Setting the scene

Hassiena Marriott from BRIDGE welcomed participants, noting that they represent the core membership of this community of practice (CoP). Given that the primary focus of this CoP will be on issues related to **teaching practice** during initial teacher education (ITE), Hassiena began the session with a reflective exercise on the topic.

Participants were asked to rate their teaching practice programmes on a scale of 0 to 10. The lowest rating given was four, the highest eight, with most clustered around six out of ten. The aim of this activity was to prompt reflection on 'why not a one or a zero?' and 'why not a nine or a ten?' – that is, let's acknowledge that there are clearly elements that are working well in each programme, and also elements that are not working effectively. Below are examples of the issues identified.

| Examples of positive elements	@CoP	Examples of challenge areas
Requests from schools for teaching practice students: this is evidence of their value.		Insufficient or inefficient mentoring.
Good feedback loops: examples given include feedback in various ways (e.g. through google forms, reporting templates and face-to-face) from students, principals, work integrated learning (WIL) or teaching practice officers, and lecturers who have carried out observations.		Sometimes there is a tension in how content knowledge and teaching methodology relate to each other, as content is delivered by subject discipline faculties who don't deal with the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK).
Ways of processing feedback: examples of various committees or structures were given which carry out this role.		Lack of standardized policies and practices for teaching practice across different universities can lead to tensions such as competition for school sites or dissatisfied students [See discussions below].
Acknowledgement of weaknesses in a model leads to reflection on the model, and to improvement.		Some student perceptions noted: there is too much theory and insufficient preparation for on the ground issues such as school violence. Students are not taught to be 'streetwise' [See discussion below].
Teaching schools such as the one hosted at UJ are a great advantage, as lessons learned here on site can inform teaching practice programme design.		

More detailed discussion on some of these issues is summarised below:

- Wits has recently changed its teaching practice date from a 3/3 split to a 6-week period. The new dates now coincide with the period that other universities such as UJ or private universities are also placing their students, so now a number of schools are unavailable. This was done without consultation or forewarning, which has affected placement for these other universities. In addition, UNISA – with its 50% of all education students in the country – takes up a lot of school places for teaching practice. The lessons here are that:
  - o Teaching practice schedule changes have a knock on effect on all universities.
  - o There are no predictors that can help in planning because data is not shared between universities. If there was an open and communal booking system, it might help all universities with their placement planning.

  The key point here is that universities need to collaborate more closely rather than work in silos.

- Universities generally have various structures and committees which oversee and integrate different aspects of teaching practice. NWU has a Mentorship Office, and Work Integrated Learning (WIL) officers who work with academic staff, as well as a teaching and learning specialist looking into the alignment between content knowledge, methodology and teaching practice. Wits has a Teaching Experience Committee which oversees various other committees. UNISA noted that for a long time their teaching practice office was staffed only by administrators, which was problematic; there are now academics linked to this office, and UNISA is reviewing its model. It was agreed that it may be useful at some point to look in detail at the different co-ordinating structures that universities have in place. By looking at who does what where, and if and how these entities communicate effectively, we may get clarity on some good practice models.

- Universities need to collaborate in support of the shared goal of producing effective teachers, who in turn will produce the competent learners needed to replenish the teaching pool in future. Universities need to recognise that teaching practice happens within an ecosystem beyond the higher education institution itself. An example of a 'lesson learned' in this regard is the Wits student stipend story. What began as a supportive and incentivising measure – providing Wits teaching practice students with a stipend – had unintended negative consequences. Non-Wits students felt dissatisfied as they did not get a stipend; and Wits itself found this to be an unsustainable measure that had set a precedent that they couldn't maintain. Without some standardised agreements in place, the HEI sector runs the risk of promoting skewed perceptions about the reputations of different universities. Teaching practice is a compulsory element in all teacher education and should not be 'rewarded' in different ways by different institutions.

- Similar issues arise when schools which host student teachers institute their own 'reward systems'. For example, Western Cape schools prefer to host UNISA students, as there is continuity in their placements. Some well-resourced schools offer rewards to students who pass modules, but underprivileged schools which can't do this become unpopular with students as teaching practice sites. But this is an issue to do with school autonomy.

- What is teaching practice for? In relation to student views on too little preparation in being 'streetwise', and too much emphasis on theory, it was noted that teaching practice cannot prepare students for the spectrum of problems they will confront. When students exit university they must, at

the very least, be competent in handling and teaching content appropriately. The kinds of social challenges that they may face – violence, discipline issues, drug abuse etc. – need to be dealt with in a thorough induction process shaped by the context of the schools in which newly qualified teachers find themselves. The topic of how context-driven social challenges that face teachers are addressed in ITE and teaching practice programmes needs further discussion.
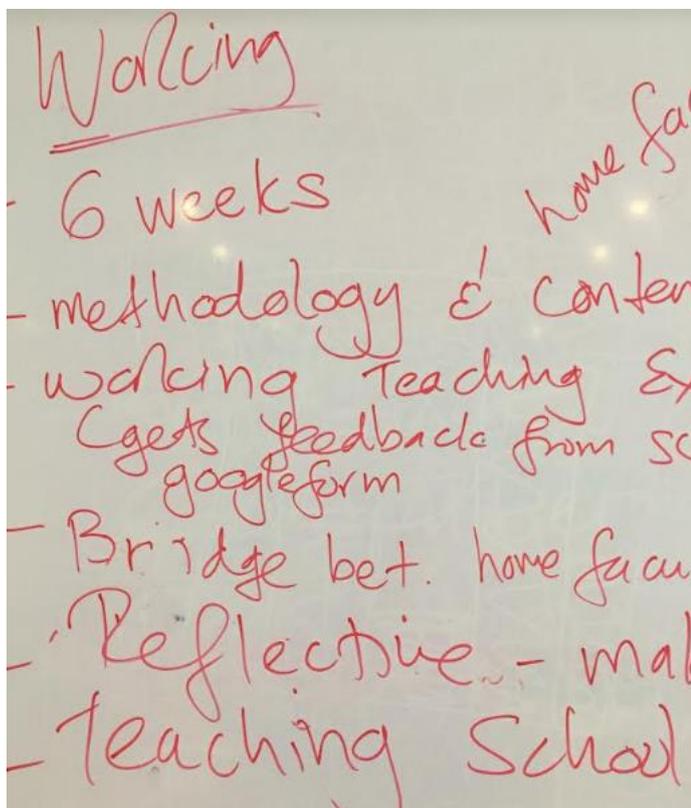
Brainstorming at the ITE CoP …
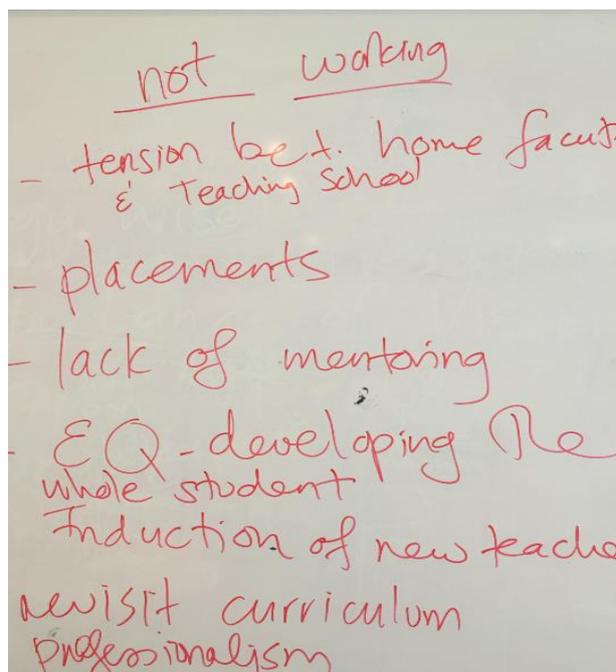
Scope of the CoP and CoP outcomes

Hassiena gave a brief overview of BRIDGE's work and our approach to communities of practice (click here to see the presentation), and the proposed outcomes for this CoP. Points made in discussion include:

▪ We need to be clear about the scope of this CoP, as our deliberations should be contained so that they have a point and a goal. The focus is on **teaching practice** as this has been identified as a challenging area, but we recognise that this does not happen in isolation. Other ITE issues that arise will be considered in relation to teaching practice. We also need to make a distinction between external issues that are common to different universities, and some which may be internal and specific to the governance and structures of individual institutions. We also need to understand what is in the control of HEIs and what is not.

▪ This focus raised questions about who should be in the room, as it should be those who are closely engaged in the design and implementation of teaching practice. At the same time, however, it is also

vital that we have the people who are thought leaders in their institutions, and who influence decision-making. BRIDGE made a special request that those who attended this first meeting continue to do so.

- Discussions can cover any students who need to undertake teaching practice: that is, not only undergraduate B Ed students, but also PGCE students who are placed at the same time. ADT students who are in-service also have a teaching practice component in their qualifications.

- The notion of expanding participation through a 'virtual' meeting was explored, and the Zoom platform demonstrated. Those who need to travel (such as participants from NWU) could take part online, and people further afield and other provinces could also be included if required.

- Hassiena noted that BRIDGE had previously run a Pre-Service Community of Practice whose work could be shared with this CoP. The Pre-service CoP comprised a group of schools and organisations involved in implementing alternative pre-service teacher education and induction programmes. In the past three years, the CoP has shared different models of school-based internships for student teachers studying through distance education. Their work represents a wealth of 'lessons learned' about a number of facets of pre-service teacher education, including the central role played by mentors. These CoP members could be invited to be part of this ITE CoP to share some of their learnings.

- Sharing of models, tools and resources is part of the CoP experience. It was noted that anything shared through BRIDGE, or anything co-created by the CoP and distilled and packaged by BRIDGE, is generally disseminated as an Open Education Resource through a creative commons licence with attribution (in this case to the BRIDGE ITE CoP). The CoP will need to think about whether its members are happy to share certain resources, or if they would be interested in co-creating a new resource.

- We need to agree on terminology as it appears that different institutions use different terms: for example, teaching practice, teaching experience and work-integrated learning (WIL). It was suggested that we follow MRTEQ, which defines teaching practice as follows:

---

7. Work Integrated Learning (WIL):

7.1 The learning-in-practice, workplace-based component of WIL for teacher education qualifications mostly take place in classroom and school settings, but could also include a small component of service learning in community settings.

7.2 It is the responsibility of the institution offering the qualification to formally arrange WIL opportunities for students, in line with the requirements of the qualification as described in this policy. This implies developing mutually beneficial partnerships with schools.

7.3 The workplace-based component of WIL must be structured, supervised, integrated into the learning programme, spread across the learning programme and it must be formally assessed.

Revised Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) Published by the Minister of Higher Education & Training in Government Gazette No 38487 on 19 February 2015

A BRIDGE Community
of Practice

- It was also noted that collaboration through a CoP is a process that requires some time to grow.

Future programme

Some suggested topics and issues arising from these include:

- **Placement**: including selection and availability of schools; blacklisting of schools; relationships with districts; mediation of guidelines and expectations of schools; lack of communication between principals and teachers about WIL expectations.
- **Liabilities protocols**: lack of policy or standardised processes for accountability for health and safety during WIL; role of the federation of SGBs.
- **Mentorship:** different players, facets and levels of implementation; different models and approaches; accreditation and SACE points.
- **Professional teacher identity:** graduate attributes from ITE.
- **Student assessment**: dealing with discrepancies between views of mentor teachers and observer lecturers; tools, criteria and rubrics.
- **School experience programme**: different elements such as student research projects, how students deal with learner support, how students might apply ICT integration in an unfamiliar context.
- Research on **professional teaching schools** and lessons learned from these.
- Linking into the **DHET Roundtable discussions** on producing a teaching practice protocol.

CONTACT LIST

Name & surname:	Organisation:	E-mail address:
Antonette du Preez	North West University	11080655@nwu.ac.za
Florrie Makaku	North West University	Florrie.Makaku@nwu.ac.za
Alton Dewa	WITS School of Education	alton.dewa@wits.ac.za
Samuel Khoza	WITS School of Education	Samuel.Khoza@wits.ac.za
Annelize DuPlessis	University of Pretoria	annelize.duplessis@up.ac.za
Jacqui Batchelor	University of Johannesburg	jbatchelor@uj.ac.za
Sithabile Ntombela	UNISA	ntombs@unisa.ac.za
Motladi Angie Setlhako	UNISA	setlhma@unisa.ac.za
Hassiena Marriott	BRIDGE	hassiena@bridge.org.za
Melissa King	BRIDGE	melissa@bridge.org.za
Jade Pieterse	BRIDGE	jade@bridge.org.za
Vuyiswa Ncontsa	BRIDGE	vuyiswa@bridge.org.za

A BRIDGE Community
of Practice