schools, to manage the line function for curriculum delivery.
- Principals are paralysed by compliance, and they need their particular role/s specified.
- Principals need to see what a functional school looks like. School-twinning programmes are one way of achieving this.
- Not every principal needs mentorship, and the identification of those who need it is vital.

The meeting ended with Linda Vilakazi, CEO of Bridge, describing the role and vision of this group:

1. It will focus on the national plan and involve national engagement.
2. It is a circle of knowledge and support and will allow us to unlock invaluable resources.
3. It is a circle of collaboration and learning and no one has the ultimate solution.

The agreed on next steps were:

1. Bridge will create a group on its social network, which will allow us to share and collaborate between meetings. Bridge will send the group a How-To Guide for this network, and is available to provide end-user support.
2. Bridge will distribute the attendance register from the meeting.
3. Bridge will develop, maintain and distribute a contact list for the sub-group.
4. Clearly defined structure of the national & provincial departments, indicating key levels where this work fits in.
5. This will be a regular engagement.
6. Linda Vilakazi will meet with Palesa Tyobeka to engage around a framework for school principal mentorship and next steps.

In working with communities for effective practice, Bridge has the following objectives:

- The contribution of the community to the whole system;
- Creating common purpose, peer support and trust among stakeholders.
- The maximising of resources by the community;
- The spread of effective practice within the community and its associated stakeholders (horizontal integration); and
- The vertical integration of policy and practice.

In this sub-group of the school leadership community, we have started to maximise resources through the creation of a collaborative space for the group on the Bridge social network so that stories of working practice and resources can be shared. Additionally, we have started to spread successful practice by beginning to share our critical lessons about what works, and what does not work.

The sharing that has already taken place amongst this community's members indicates the beginning of the development of trusting relationships and a willingness to offer peer support. Further engagements will build on our last session and deepen our understanding and identification of the root challenges we are trying to address as well as what works in combating them. This will help us understand how the work of this community for effective practice is contributing to systemic change in the education sector.