

Evaluation Report of the Communities of Practice for School Leadership

Gauteng Education
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Communities of Practice

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Communities of Practice for School Leadership

Report compiled by the Project team on behalf of Saide for the Gauteng Education Development Trust (GEDT)

Saide

P O Box 31822

Braamfontein

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South Africa

Tel: +27 11 403 2813

<http://www.saide.org.za>

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Notwithstanding the richness of the data generated, the complexity of the programme means that this report cannot do full justice to all programme developments. The hard work of dedicated individuals driving CoP development and implementation is acknowledged and appreciated.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CMM	Curriculum Management Model
CoP	Communities of Practice
CPD	Continuous professional development
CPTD	Continuing Professional Teacher Development
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
GEDT	Gauteng Education Development Trust
HoD	Head of Department
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SGB	School Governing Body
SLS	Social Learning Spaces
SMT	School Management Team
T&L	Teaching and learning

Summary

Background: The extended GEDT CoP programme implementation on school leadership, a BRIDGE initiative, got off to a good start in Sept/October 2016. A year since inception, gains are beginning to be visible and the emergent nature of value creation, as borne out by literature and experience, was almost to be expected. The conceptualisation and implementation of the CoP takes time to take hold. BRIDGE is to be commended for the overall effectiveness of the programme (achieving the outcomes and overall objectives) and efficiently managing and coordinating the programme.

Purpose: As part of its development, this evaluation explored the value of the programme with respect to financial accomplishment, achievement of objectives and contractual compliance. In particular, it focussed on the evaluation question: *How and why does the programme translate into action (or non-action) and how can the programme be improved going forward?*

Approach and methods: This evaluation was aimed at mapping what was happening in the programme as it evolved in the first year since inception and as such gives an account of what the programme looks like at a particular point in time. It aims to comment on what is working or not over time. The developmental approach was therefore most appropriate to capture the implementation of the programme and how it could be improved in future CoP conceptualisation and implementation. Multiple data collection methods included document analysis, a survey, informant discussions, observation and interviews.

Findings: Some key findings that emerged regarding minimal action, and/or non-action were:

- In a very short space of time, BRIDGE managed to successfully implement the CoP programme within budget and specified plan. They managed their time, as well as that of the CoP efficiently and through reflexive practice, offered flexible ways of working with CoPs.
- Principals are starting to share tools and act collaboratively and the successes are attributed to skilled facilitation, opportunities to share and collaborate and generally being exposed to various practices.
- In terms of leadership, Principals appeared to be clear about their roles as leaders and what this comprised. However, they were less clear about how CoP engagement could help them in becoming competent and better leaders.
- In terms of general changes in teaching and learning, there does seem to be some progress. Principals related stories of the start of collaborative team teaching, sharing of lesson plans and showcasing innovative lessons.
- Despite the gains, many improvement areas in terms of the management of the CoP emerged. Some include getting District officials up to speed and

respectful of the CoP programme to avoid clashes in meeting attendance, working towards a common purpose so that cohesion and commitment is solidified, transparent selection criteria so that there is more excitement and less resistance, and reconsidering the way Principals are grouped in order to avoid travelling long distances to attend CoP meetings, amongst others.

- Examples of some of the many lessons learned in respect of CoP implementation are: distributive leadership calls for support of the entire SMT and not only Principals, CoPs should be allowed to grow organically which calls for flexibility in terms of joining/leaving the CoP, tackling of daily challenges is key if CoPs are to remain contextually relevant, structural as well as personal issues hamper engagement and need to be recognised and effectively addressed, advocacy work and support are needed to enable active participation, etc.
- BRIDGE managed to achieve emergent results within budget and in slightly extended timeframes.

Recommendations: In terms of moving forward, we offer some recommendations which we believe are essential for the continued growth and success of the initiative, and some which we think are worth serious consideration. These are:

Essential:

- ⇒ Embrace inclusive practices that allow Principals to form part of the discourse around CoP conceptualisation, formation and implementation at their respective schools. This would mean that open, transparent, selection criteria be set so that Principals feel less resistant towards CoP engagement.
- ⇒ GDE/BRIDGE should model collaborative practices by inviting Principals to form part of agenda setting. If CoP value creation is to be realised, related departmental policies should serve to empower Principals to actively shape decision-making and have their voices heard. The implication is that CoPs could become “self-organising”, “self-sustaining” agents of change (as per BRIDGEs conception of a CoP).
- ⇒ More should be done to brief District officials, BRIDGE facilitators and CoP members on the purpose of the CoP. If the CoP domain (shared interest or purpose with specific rules of engagement) is weak then the CoP formation is going to be weak.

- ⇒ Through CoP engagement, Principals need to be empowered to deal with disciplinary issues (both staff and students) as well as issues related to community engagement, amongst others. Many of the Principals interviewed recognised their role of uplifting the communities in which their schools were situated and felt enormous pressure to act, but often felt powerless.
- ⇒ While it is difficult to influence intrinsic motivation (e.g. love for teaching), extrinsic motivation (e.g. incentives, promotions, etc.) can be influenced by making sure that the socio/political conditions at the respective schools are favourable. We recommend that structural issues (restrictive policies, lack of infrastructure, etc.) as well as personal related issues (such as health, workload, high stress levels, low morale and apathy etc.) need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- ⇒ In terms of **practice**, the following actions must accompany CoP implementation
 - More time needs to be spent on buy-in so that uptake is improved. That means that advocacy work must be given prime time.
 - Varied strategies to develop leadership roles must be rethought and introduced. CoP meetings are but one strategy, school visits are another and other strategies should be explored.
 - Allow flexibility regarding the formation, joining and /or leaving of CoPs to include Deputy Principals and HoDs.

For Consideration:

- ⇒ Explain the intersection between the Mentorship programme (Master teachers) – introduced last year - and the CoP initiative.
- ⇒ Avoid duplication through finding synergies in the Leadership course Matthew Goniwe is offering and which some Principals are enrolled in, the existing Forum and the CoP programme.
- ⇒ Inform members about the evaluation. This could have prepared Principals better for their involvement in data collection and allayed fears around privacy issues.

- ⇒ Principals should be assisted to work collaboratively within and across appropriate Acts, policies and guidelines so that they are enabled to be more vested in visionary leadership activities.
- ⇒ It is not quite evident how school Principals as leaders, help shape the learning outcomes and academic success of learners through CoP programmes. Principals, together with BRIDGE should be encouraged to explore, possibly in action research mode, or using narrative inquiry as Smit (2017) had done, some of the following research questions:
- How could GEDT/BRIDGE leverage CoPs for sustainable leadership development? How could they get there and how could they respond to associated challenges?
 - What are some of the structural and strategic problems related to CoP initiatives? How can a CoP assist to address these but also go beyond to address curricular issues?
 - How can the CoP be conceptualised and implemented to strengthen social change within schools and surrounding communities?

Evaluation of the Extended Communities of Practice

1. Introduction

Notwithstanding many positive changes in the past few years, South African schools remain contested spaces. In the context of poverty-stricken school communities, health-related issues and social ills, leadership becomes very challenging (Smit, 2017). Principals (as visionary leaders) are increasingly being drawn on to make the necessary shifts to allow schools to cultivate successful student learning experiences. It is argued by Naidoo & Petersen (2016) and others that the culture of leadership at South African schools is such that Principals often mistake management (ensuring compliance) for leadership (being a visionary). As part of the continuous professional development (CPD) of school Principals, the Gauteng Education Development Trust (GEDT) funded the establishment of communities of practice (CoPs), with BRIDGE as a service provider responsible for CoP implementation.

2. Background and Context

BRIDGE, a non-profit organisation established in 2009, has been actively involved in facilitating and supporting a total of 23 CoPs in Cape Town and Gauteng. BRIDGE has run pilots in various districts in Gauteng, which includes Ekurhuleni North and Gauteng East, Sedibeng West, Sedibeng East and Ekurhuleni South. In this seminal work, a regional partnership between BRIDGE and the Gauteng Department of Education, was established.

The overall goal of the programme is to provide opportunities for Principals to collaborate and share successful practices in order to develop their leadership capacities. The structured CoP activities include amongst others:

- School Principals meeting for 2 hour facilitated sessions
- Collaborating and reflecting in facilitated meetings approximately 8 times a year
- One-to-one conversations with individual Principals and Facilitators (trained by BRIDGE)
- Facilitator reflection

The purpose of the programme is to enable Principals' sense of agency in the domains of Governance, strategy and planning; managing teams, people and stakeholders; school

systems and operations; and leading teaching and learning in the school. Innovation and collaborative problem-solving is encouraged through shared resources and knowledge. BRIDGE argues that CoPs are not only about groups of people with similar interests, rather, it has an activist nature and is therefore about creating systemic change.

The individual evaluations BRIDGE commissioned over a 3-year period (2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15) reported that CoP implementations had been hugely successful. In an effort to expand their work GDE and BRIDGE requested funding from the GEDT to include an additional four new CoPs in the Ekurhuleni North district.

Nature of Extended Communities of Practice

In 2016, the Gauteng Education Development Trust (GEDT), a trust supporting the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), approved a request for funding from BRIDGE and the GDE to expand the CoP for school Principals in the Gauteng Ekurhuleni Region. The initial purpose of the CoP, as stated by BRIDGE in the Proposal to GEDT reads as follows:

The Principals' Communities of Practice Programme in Gauteng was designed as a way of developing the leadership capacities of public school Principals. The approach is that school Principals within a geographical location are brought together to collaborate and reflect with one another in facilitated two-hour community of practice meetings.

The selection of these CoPs were done by the District and Principals were told to attend a briefing session held in September 2016. All related matters regarding CoP selection, programme purpose, engagement, etc. were discussed at this session, yet many questions remained and Principals felt sceptical about the programme.

Theory of Change

BRIDGE developed a theory of change that outlines the assumptions in the form of interventions, inputs, outputs, indicators and outcomes. This is depicted in Fig 1.

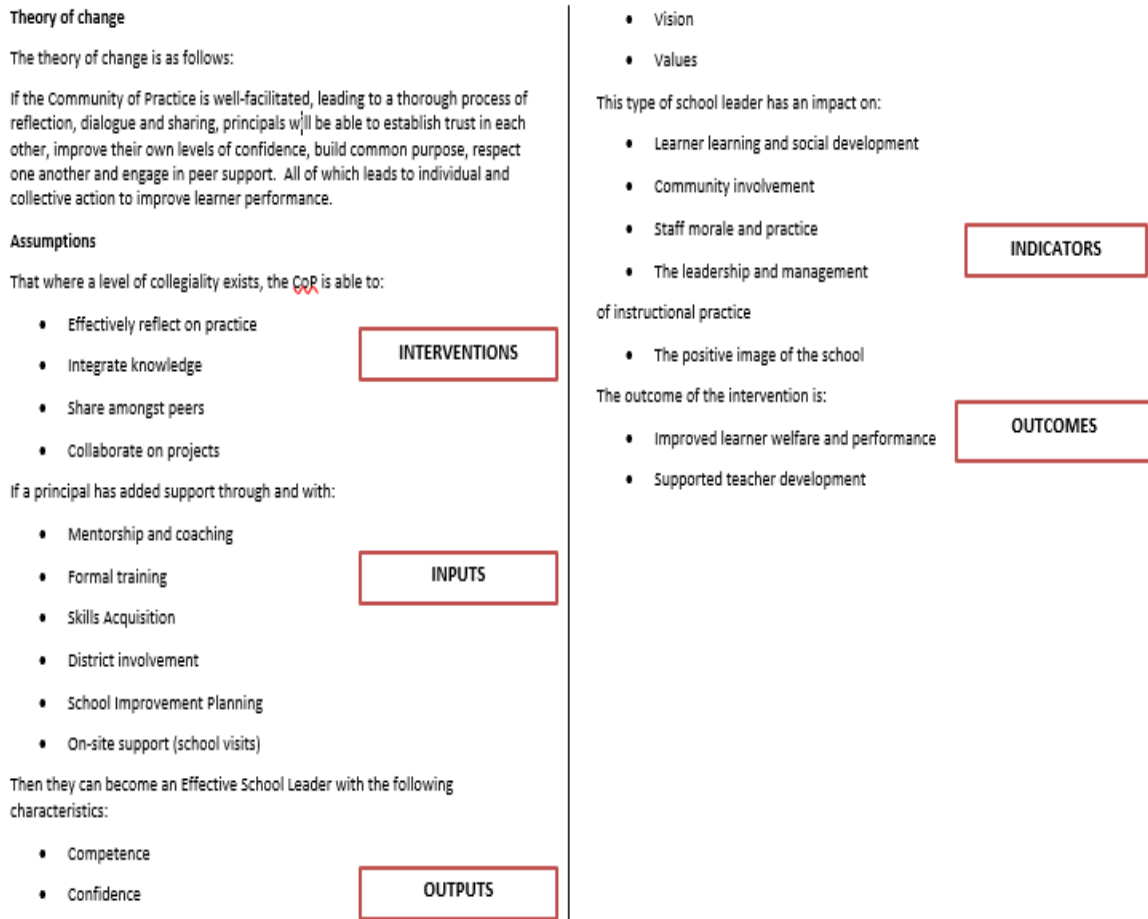


Figure 1 Theory of Change (as depicted in the BRIDGE Proposal Document)

According to the Theory of Change, if a principal has support in mentorship and coaching, formal training, skills acquisition, District involvement, School Improvement Planning, on-site support (school visits) then Principals can become effective School Leaders that are competent, confident, visionary and have values. BRIDGE provided school visits, skills training (e.g. on dashboards) and mentoring and coaching. The expected outcomes were improved learner welfare and performance, supported teacher development, and lastly, a supported and functional SGB.

In the Findings section, we will discuss the theory of change in more detail.

3. Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation relates to the value of the programme with respect to financial accomplishment, achievement of objectives and contractual compliance. The evaluation commenced at the start of the implementation of the GEDT CoPs and is therefore developmental in nature. The report provides a snapshot of how the CoPs have unfolded since

its inception and how it could possibly move forward. It reflects on the views, perceptions and experiences of participants (facilitators and Principals) supplemented by written accounts (as reported in the quarterly and facilitators reports), observations and a survey. See Fig 2, an overview of the evaluation as presented to Principals:

<p>What is the Purpose of this evaluation study?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide robust and rigorous evidence of the value of the programme To provide practical implications of the research for the GEDT and for Bridge to inform the implementation of similar programmes To reflect on how communities of practice are conceptualised and its value creation (i.e. the learning enabled) for school principals 	<p>Evaluation of the Communities of Practice (COPs) Programme</p>	<p>What do we require from COP members?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Complete an online questionnaire (Google form) - end April 2017 Avail yourself for a focus group interview – end May/June 2017 <i>Facilitators will be interviewed individually</i> <p>Participation is voluntary and all information will be kept confidential and anonymous.</p> <p>The two main researchers will attend some scheduled COP meetings.</p>
<p>Who are all involved in this study?</p> <p>COP Members: School Principals and BRIDGE Facilitators Researchers: Saide Staff: Saide is a non-governmental organisation based in Johannesburg who conducts projects throughout South Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. Provider: BRIDGE Funder: The Gauteng Education Development Trust (GEDT)</p>	<p>x4 School Leadership COPs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Ekurhuleni North 2 Gauteng East 2 Gauteng East 3 Ekurhuleni South 2 	<p>Who are the main researchers?</p> <p>Dr. Najma Agherdien: najmaa@saide.org.za Dr. Ephraim Mhlanga: ephraimm@saide.org.za</p> <p>Office number: Tel: +27 11 403-2813</p>



Figure 2 Overview of Evaluation

The main evaluation question is: *How and why does the programme translate into action (or non-action) and how can the programme be improved going forward?* In an attempt to align the evaluation question with the purpose of the intervention, the sub-questions (amended from the terms of reference) include:

- I. To what extent does the implementation of the programme align with the specified plan?
- II. Do Principals share tools and act collaboratively? If so, how and why?
- III. How does CoP engagement shape leadership?
- IV. As a result of involvement in the CoP, have Principals introduced any changes in teaching and learning (particularly in Maths)?
- V. What are the improvement areas in terms of the management of the CoP?
- VI. What are the lessons learned regarding the CoP implementation?
- VII. Were the results achieved within budget and in the agreed timeframes?

A key limitation of this evaluation is that CoPs take time to evolve and add value, making it difficult to comment on the effectiveness of the programme. It is more likely that value is realised long after the programme - and this evaluation - comes to an end.

4. Literature Review

For this evaluation study, the literature base consulted included communities of practice, thoughts on school leadership and professional development in general. The literature has been ongoing since inception of this evaluation and continued throughout the development of this report to ensure that current literature and debates are included.

Communities of Practice as CPD initiative

Continuous professional development (CPD) refers to ongoing support and includes intentional, structured, contextually relevant interventions and opportunities that address the needs of staff. Principals as leaders also require such interventions. Identified as a high impact practice, a CoP is an effective CPD opportunity as it provides spaces for deep and meaningful engagement where practices can be shared. Essentially, CoPs - but also practices - take time to develop. We agree with Boud & Brew (2013, p.213) that “Practices evolve over time and over contexts: new challenges require new ways of practising”. In their study on the effectiveness of CPD, Schostak, Davis, Hanson, Schostak, Brown, Driscoll, Starke and Jenkins (2010) argue that learner-led CPD is the most successful. By implication, CoP engagement is determined by participants and not imposed or pre-determined by implementers. They also point out that individual needs must be addressed if CPD is to be sustainable.

The way a CoP is defined points to implications for implementation. A CoP can be conceptualised as a group of people that come together to share cultural practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In this coming together, their identities get formed, shaped and negotiated. Three generic characteristics of CoPs are that it has a *domain* (shared interest or purpose with specific rules of engagement), a *community* (participants who have a shared sense of community and trust for relationship building) and *practice* (shared tools and methods used to do work in a context specific setting). Not everyone participates equally and there is a clear ‘old-timer’/novice divide characterised by peripheral participation by novices to full participation by ‘old timers’ (Hughes, Jewson & Unwin, 2007).

BRIDGE’s conception (as posed on their website) is as follows:

...an inclusive, multi-stakeholder and diverse group that is facilitated using a methodological approach, is organised around a common set of

objectives, and is ultimately self-organising and self-sustaining. It is continuous in terms of relationship-building, learnings and outcomes, and its successes and outcomes are measurable. Part of its role is to define its alignment and contribution to the national education sector plan and other national and provincial strategic frameworks.

From this perspective of CoPs, accuracy in terms of setting goals and/or outcomes that are measurable, challenging and realistic is enabled. Nevertheless, an added focus on processes (w.r.t. CoP creation, engagement, etc.) is suggested to gain a deeper understanding of its value creation. Wenger’s value creation criteria can help in this regard. A note of caution is that value creation stories are subjective and could attribute value as a causal relationship, which might not necessarily be entirely accurate. Refer to Table 1.

Table 1 Wenger’s Value Creation criteria (2011, p. 29)

Immediate value: value of activities and interactions	Potential value: knowledge capital whose value lies in its potential to be realised later	Applied value: adapting and applying “knowledge capital”
Level of participation	Skills acquisition	Implementation of advice
Quality interaction	Inspiration	Innovation in practice
Level of engagement	Social connections	Reuse products
Having fun	Tools and documents	Use of social connections
Level of reflection	New views of learning	New learning approaches

A more inclusive, revised conception of CoPs, known as social learning spaces (SLS) is proposed by Wenger (2009). Social learning spaces (SLS) are: “...social containers that enable genuine interactions among participants, who can bring to the learning table both their experience of practice and their experience of themselves in that practice” (Wenger, 2009, p.3). From such a perspective, an evaluation of the CoP engagement over a period of time that is historically situated, as well as individually and collectively inclusive (Agherdien, 2015), is possible.

While CoPs aim to liberate and aid workers/learners to work more creatively and efficiently, it is important to problematise the concept CoP. The traditional notion of CoPs does not take into account the power differentials at play (Smith 2003, 2009) the often competing goals which could constrain participation (Roth, 2001, p.1002) or neglecting to take a historical perspective (Engeström, 2007, Jewson, 2007) of CoPs. Oftentimes, CoPs are not used for knowledge creation (Edwards, 2005 in Hughes et al, 2007) but rather for defending and maintaining current practices. Having a clear idea of how CoPs are defined, enables a methodology to assess, revise and amend CoPs (Hughes et al, 2007, p. 5006).

School Leadership: South African *Situatedness*

Leadership and management has undergone major shifts since 1994. Research on leadership and management in South Africa has not been widely publicised and where it exists, does not take into account the complexity of both the terms and also of the field (Christie, 2010). In a recent study, Smit (2017) found that the field is still characterised by a sense of hopelessness as Principals battle to grapple with challenges involving poverty, teen pregnancy, lack of support, etc. She further proposes relational leadership - focus on leading with care, vision, and collaboration - and emotional leadership - recognising emotion as legitimate attribute – as appropriate theoretical lenses (2017, p.6).

Leadership and management has often been used interchangeably in a school context which is deemed to be hugely problematic (Naidoo & Petersen, 2016). Christie (2010) presents a clear distinction between the two. She argues that leadership is an exercise of influence; is dispersed and is mainly about value and vision. Management on the other hand, is tied to a formal position in an organisation and is mainly about structures and processes. She concedes that it is extremely difficult for Principals to integrate leadership, management as well as ‘headship’ or “Principalship” which refers to a principal having certain responsibilities, being accountable and often having to lead through compulsion (p. 696).

It is essential to distinguish between Leadership and control. Leadership is more about practice (responding to uncertainty than it is about a position of authority (Ganz, 2017) It is also believed that leadership is also not about roles: ... *Leaders should stop thinking of roles, or of followers as fixed individuals, and should instead think of them in terms of interconnected relationships*” (Lynch, 2016). Another very interesting conception of leadership is:

Leadership is a matter of how to be, not how to do. How to do, is the task of a manager. The most effective leaders are a living demonstration of how values and character when combined in action, carry the day (Odora-Hoppers, 2012, p. 2 as cited in Smit, 2017).

So, if leadership is about relationships, connections, values and vision, what does this mean for practice in a South African context? What are the new demands on Principals in their leadership roles? For CoP engagement it is important to note that Principals do not function on their own but rely on the support of the school management team (SMT) and these interconnected relationships need nurturing.

Historically, school Principals have been expected to manage schools. Policy shifts, as well as the political landscape however, have meant that Principals have had to rethink their role. According to the principles and standards document for *Principalship*, a key area is *Leading teaching and learning in the school*. The document distinguishes between five main kinds of leadership, that is, strategic, executive, instructional, cultural and organisational. See Figure 3 for a graphic representation of different types of leadership.

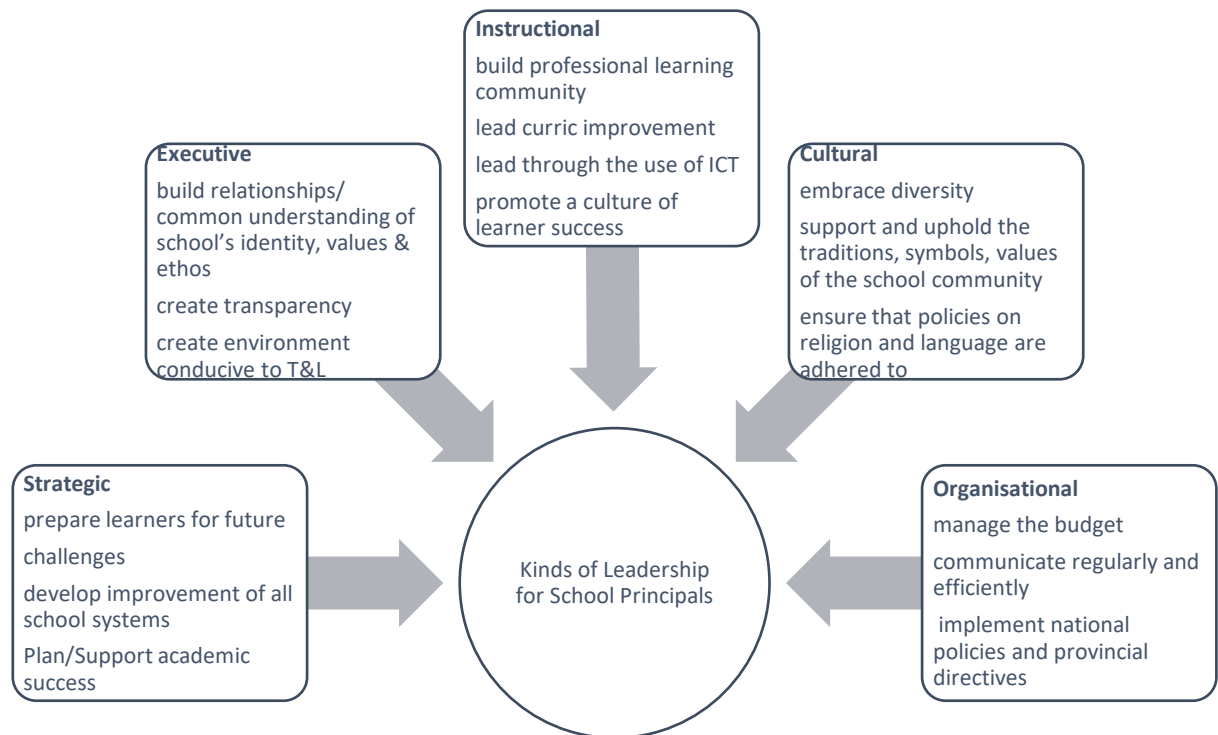


Figure 3 Five kinds of Leadership – Adapted from Government Gazette No. 39827, 18 Mar 2016

It is important to note that much of the leadership responsibilities have to be carried out in collaboration with the SGB (School Governing Body) and SMT, comprising the principal, deputy principal and heads of department).

If leadership is about self, other, and action (Ganz, 2017), then what are some support initiatives that can support the leadership role?

5. Evaluation Approach and Methods

This evaluation was aimed at mapping what was happening in the programme as it evolved in the first year since inception and as such gives an account of what the programme looks like at a particular point in time. It is aimed at commenting on what is working or not and how the programme can be improved going forward. The developmental approach was therefore most appropriate to capture the implementation of the programme and how it could be improved in future provision of CoPs. Notwithstanding the context specific nature of such a programme, implications and suggestions are made for continued CoP engagement and expansion.

This section of the report presents the triangulated data collection methods used which enabled a much more nuanced view and results (Johansson, 2003). The informant discussions and initial documents reviewed shaped the interviews and survey questions. We wanted to gather direct evidence and deep insights from an insider perspective, and not rely solely on the evaluators' impressions and/or interpretations.

Document analysis

The purpose of the document analysis was to gather secondary data about the extent to which the implementation of the programme aligned with the specified plan. We consulted the following documents: BRIDGE proposal to GEDT, BRIDGE quarterly reports, facilitator reports, the evaluation report of the existing CoPs, amongst others. We note that the information can be inaccurate or incomplete, selective or unrepresentative. Nevertheless, the facilitators reports were helpful in the sense that it gave a good account of what happened in the CoP meetings (in terms of objectives, progress, school visits as well as Facilitator reflections. Supplemented with quarterly reports, these documents made up for the poor survey responses.

See Appendix A for a summary of one Facilitators' reports.

Informant discussions

After the initial document analysis, the researchers conducted two interviews with CoP members and another one with a District official. This happened before any observation and interviews had been done. The rationale behind talking to members from a different BRIDGE facilitated CoP – one not directly involved in the GEDT CoPs - was to get a sense of what worked or not in the established CoPs and what recommendations could be taken forward in the newly established GEDT CoPs.

Importantly, key informants were invited to form a CoP and this fundamental difference in voluntary selection vs forced participation had huge implications for the general morale, motivation and participation of participants. This will be discussed under *Section 7. Addressing the Evaluation question.*

Survey

The purpose of the survey was to gather quick data regarding the demographics of members, information about their experiences as members of the School Leadership CoP and the value creation of participation in a CoP for their own practice and development. The various sections included in the questionnaire were: A. Profile; B. Leadership issues; C. Expected Value Creation and lastly, D. Overall impression of the CoP Offering.

The online survey was initially opened for a week – but as only 2 responses were received, it was subsequently opened again, which yielded another 2 responses. Two to three emails were received from members who indicated technical difficulties. Despite emailing print copies, none were received back. Facilitators were then given hard copies to give to members and another 4 were received. Due to low response rates, the profile data was not used as it did not give a complete picture of who CoP members were. The rest of the data however mirrored what was communicated via discussions, interviews and documentation.

A limitation of this evaluation is that the online survey was not a good option for data collection and that administering hard copies right from the start might have yielded better results.

Appendix B is a copy of the printed questionnaire.

Observation

The purpose of the observation was to become part of participants' world and mediate trusting relationships and offer support. Observation notes were compiled. The focus was on what was happening during the meetings (such as the content covered) but also on how it was experienced, what the attendance was like, etc. Noted disadvantages of this data collection method is that it may be experienced as intrusive and may influence events. See Appendix C for a sample completed observation sheet.

A few cancellations and rescheduling of meetings made it very difficult for the researchers to do the observation. All in all, the main researcher attended 3 meetings and another project team member attended an additional 2 meetings. This was supplemented with school visits.

Interviews

Besides the formal interviews, many informal discussions took place, mostly with the Project-coordinator, but also with some of the participants (at the scheduled CoP meetings). Conducting interviews allowed us to get their views as opposed to our understanding alone. In this way, we sought an 'insider' perspective. This type of interviewing allows for a multiplicity of voices in one space, permits tensions to emerge in the interview process and is collaborative in nature.

The interview requests were sent out several times and Facilitators were then prompted to assist in this regard. A total of 4 interviews were conducted: 2 telephonic interviews, one emailed response and one audio-recorded face-to-face interview (to be made available on request). The interview schedule included the following questions:

1. *How do you see your role as a Principal (within your school/community and district)?*
2. *What do you think the role of the CoP is?*
3. *What, in your opinion worked well?*
4. *What, in your opinion did not work well?*
5. *Going forward, how should the provision of CoPs be improved?*

Additionally, 3 Facilitators were interviewed and due to conflicting schedules and time-constraints, the fourth facilitator could not be reached. The recordings are available upon request. The guiding questions for the interview schedule for Facilitators were:

1. In your experience in facilitating the GEDT CoP, what is working/not in terms of collaboration, building trust, timing of the CoP, first meetings, etc.?

2. What would you say are some of the barriers Principals are experiencing (self, school and district) to being part of the CoP?
3. What improvements (in terms of processes, school visits, etc.) would you suggest for future engagement?

To conclude this section, we note that interviews need to be used with care as “language cannot really mirror complex reality” (Alvesson, 2011, p.143). We therefore did not place too much emphasis on interviews only. Hence, in the evaluation, we also made use of observation and document analysis in conjunction with interviews as research tools. Ultimately, the chosen data collection methods were based on the evaluation questions and what methods of data collection would best address the questions. See Table 2 which shows the method (s) used to address each of the sub-questions.

Table 2 Sub-question vs method(s)

Sub-question	Methods
I. To what extent does the implementation of the programme align with the specified plan?	Document analysis (programme documentation)
II. Do Principals share tools and act collaboratively? If so, how and why?	Survey, interviews, observation
III. How does CoP engagement shape leadership?	Survey, interviews
IV. As a result of involvement in the CoP, have Principals introduced any changes in teaching and learning (particularly in Maths)?	Interviews, document analysis
V. What are the improvement areas in terms of the management of the CoP?	Survey, interviews
VI. What are the lessons learned regarding the CoP implementation?	Survey, interviews
VII. Were the results achieved within budget and in the agreed timeframes?	Document analysis (programme documents, financials)

6. Discussion of Findings:

This section synthesises the findings and is presented in terms of the 7 sub-questions. See Fig 4 for a graphic representation. It will conclude with a summary of the findings and will be discussed in relation to the main evaluation question: *How and why does the programme translate into action (or non-action) and how can the programme be improved going forward?*

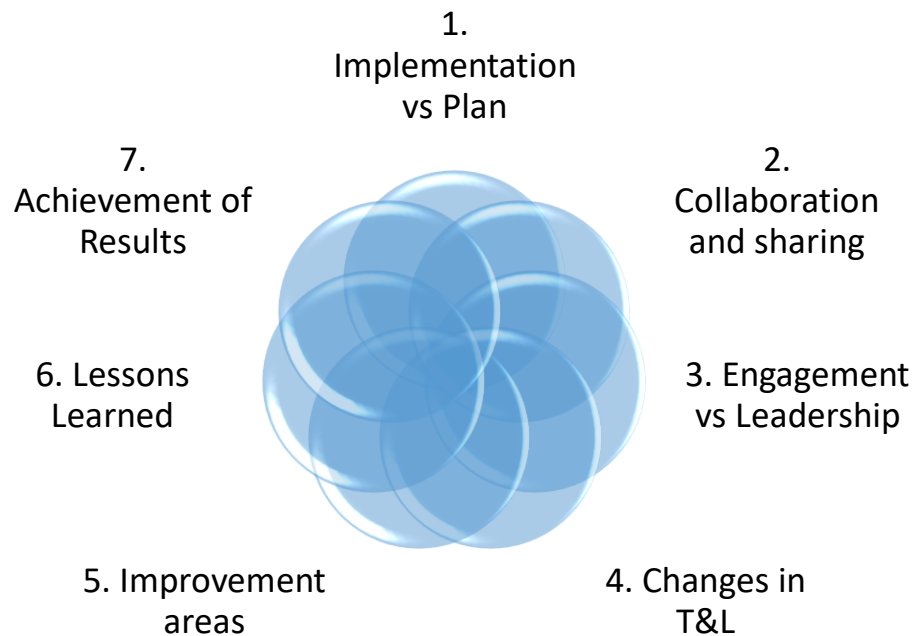


Figure 4 Seven Evaluation Sub-questions

1. To what extent does the implementation of the programme align with the specified plan?

The CoP programme, initially proposed to start on 1 July 2016 and run until 30 June 2017, experienced some unforeseen delays and therefore only two CoPs started in September 2016, and the other two started in November 2016. As a result, a no-cost extension from 30 June to 30 November 2017 was granted. Despite postponements, BRIDGE managed to successfully implement eight scheduled meetings as per project plan. The schedule for the CoP meetings was planned around the GDE schedule of meetings for Principals and reflects BRIDGEs flexibility and willingness to accommodate unforeseen realities. Regrettably, while a BRIDGE administrator relentlessly sent email reminders to CoP members as well as made telephonic calls before each scheduled meeting, attendance remained poor. The school visits seemed to be more successful, perhaps because it did not require any travelling from the Principals' side.

One facilitator suggested that Principals be given leeway to choose the dates for visits. See Table 3 for a copy of the revised schedule for the year.

Table 3 Scheduled CoP meetings

Proposed dates for the 4 GEDT CoPs in 2017															
CoP	Facilitator	School visits	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr Vac	Apr	May	June	July Vac	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov
1	Ekhuruleni North 2	PS		2	9	3-13	19	4	8	3-21		17	14	12	9
2	Gauteng East 2	DB		20		3-13	24			26/27					
			30		22/23			22	19			21	18	19	13
3	Gauteng East 3	CK	24			3-13	19			3-21					
			January	2	1			10	6			3	7	12	2
4	Ekhuruleni South 2	PV	24			3-13	19			3-21					
			January	1	7			10	7			2	6	11	1

According to the Project Coordinator, Facilitators and Principals, one of the main reasons for poor meeting attendance (average of 56%) was the cancellations due to cluster meetings and unofficial District official visits. This finding came out in the quarterly reports, interviews, informal discussions and facilitators reports. Often, meetings had to be cancelled or rescheduled, making it very difficult to align schedules, especially with the independent contract Facilitators. Briefing GDE District Officials on the importance of the CoP programme could result in greater respect shown for the programme and less disruptive behaviours.

We take a brief look at the Theory of Change itself that was used to inform programme implementation and monitoring. The objectives statement of the Theory of Change specifies the intended outcome of the CoPs intervention in somewhat broad terms - improvement of learner performance. The short-term outputs of the intervention are however not clear enough. The outputs, competence, vision and values stated could be further fleshed out in order to make them clearer. In other words, make it clear what competencies Principals would be expected to have as a result of the interventions. A theory of change describes a process of planned social change, from the assumptions that guide its design to the long-term goals it seeks to achieve. It is an organisation's story of how it will make change happen and an

explanation of why the change should occur. A theory of change is premised on the logic that links actions and outcomes. The starting point is the desired outcomes which in turn determine appropriate actions to be taken within a particular social and economic context in order to achieve defined ends.

Also, a good objective statement should be informed by a well-identified problem statement. What problem or problems is the intervention meant to address? This entails identifying the root causes of the problem as well.

A good Theory of Change is an integral aspect of Improvement Science, and there are three fundamental questions that should be asked in the latter:

- How clear is the specific problem to be solved?
- What are reasoned explanations about the particular changes envisaged and what do we expect the changes to accomplish?
- How will you know if the changes introduced are actually an improvement – encourages empirical orientation?

On the basis of these characteristics, one would recommend a more rigorous Theory of Change for such educational interventions.

II. Do Principals share tools and act collaboratively? If so, how and why?

Participants felt that they were sharing ideas and sometimes also tools during sessions but that this had not happened much outside of the CoP meetings. This is evident in the researchers Observation notes dated 20 Oct 2016:

From the common problems that were raised by the three Principals I got the impression that collaborative sharing and partnerships are not part of the culture of schools. Yet there is great potential for school Principals to support each other in addressing some of the challenges they face. I also got the impression that school Principals need to have greater appreciation of the value of the CoP initiative. Perhaps having a meeting where the facilitator explains the benefits of the initiative would help. At the moment it appears to me that Principals attend the meetings just for compliance and not out of a felt need.

However, this observation was made early in the programme. Since then (as evident in the July-September 2017 report), *“Schools have worked together and have supported each other in preparation for Whole School Evaluation process which has taken place at 4 schools in the past two quarters”*.

One particular CoP had been functioning well and really valued the flexibility, knowledgeability and expertise of the Facilitator. They particularly valued her input on Dashboards, South African Council for Educators (SACE) Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD), policies regarding learner transport, staff and student discipline etc. which they consider as being *“relevant to their space”*. One Principal spoke about an eLearning Programme at her school, which she was about to share with a Principal at another school. She also mentioned that members of her CoP would visit each other’s schools if and when good practices were shared during CoP meetings.

In other CoPs, admittedly, sharing of resources and practices were at an embryonic stage. This finding is not surprising and speaks to Wenger’s notion of peripheral to full participation) as well as CoPs taking time to evolve (Wenger 1998, 2009). The same finding was evident in the informant discussions where participants spoke about different levels of participation and progression (personal growth of Principals were evident in how they could articulate their thoughts confidently and intelligibly, which was not visible previously). They relayed stories of how this happened in the second year of CoP engagement only. The findings thus suggest that BRIDGE had managed to build a foundation of trust which facilitated sharing of tools and collaborative engagement.

III. How does CoP engagement shape leadership?

On the question of leadership roles, the interview data show that Principals saw their role as including curriculum development and implementation, monitoring infrastructure, assisting learners to become better citizens, developing and managing staff, and reaching out to the school community, amongst others. Although they were clear about what their roles entailed, it was less clear to them how the CoP could help them in becoming competent and better leaders. While some felt that they have been employed as leaders for many years, and therefore did not need support, the younger, more inexperienced Principals seemed more open to learning both on the job as well as engaging in CPD activities to sharpen their leadership skills. Perhaps thought needs to be given to how a CoP could harness the more experienced Principals’ experiences and get them more involved.

One facilitator agreed with his CoP that HoDs should be targeted instead of Principals who are already stretched for time. Other facilitators however felt that the initiative was aimed at Principals and allowing deputy Principals to attend would be defeating the purpose of the CoP. What seemed to be clear was that a more distributed leadership model that warrants CPD opportunities for the entire SMT and not Principals alone was desired. The CoP would be a good initiative to support the SMT in its leadership role.

One of the informant discussion participants referred to activating a joint project fairly quickly so that less talk and more action results. However, one facilitator tried this but found that participants struggled to identify a project at the outset. It took time to first build trust and get to know who was in the room, who knew what and who could be trusted. Only when this happened, was it easier to select and actively work on a joint project.

Another Principal spoke about being shy and very tentative in her thoughts and contributions. As time progressed, she felt the CoP had helped her to hone her skills and position herself as a leader who is knowledgeable and who has a valid contribution to make. She felt that the CoP had exposed her to what she calls “better things” like sharing openly and confidently, working on collaborative eLearning strategies, etc. The confidence gained through mutual sharing, collaboration and engagement had helped to shape her identity as a leader. Through engagement, meaning as well as identity are negotiated and formed. This finding resonates with Lave and Wenger’s (1998:95) take on learning as a process of identity formation.

IV. As a result of involvement in the CoP, have Principals introduced any changes in teaching and learning (particularly in Maths)?

Regarding general changes in teaching and learning, there does seem to be some progress in this regard. Principals related stories of the start of collaborative team teaching, sharing of lesson plans and showcasing. At one of the CoP meetings, the researcher observed:

The facilitator tried to inspire the Principals by proposing a Maths initiative where schools would collaborate in marking tests for each other’s schools. All three Principals welcomed the initiative and were keen to have their teachers participating in the initiative.

However, the focus on Maths was not very prominent at all CoPs and one facilitator felt that it was not up to others to decide on the agenda of the CoP but that it was the Principals’ prerogative. He argues:

Surely it’s not for BRIDGE or the Facilitator to be prescriptive. The Principals in this CoP should be deciding/dictating their own agenda. Teaching and learning per se may not

have been their priority at this stage (it could have been discipline, or parental involvement, or fund raising, or whatever. My CoP focussed on school readiness (for the new year) during the closing months last year; and during the first half of this year looked at leadership approaches, more specifically on leading in context (schools having different challenges/priorities) – this has been pursued during school visits. Maths teaching has NOT emerged as a priority at any of our CoP meetings... Language issues appear to be of greater interest/concern in xx, and the issue has been raised a few times. I just feel that the question, as presently posed, is too specific and narrow in its scope, and in my view undermines the purpose of a CoP (the onus should be on the Principals to decide on their own agenda, and not to be directed by the GDE or whoever else, otherwise it's defeating the purpose/nature of a CoP. This does not mean it won't be raised in the future.

In the July – Sept 2017 quarterly report, BRIDGE mentions with regard to **Milestone 3: Maths test to be conducted in Term 4**, that while plans were in place, schools were guarded and did not want to make themselves vulnerable in agreeing to participate in the Maths diagnostic test. The informant discussions revealed that members collaborated actively and in some instances a teacher would go to another school to teach a lesson, particularly if that teacher had been recognised for innovative teaching. However, the four GEDT CoPs had started discussing such collaborations and would most probably do so going forward. The initial connections had been forged and are yet to bear fruits.

V. What are the improvement areas in terms of the management of the CoP?

Almost all facilitators and Principals interviewed mentioned that District Officers did not respect CoP meetings as Principals often missed scheduled meetings because of being called to GDE meetings or receiving unexpected, unannounced visits from officials. In a report, one Facilitator notes: *Generally, absence from the meeting was on account of district obligations and unavoidable by Principal.* One or two Principals expressed a need to have a say in dates and times for CoP meetings as some dates clashed with their busy times.

The confusion about the purpose of the CoP amongst Principals as well as Facilitators - some saw the CoP as a developmental initiative while others felt it was to share good practices - detracted from the value it could have added to CPD. Distrust amongst members and unclear selection led to questions such as: *Why am I here? Is there something wrong with the way I*

work? This, coupled with a lack of buy in from Principals, meant that the CoP did not translate into gains for some Principals.

Perhaps transparent CoP member selection criteria could assist in moving from compliance to excitement and in turn, to motivation to engage. Incentivising the initiative and allowing the accumulation of CPD points could serve as good motivation to increase participation. According to the Quarterly report, Compliance with SACE CPTD structures are being implemented at schools.

In terms of moving forward, facilitators identified a few improvements as follows:

- BRIDGE should work hard to get the Department improving communication with schools at a formal level. All schools should have email addresses and official email systems should be used in such communications.
- All CoPs should be informed of possible evaluation activities early in the process. The CoPs should be a safe space and having researchers intrude on sessions and requesting survey completion and interviews might be seen as a threat. One facilitator expressed concern about researchers having access to all activities, data and reports.
- The Department should also respect and follow up on CoP activities. One facilitator mentioned that while the CoP was the GDEs initiative, there was not enough of a synergy and “District support has been minimal”. Perhaps this explains some of the clashes experienced.
- There should be a mechanism in place to ensure that Principals who miss a CoP meeting have a way of getting the information and catching up
- Principals must be grouped according to clusters within a range of less than 20km. At the moment, some Principals travel long distances to attend CoP meetings. Others felt that grouping in itself was problematic but if necessary, that criteria should be transparent. No one seemed to understand how selection and grouping was done.

VI. What are the lessons learned regarding the CoP implementation?

- Distributive leadership is called for: involving leadership teams (deputy Principals, HoDs and Principals) or perhaps a separate HoD CoP is suggested.
- Allowing CoPs to grow organically could be done through working with people respectfully and recognising their agency. Forcing Principals to participate is counter-productive.

- CoPs want to deal with daily challenges and share ideas on how to tackle these. The Facilitators' reports show that members dictated the meeting agendas and this flexibility worked well.
- Both head and heart are required: The implication is that we need to interrogate what Principals value and what motivates them. We further need to recognise that they are completely stressed out by structural issues and assist in alleviating some of the related challenges. Health related issues need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- Common challenges Principals face in their schools include crowded conditions; lack of resources; poor infrastructure; financial constraints, numeracy and literacy issues; a lack of departmental support, learner motivation, drug related problems and parent involvement. Some Principals seemed to be paralysed by these issues and could not move towards curricular leadership. They seemed to be unable to manage their time efficiently and effectively.
- BRIDGE faces poor CoP participation in a programme that is based purely on voluntary participation without any contractual obligation or incentive. Possibly, an attempt to enter into some sort of 'friendly contract' which fosters notions of collegiality and spells out not only the terms of engagement, but also the benefit of the CoP based on active participation is required.
- The reimbursement of travel costs and the costs incurred by the host party are not recoverable and deter participation in the programme. It is seen as an unnecessary hindrance in light of other pressing challenges.
- Knowledge alone will not result in action – recognising the benefits of collaborative work or CoP value must be accompanied by active support. This could occur through for example acknowledging the importance of CoPs, making gains visible on the GDE website and general awareness raising of the value of CoPs.

VII. Were the results achieved within budget and in the agreed timeframes?

BRIDGE requested and was granted a no-cost extension in August 2017. The reason for this (cited in the quarterly report) is that the extension was necessitated by a delayed start. Arguably, CoPs take a long time to function optimally and it was therefore to be expected that a year would not be a realistic timeframe for the project to yield positive results. That said, BRIDGE is to be commended for the effectiveness of the programme (achieving the outcomes and overall objectives) and efficiently managing and coordinating the programme.

Lastly, the financial accomplishment of the programme has been met. The July – September 2017 quarterly report states that 88% (R614 795.00 of the R697 500.00) of the allocated budget had been spent. With only three months remaining, and the bulk of the work completed, this figure is within scope and budget.

7. Addressing the Evaluation question and Offering Recommendations

Here we address the evaluation question: How and why does the programme translate into action (or non-action) and how can the programme be improved going forward?

As was to be expected, the findings suggest that the CoP initiative yielded many benefits but these were only emergent at the time of writing this report. As stated previously, CoPs take time to evolve and add value. Minimal action, and in some cases, non-action was due to a number of reasons. These include personal issues (ill health, time management issues due to an overload of administrative duties, etc.) and structural issues (disciplinary staff challenges, lack of facilities, etc.). If action is to result, reciprocal relations must be nurtured and is not something that happens overnight. Ongoing support is needed.

Principals' discourse seemed to suggest that they were beginning to see the value that CoPs held for their development as leaders and agents of change. This finding is encouraging as the adoption of a participative, collaborative approach was the outcome hoped for (see theory of change under section titled *Background and Context*). Further work with CoPs need to build on this and continue on a path of relationship building, care and trust. Acknowledging these Principals' historical *situatedness*, and intentionally being individually and collectively inclusive (Agherdien, 2015) is core.

The downside also needs to be recognised as legitimate and dealt with accordingly. Members were often overwhelmed by a sense of hopelessness. This hopelessness was accompanied by high stress levels, ill-health in some cases and general low morale and apathy. As Smit (2017) notes, hopelessness results from the myriad of challenges Principals face in their schools and embedded communities. During the course of the CoP implementation, a significant number of Principals had fallen ill, understandably due to stress. It gives the impression that Principals find their jobs stressful and therefore need support to mitigate this. Paulo Freire's pedagogy of hope states "*Without hope, we are hopeless and cannot begin the struggle to change*" (1994, p.8). All stakeholders need to continue to support school Principals in their daily struggles and keep the doors for collaborative participation and engagement open.

Recommendations

In terms of improving the programme and moving forward, a number of recommendations follow. These will be discussed in relation to *'essential'* and *'for consideration'*

Essential for future implementation of the GEDT and other CoPs

- ⇒ Embrace inclusive practices that allow Principals to form part of the discourse around CoP conceptualisation, formation and implementation at their respective schools. This would mean that open, transparent, selection criteria be set so that Principals feel less resistant towards CoP engagement.
- ⇒ GDE/BRIDGE should model collaborative practices by inviting Principals to form part of agenda setting. If CoP value creation is to be realised, related departmental policies should serve to empower Principals to actively shape decision-making and have their voices heard. The implication is that CoPs could become “self-organising”, “self-sustaining” agents of change (as per BRIDGEs conception of a CoP).
- ⇒ More should be done to brief District officials, BRIDGE facilitators and CoP members on the purpose of the CoP. If the CoP domain (shared interest or purpose with specific rules of engagement) is weak then the CoP formation is going to be weak.
- ⇒ Through CoP engagement, Principals need to be empowered to deal with disciplinary issues (both staff and students) as well as issues related to community engagement, amongst others. Many of the Principals interviewed recognised their role of uplifting the communities in which their schools were situated and felt enormous pressure to act, but were often powerless.
- ⇒ While it is difficult to influence intrinsic motivation (e.g. love for teaching), extrinsic motivation (e.g. incentives, promotions, etc.) can be influenced by making sure that the socio/political conditions at the respective schools are favourable. We recommend that structural issues (restrictive policies, lack of infrastructure, etc.) as well as personal related issues (such as health, workload, high stress levels, low morale and apathy etc.) need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

⇒ In terms of **practice**, the following actions must accompany CoP implementation

- More time needs to be spent on buy-in so that uptake is improved. That means that advocacy work must be given prime time.
- Varied strategies to develop leadership roles must be rethought and introduced. CoP meetings are but one strategy, school visits are another and other strategies should be explored.
- Allow flexibility regarding the formation, joining and /or leaving of CoPs to include Deputy Principals and HoDs.

For Consideration: For future implementation of the GEDT and other CoPs

- ⇒ Explain the intersection of Mentorship programme (Master teachers) – introduced last year - and CoP initiative.
- ⇒ Avoid duplication through finding synergies in the Leadership course Matthew Goniwe is offering and which some Principals are enrolled in, the existing Forum and the CoP programme.
- ⇒ Inform members about the evaluation. This could have prepared Principals better for their involvement in data collection and allayed fears around privacy issues.
- ⇒ Principals should be assisted to work collaboratively within and across appropriate Acts, policies and guidelines so that they are enabled to be more vested in visionary leadership activities.
- ⇒ It is not quite evident how school Principals as leaders, help shape the learning outcomes and academic success of learners through CoP programmes. Principals, together with BRIDGE should be encouraged to explore, possibly in action research mode, or using narrative inquiry as Smit (2017) had done, some of the following research questions:
 - How could GEDT/BRIDGE leverage CoPs for sustainable leadership development? How could they get there and how could they respond to associated challenges?

- What are some of the structural and strategic problems related to CoP initiatives? How can a CoP assist to address these but also go beyond to address curricular issues?
- How can the CoP be conceptualised and implemented to strengthen social change within schools and surrounding communities?

8. Final Remarks

If Principals are not prepared to engage in reflexive practice, and bring to the table 'both their experience of practice and their experience of themselves in that practice' (Wenger 2009), then CoP programmes/SLS are not likely to yield any significant gains. Similarly, if service providers do not revise processes and practices and take into account what the actions and non-actions are and why they occur, that is, if service providers become steeped in established practices, then CoP programmes will lose its transformative power. In the end, school leaders will miss out.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Summary of A Facilitator's reports

All six reports are based on the one visit done on 24th October 2016, five are for the individual schools visited that morning and one is for the CoP meeting that was held in the afternoon. Out of the 10 Principals constituting the XX Region, only four attended the day's meeting. XX morning visit to five of the schools revealed that three of the Principals didn't know about the existence of the CoP, neither were they aware of the day's meeting. Clearly, communication appears to be an issue impacting negatively on the smooth running of the CoP. It is not clear whether the six Principals who did not attend the meeting knew about it. This was also XX first meeting with the CoP, so it is possible that not enough awareness had been created yet about the CoP.

Generally, the report shows that once the facilitator talked to the Principals during the school visits, they showed interest in the CoP idea. The four who attended the meeting reportedly participated actively in the discussions.

From the visits and from the meeting, XX concluded that the major problem faced by Principals in their schools is **teacher absenteeism**. This is a challenge that Principals find difficult to manage, especially given that unions defend teachers that are absent from schools.

Principals who attended the CoP meeting felt they should have been involved in choosing schools that should constitute their CoP. Apparently, they were not impressed by schools that let them down by not attending meetings.

It is clear from the report that more advocacy about the CoP is needed.

Appendix B: Survey

The purpose of this **survey** is to collect information about your experiences as members of the School Leadership Community of Practice (CoP). We are interested in what the value creation of participation in a CoP is/was for your own practice and development to date.

The information collected through this survey is very valuable and will help us to find practical ways to improve the implementation of future CoPs. It is, therefore, very important to us to get your honest opinion and to get as many as possible completed questionnaires back.

The survey will only take **10-15 minutes** to complete. Your responses are totally anonymous (and, therefore, also confidential).

A. Profile

1. The name of my CoP *

2. How long have you been a member of this CoP? *

3. Please select the appropriate option below:

a. Gender *

Male

Female

b. Years of experience as a Principal *

0-1

6-10

11 and more

c. School *

no-fee paying schools (quintiles 1-3)

fee-paying schools (quintiles 4 & 5)

d. School size *

Between 500 -700 learners

Between 701- 1000 learners

More than 1000 learners

4. How many CoP meetings have you attended to date?

5. The following options best describe your reason(s) for joining the CoP *

- I value opportunities to collaborate and share
- It brings Principals together
- I can ask for help
- I need to improve my leadership skills and the CoP provides this
- I need help with management in my school and the CoP provides this
- I am able to add value to the group by sharing my expertise, experience and best practice
- It presents opportunities for shared practices
- None of the above
- All of the above

Other:

6. What issues, if any, inhibit your regular attendance at the monthly CoP meetings? *

- Professional obligations
- Personal obligations
- District visits/meetings
- Time constraints
- Not applicable

Other:

B. Leadership issues

I need the opportunity to discuss and problem solve challenges with *

- Staff development
- My own Continued Professional Development (CPD)
- Disciplinary issues (of learners)
- Disciplinary issues (of staff)

- Unions
- Managerial responsibilities
- My leadership role
- Dealing with District demands
- Involving parents in their children's learning
- Supporting teachers and learners towards educational excellence
- Related knowledge and skills needed to function as leaders of curriculum delivery

Other

C. Expected value creation

CoP cycles of value (immediate, potential and applied) are enabled by community involvement and networking.

Immediate value - refers to the value of activities and interactions.

Potential value – refers to the “knowledge capital” whose value lies in its potential to be realised later.

Applied value – refers to adapting and applying “knowledge capital” to a specific situation.

1. Which of the immediate value creation indicators below reflect your experience or expectations to date? *

- Increased participation with others
- Meaningful engagement (activity/interaction was relevant to me/my needs)
- Fun aspect (created enjoyment and excitement)
- Built in reflection
- All of the above
- None of the above

Other:

2. Which of the potential value creation indicators below reflect your experience or expectations? *

- Acquiring new skills/expertise (that changed me and how I participate)
- Being inspired to do new things
- Social connections formed (e.g. access to others, feeling less isolated, trust in others to help, etc.)
- Developing tools and documents
- Being exposed to new views on learning/seeing opportunities for learning that I did not see before

Other:

3. Which of the applied value creation indicators below reflect your experience or expectations? *

- Implementation of innovative practices
- Reusing tools/documents/tests and examinations/etc.
- Calling on social connections in pursuing a cause I care about
- Implementing new learning approaches and practices

Other:

D. Overall impression and experience of the CoP offering

1. What, in your opinion, is working? *

2. What, in your opinion, is not working? *

3. How can the CoP offering be improved going forward? *

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. We appreciate your valuable feedback.

Appendix C: Completed Observation Schedule

	Comments: What I am seeing and my impressions
1. Attendance and punctuality	13 members were expected but the session started at 13:25 (was meant to start at 13:00) with only 7 members present. Later, 3 more arrived. The host joined at 14:00 as she had an unexpected/unplanned visit from a District Official. This was noteworthy as in the informant discussions, this occurrence of unplanned visits and/or meetings by GDE came up as one of the challenges the CoPs face and which adversely affects attendance. I am wondering if Principals actually have the agency to say 'no' to these visits/meetings. That is, <i>what if</i> they had to say that they have a scheduled CoP meeting?
2. Level of participation What topics are discussed? Are all actively engaged? Quality of interaction Is reflection built in? Evidence of trust and respect Element of fun is visible	At the previous scheduled meeting and school visits, Principals had asked xx (Facilitator) to address the issue of school readiness for 2017. One Principal reported a practical example of how thinking and planning ahead actually benefitted them and how this had not been done before. One/two others also reflected on their practices and shared practical examples. The other topic on the agenda was the issue of dealing with staff discipline (again a topic that Principals had requested). Two male Principals shared their strategies (the one tried the same approach) based on the other's recommendation. Although all three had a consultative approach, the third Principal, a female, had a softer, more nurturing one. The one male Principal spoke about how he quoted from Circulars when faced with issues/questions as he felt that this gave him credibility and stopped staff from coming with unfair requests.
3. Communication Who is talking? Who is silent?	Two – three Principals were very vocal and the rest were quiet, and only engaged if/when prompted. Two Principals did not engage at all.
4. Skills acquisition Are participants inspired? Are social connections being formed?	There already seems to be some connection and sharing but I suspect not because of the CoP but perhaps more because of proximity

Emerging/new views on learning is evident	
5. Implementation of advice Innovative practices Reuse of tools/products New learning approaches can be seen/are being discussed	The two Principals that spoke about the 'Bosberaad 'did so on the other's recommendation – again, I do not think this was as a direct result of the CoP – perhaps this is something we can discuss in a follow up interview. These two individuals were both fairly young and new in the Principal role
6. Personal performance Personal vs organisational performance	Not evident yet
7. Change in Strategy Expectations, institutional changes, new metrics	Not evident yet
General Remark	I had a chat with the facilitator, an ex/retired Principal while we were waiting for members to arrive. He noted that he had been doing school visits in the morning – before the scheduled CoP meeting. He observed that the schools in Limpopo (where his other CoP is located) was still very male dominated but that in Gauteng schools that was not the case. His session was very interactive and he tried his best to elicit responses.