

Bridge School Leadership Community for Effective Practice

Record of the meeting of the mentorship sub-group

Room 305, A Block, Wits Education Campus, 27 St Andrews Rd, Parktown, Johannesburg

25 October 2011

09h30-12h30

Present

Barbara Dale-Jones	Bridge
Carlene Gonzo	Bridge
Lethabo-Thabo Royds	Bridge
Linda Vilakazi-Tselane	Bridge
Adelaide Fyffe	New Leaders Foundation
Andrew Stead	ADS Consultants
Desmond Zeelie	ADS Consultants
Giles Gillett	New Leaders Foundation
Johanna Maphutle	MGSLG
Lindiwe Shishonge	MGSLG
Martin Prew	CEPD
Muavia Gallie	EMU/EMASA
Penny Abbott	Clutterbuck Associates
Sipho Dlamini	MGSLG
Thulani Radebe	MGSLG

The 25 October 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 13 September 2011 meeting held at Wits School of Education, when members of the group had volunteered to take on particular tasks, as listed below:

- Muavia Gallie had agreed to create a summary of turnaround in some previously dysfunctional schools, definitions of successful schools, and a literature review.
- Giles Gillett had undertaken to draw up basic definitions of mentorship and coaching, what success looks like, possible entry points, etc.
- Martin Prew had offered to provide a reflection on what has been done before.
- Renny Somnath had agreed to describe what is needed at each level of school leadership.
- Lloyd Conley had agreed to describe entry points for interventions and what qualification criteria could be used for people to be part of this intervention or programme.
- John Paisley had offered to draft guidelines and a framework for the mentoring of principals.

Linda Vilakazi welcomed everybody and thanked them for making the time to attend the meeting. She then stressed the importance of continuing to explore what working practices are out there so we as a community can maximise impact of the work we are doing. She said that her interest is in

seeing visible results of this collaboration and moving beyond isolated pockets of success. She went on to say that the group's focus is premised on the notion that most traditionally-structured programmes for school principals have not historically worked and that coaching and mentoring have a greater chance of success. She said that, as we lift working practices, we are looking to support government both nationally and provincially, and then link our work back to the districts.

Linda went on to thank members of the community for their contributions and input into the documents that had been circulated to the group prior to the meeting. She summarised the work that had been done in advance of the meeting and said that colleagues (notably John Paisley, Martin Prew, Muavia Gallie, Renny Somnath, Lloyd Conley, and Giles Gillett) had given the group useful, insightful inputs. She reiterated that there is a need for guidance that is currently being articulated by government and that this community started with a request from the system that asked the community to guide and frame how to use mentorship to support struggling schools. She said that we need to have a product on the table to give to government, but that the mandate has a timeline. She said that she is looking forward to an emerging draft by the end of 2011 and that, although the DDG was in the E. Cape that day, Linda regularly briefs her on progress in this regard.

The group then considered the terms mentoring and coaching, and refined their definitions of all three terms. After some discussion, they described the distinctions among the terms. Mentorship, they said, implies direct support, where experience is critical and expert or specialist advice is being offered in a relationship that is characterised as a partnership. Coaching, on the other hand, focuses on a specific skill development with clearly defined goals and is planned and structured. It was felt that both processes are about people helping themselves and must start from a willingness to engage where the intervention is wanted and needed rather than imposed. It needs to be driven by the mentee or coachee and to be about seeking one's own solutions rather than having them imposed on one. It was also felt that the relationship needs to involve role-modelling (role-modelling being as important as dialogue), credibility, confidentiality and open-mindedness. The group also spoke about the importance of identifying the candidates that you involve in these programmes.

The group felt that a good mentor will be good coach, but not necessarily the other way around, and that you would ideally not use one person for both roles. Importantly, as we want children to learn, it is important to remember that we are dealing with a learning environment. Thus, mentoring and coaching of school principals are not just about content; the way they are done is a systemic contributor. Coaching and mentoring are not ends in themselves either; they must lead to better teaching and learning.

The group then discussed the assumptions, aids, obstacles in an intervention which offers mentorship to school principals:

The assumptions include that the department would welcome the intervention, that schools need it and acknowledge they do, that there is budget available, that the intervention can be quality assured, that unions will support it, that principals reflect as a practice, and that schools know how to develop a knowledge base; etc.

The aids or benefits would include the development of leaders, benefits to the system, extending the capacity of the system, linking to learners, etc.

Obstacles would include the idea that government tends to jump from one idea to another, and so government could see the intervention as a silver bullet. Over-expectation needs to be managed.

The group agreed on the key features of a recommended intervention:

- It was agreed that the principal is the key lever of change and so an intervention must focus on principals.
- It needs communication and strategy.
- The conditions of appointing principals need to be added to what we produce, and the process of appointing principals to mentor them should stop as should the appointment of principals by SGBs.
- Leadership development is crucial and needs to be part of the blend, along with coaching and mentoring.
- While SGBs are mainly unemployed, have low skills, and their decision-making may be problematic, they need to be involved. However, the SGB must be involved in contextual matters only and not the technical or operational ones.
- Mentorship must integrate with all other HR processes.
- Because mentoring and coaching are about driving change, there needs to be support for a change management process. Furthermore, coaches and mentors need to support principals in managing change.
- Systemic changes need to be identified, integrated and included.
- There needs to be an academic component to the intervention too. The weakness in the system currently is that there is no mentoring and coaching that go with the ACE, whereas there should be a theoretical grounding with mentorship and coaching added to it.

It was agreed that the group would provide comments on the documents prepared for the meeting by Monday 31 October. It was then agreed that there are two pieces outstanding, which have to do with:

1. The training of new and existing principals; and
2. Systemic changes (integrated with succession management concept) that need to be addressed.

The following actions were then agreed on:

1. A new document will be compiled and produced during November 2011.
2. It needs to be both a technical and strategic document.
3. It will include reference to the report, which Linda will source and circulate, that looks at the training of principals across the African continent.
4. Muavia will provide a link to the documents from China to which he referred. He will work with Martin and Linda on integrating this topic.
5. The recommendations in the report must include the criteria for the appointment of a principal, as well as a description of the role of the SGB in the appointment of principals.
6. A draft of the report will be circulated to the focus group on 11 November.
7. Comments will be received from members of the focus group by 18 November.
8. The final document will be circulated on 25 November.

9. A meeting with the DDG will be scheduled for the week of 28 November (Desmond, Andrew and Giles all offered to join Linda at that meeting), which Bridge will facilitate.

The next meeting will take place on 31 January 2012 from 09h30-12h30.

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 continue to spread successful practice by sharing our critical lessons about what works and what does not work.

We continue to maximise resources through use of a collaborative space for the group on the Bridge social network so that stories of working practice and resources can be shared.

We have the potential to impact vertically on policy and practice by developing tools and guidelines that will help the national department in their work with school principal mentorship.

The sharing among this community demonstrates the development of trusting relationships and a willingness to offer peer support.

Further engagements will build on these sessions 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.